

Self-Government (Part 1)

Submitting to Every Ordinance

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There are some subjects that can be easily explained and understood in short order merely by being given a brief period of instruction, and by maybe with a period of lab work or practical application, and presto! change-o!, we have got it. But the subject of government is not one of them. For anyone seriously seeking answers to questions regarding government, one can find so many nuances, it is almost incredible.

Late in Mr. Armstrong's life, he told Dr. Hoeh, and Dr. Hoeh in turn told a ministerial refresher class I was in, "The subject of government has been the most difficult of all doctrine."

Some things regarding government are easily seen and readily agreed with, saying, "Yes, that's correct," but the difficulties arise since government is not easily submitted to because of the unwillingness to discipline oneself, combined with the powerful influence of self-justification. Romans 8:7 defines the reason for this bluntly and clearly: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." Even when one is converted, elements of that anti-God attitude remain to dog our heels, blocking improvement to our growth and our relationship with God.

It was Thomas Paine—one of the leaders of the American Revolution—who said, "Government, at its best state, is a necessary evil; at its worse, it is intolerable." I would say that at best that is a contemptuous statement, seeing that God put so much emphasis on this subject. I heard or read one man say, "Government is an objectionable good." What this means is that we might find much about government objectionable, but in an overall sense it is good because the alternative of no government at all is unthinkable.

Now what is your view of government? There are many answers to that question because each of us has had so many experiences of operations of government in a wide variety of circumstances, and we have developed complex attitudes toward and about government. In many cases we feel so strongly about these attitudes that sometimes we are moved to act—sometimes positively, or even to rebel against it.

I want you to consider this. Our attitudes, our knowledge and understanding, and conduct toward and about government may be the most important aspect of our Christian life. Why? How can this be? You probably have heard the cliché that there is nothing surer than death and taxes. Well, here is another one. Nothing is more present in life than government, because government is *omnipresent*. It is omnipresent because we must deal with aspects of it almost constantly, and it is absolutely necessary that we govern ourselves, or life is chaotic, directionless, and perhaps even meaningless.

Now what is government? I think it good before we go any further to first thoroughly define the verb "govern" and the noun-form "government," which is derived from it. In the book, *The Origin of English Words* by Joseph Shipley, on page 195 it says, "Government [or governed], is derived from a Greek word *kuberna*. That Greek term means to pilot, to steer, and it implies controlling the direction of. I do not know whether that word is ever found in Scripture. I did not take the time and the care to look.

Most of us are familiar with the prestigious university fraternity Phi Beta Kappa. This fraternity's members achieved very high academic standing. Phi, Beta, and Kappa are the first letters of a Greek proverb: Philosophia, Biou, Kubernetes. Did you hear that word *kubernetes*? *Kubernetes* is derived from *kuberna*. The proverb translates into this: "The love of wisdom is the pilot [*kubernetes*] of life." Shrinking it down a little further, making it more compact—"wisdom is to govern one's life."

Other deeply researched sources say that "governed" is derived from the Latin *gubernere*. Thus, in the process of time, the Greek root *kuberna* evolved into *gubernere* in the Latin language of the Romans, and it means "to steer a ship" or "to steer a ship of state," because they applied it to government.

When we look at English dictionaries to find applications of govern, we find such terms as: to control, direct, rule, be dominant in, to exercise continuous sovereign authority, making and administering policy, to manipulate, to strongly influence the actions of. *Reader's Digest Word Finder* provides synonyms such as: administer, manage, rule, direct, head, lead, guide, control, supervise, steer, pilot, oversee, exercise authority over, be in the driver's seat, pull the strings. All of these imply that government is a means of management, a means of control. Govern always implies the aim of keeping oneself, a project, or a group in a straight and safe course for a smooth operation. However, the word by itself does not always imply for whose good the benefit of governing is taking place.

The noun term "government" usage includes the act or process of governing. It includes the complex of laws, policies, institutions, and customs for which the functions of governing are carried out, and thus it also refers to the body of persons that constitute the directing and controlling authority.

That is a pretty lengthy definition, but I think the subject is important enough to deserve it. If there is anything that I would suggest you would remember, it is that "govern" and "government" always imply the aim of keeping in a straight smooth course of operation toward an objective. They imply the effort to create or maintain order and direction, and sometimes education toward a certain goal. They also then necessarily imply the authority and power to accomplish the objective.

My "SPS" (Specific Purpose Statement) now: Regardless of whether one is called upon to submit to God, to state, to a family, to an institution, or on the job, there is one constant factor, and that is that each person is called upon to make a choice as to how he will respond. This sermon deals with important aspects of that respond part: *self-government*.

There is an over-riding reason why the subject of government is so important to the Christian. I want you to turn to the beginning of the Book.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

I believe that this is God's SPS for the entire creation. Having dominion suggests government, having authority over. Having dominion is bound with God's declaration of making man in His image. The two cannot be separated, for government begins to come into the picture right in the very first chapter of Genesis.

God is in the process of making man in His image, and the creation of man in God's image did not end with His physically creating Adam and Eve. It is in this reference to this creative objective in God's Word that all the commands, the events, why what happened, what was done, or not done, is reported in this Book. Mr. Armstrong once said in my presence, "The Bible is a book about government from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22."

The phrase, "God is reproducing Himself," never appears in Scripture; however, it is certainly implied following the statement that each living thing He creates is reproducing itself after its kind, and with that trigger it becomes clear, as the physical narrative moves on, that God is doing the same thing. The animals were created, and they were commanded to reproduce their own kind. God is introduced making someone in His own image, and so it begins to imply right away that God is reproducing Himself in man.

We commonly use a term like, "He is the spitting image of his father, or his mother, or his sister or brother," to indicate a relationship within a family. In like manner the Bible uses the family terms father, mother, brother, sister, wife, son, daughter, adoption, and family in relation to the church in the New Testament. But what is the image and likeness of God? Now because we are physical, our first reaction is to think of a physical image—a form and shape that will give us some idea, some concept of what we are being made into—but there is none, because that is not God's purpose.

John 5:37 And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.

If God gave us a form or shape, we would concentrate on it and be led away from His objective. Our attitude toward clothing fashions and fads illustrates how easily we are drawn toward something we want to conform to. The fashion or the fad becomes important to us. It may be something that we consider to be appealing, maybe even beautiful, some sort of an ideal, and the first thing you know, we buy it and we endeavor to conform to it. Let me give you a vivid example.

I am sure you have noticed how many young men walk with their pants just barely hanging onto their hips. To me, that is not appealing, but it seems to be *very* appealing to all those young men who are emulating this fad that came down the road, and somebody sold it to them. It became an ideal, and now they go, slouching along, just barely holding their pants up from falling off, and it is as sloppy as you can possibly get.

You get the idea. We are drawn to conforming to something that we think is beautiful. I hate to use the word beautiful. In that case, I do not see how that can be beautiful, but that is what we do in order to conform. This is a principle. This is why God did not give us a form and a shape, because we would be drawn to something like that, and it would lead us away from the image, the objective, that He is creating.

Turn with me to II Corinthians. I am using these verses hopefully as Paul intended; and I think I am.

II Corinthians 3:17-18 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all [meaning Christians], with unveiled face [the blindness has been taken away], beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed [Here comes a clear indication of God's objective.] into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

What God has given us is an image to conform to, and that image is of a life lived by Jesus of Nazareth, guided by the divine nature. Paul defines this purpose as us being transformed from one glory [that is, the glory of mankind] to the glory of the God-kind, and that is awesome.

I want you to look at a verse that we turn to once in a while.

John 17:2-4 As You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.

There is the glory—a life that we are being conformed to. We are being conformed to the glory of Jesus' life.

Paul also said there that this is being accomplished by the Spirit of the Lord. Turn to II Peter 1 where Peter takes a little bit different look at it, but he comes up with the same thing though, a confirmation of that.

II Peter 1:3-4 As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness [so that we can accomplish this transforming that is taking place], through the knowledge of Him [Jesus Christ and His life lived] who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

In God's wisdom, in order for His purpose to be accomplished, it was necessary for us to be given free moral agency. This is another term that nowhere appears in the Bible, just like the term "God is reproducing Himself" does not appear in the Bible. Yet that mankind is a free moral agent is obvious right from the beginning of the Bible (and history), because mankind is given choices as to which way he should go. As I said very early, we must respond. So we have a choice, and we are free to do so.

Now God did not interfere with Adam and Eve's choices in the Garden. This sets the pattern for you and me. Nothing else, except angels, is free to make choices involving morals. Everything else operates according to the way it was designed, and animals cannot sin because of this factor. Get this clearly. "Free" means "not subject to the control or domination of another." It stresses the complete absence of external rule, and the right to make one's own decisions.

Adam and Eve were put into the Garden. They were commanded not to take of one particular tree, but free to take of it regardless of the instructions and command. There is our model. Right at the very beginning we see the beginning of understanding free moral agency. God forced the issue only that He made the choices available. The control of their choice—their governance of themselves, their response—was left to themselves, and God, in order to reinforce it, did not show up in the Garden until *after* they sinned. And God did not show up when Cain sinned until after he sinned.

Now there is a significant statement there that helps you to understand about free moral agency.

Genesis 4:6-7 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well,

sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you [toward you in an antagonistic way], but you should rule over it."

Cain had a choice. We have multitudes of choices throughout life, and if we choose to do well, will we not be accepted? Regarding free moral agency and our choices in life, this is exceedingly clear. In order to conform to God's purpose of being conformed to His image, we must choose correctly. I am not saying that our life hangs on every choice, but we must—and I mean *must*—live with the attitude that it does. In other words, sin is that serious. God is very merciful, and we can look for Him to be very forgiving, but the attitude of not caring, that is something that does not apply with Him for very long.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

This sets the issue before us very clearly. Free moral agency is a necessary factor in God's purpose if we are going to be in His Son's image. We must be free to make the choices, and this is because we are being conformed to a nature, to a character, to an attitude, to a perspective-image. Form and shape are merely incidental by comparison. So the picture becomes clear, that if only by means of having the opportunity of freely choosing of our own volition to give ourselves to the way *He* lives, that we will be in His image. I will make it very plain. *God's objective requires our cooperation.*

It is at this point that education in God's way of life, in order to know what God requires, becomes an absolute necessity. This is where the church becomes a necessary instrument for the education of the sons and daughters of God. That education must be added to our willingness to govern ourselves. The discipline and sacrifice are necessary in order to follow the path that Jesus also trod.

Governing involves the issues of steering and controlling, of guiding and management. Self-government, which is what God requires with His gift of free moral agency, must involve the issues of *self*-steering and *self*-control. I think that it is good for us to understand this issue of control. I think that there is evidence that God exerts very little overt control over our lives.

The Protestant churches have a doctrine about being "*God*-controlled." That is the way they call it—"God-controlled" or "spirit-controlled." But those terms are misleading because they give the impression that God is exercising control to control our lives. God is indeed governing His creation. He is exercising power to move the events of history toward the goal He has in mind, but He is exercising very little power to control individual decisions in individual lives. If He did that, there would be no free moral agency.

So what does He have to do? I will tell you. He has to bite His tongue. He has to restrain Himself pretty often, I am sure, because He wants us to succeed, but He cannot help us too much (if you understand what I mean), or we would be like the spoiled rich kid. We have to be put into situations where the right choice is pretty difficult because He wants to see where our loyalties lie.

Brethren, it is really sad, from observing life, I think that one can see that God allows us to do the dumbest, most foolish, most self-centered, and self-destructive acts imaginable.

I want you to turn to Romans 8:7, and we are going to look at one particular word there regarding this issue of control.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

We are going to approach this from a slightly different angle. We are going to look at the word "subject." If we are not subject to the law, we are not subject to Him, because it is His law. "Not subject" is a great deal different from being controlled. The word "subject" is a form of the Greek word *hupotasso*. Believe it or not, this is a military term, and it means "to arrange in order under."

"Arranging in order under" is something that someone would ordinarily do to something else. For example, since this is a military term, I use this illustration. A drill instructor will arrange recruits in order under him, and he uses whatever power is at his command to make them subject to the military. But "arranging under"—that is, making oneself subject to—is something that one can do to himself.

We are going to look at some very familiar scriptures here.

Ephesians 5:21-22 Submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Both of those terms "submitting" and "submit" are exactly from the same word *hupotasso*, as in Romans 8:7.

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Same word again—*hupotasso*.

I Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme.

The same Greek word (*hupotasso*) is used in every case, and all of these commands are given to Christians. They could have just as easily been translated "subject."

An interesting example regarding submission is that the submission the wife gives her husband (which is explained more thoroughly in Colossians 3:18) is not because he is superior by creation, but is required to for the sake of order. That order has two parts to it. The immediate one is so there is order within the family. She submits in order to produce order within the family. The second part is that she submits in order to be conformed to what God wants her to do. She makes herself subject. She makes a decision to do that.

Now with the help of conversion and with God's continuing education to upgrade our understanding, we must thus choose to use our free moral agency to make ourselves subject to God, and thus be conformed to His purpose in every place where we know we should be subject to God. It is conversion and the fear of God that makes the difference between us and the world. The carnal mind is *not* subject, but the converted mind *is* subject.

I am going to give you a verse that is kind of clear in the old KJV. We are going to turn to I Corinthians 14:34. Now the Corinthian church's services must have been ruckus at times, with people wanting to stand up and talk all the time, and so Paul had some explaining to do there in order to calm things down. One of the things he said is in verse 34.

I Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.

The KJV says "*obedient*." The NKJV says "submissive." The reason I mentioned that about the KJV translating it as "obedient," is that it shows the translators understood God's intent in all of these cases where the underlying word *hupotasso* is being used. It involves obedience; choosing to do as God says, whether a family situation, a governmental situation—the civil government, or whatever.

Remember, that in each case, the purpose behind the commands given by God to submit is to produce—that is, to steer, pilot, or to govern ourselves within God's creation so things will progress in the right direction—the right fruit.

You will notice that in each case, submission is something we give, with no indication of being controlled by God. I will show you a verse a bit later that makes this very, very clear.

In John 8:29, Jesus said, "The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." He was the perfect submissive Son of God. He was subject to God in everything. Now by way of contrast, the concept in Romans 8:7 is that when man is in the flesh, he is physically oriented, unconverted, and he cannot physically subject himself to God. Once in a while he will, but he will not consistently do it. We are going to see very surely *why* in the book of John.

In John 8:31-32 is another confrontation between Jesus and His detractors, which will show why men will not submit themselves.

John 8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The implication on the other side of that is people are not free to do what they want to do, or need to do, all the time. Look at verses 43 and 44. We see this clarified, because this dispute between the two went on. Jesus is here talking to unconverted people.

John 8:43-44 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

This is why the carnal mind does not possess free moral agency—the kind that will allow a person to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ—because they are in bondage to Satan the Devil, and he *does* have control of their minds. It is God who sets us free and gives us the opportunity to conform to the image of His Son and fulfill God's objective, which is to be in that image.

John 8:50-51 And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."

These final two verses focus on why Jesus always submitted, and how important it is for us to do so. He was never seeking His own glory. That is awesome! We might put that another way. He was never seeking His own will. Being like that of course bolstered His willingness to submit. In choosing to submit to God's Word, then, in verse 51, will result in a person being given eternal life. He says that those people who govern themselves according to God's will, will never die, because they will be in the image of God.

Now I want you to go to Luke 22 where we will see a clear affirmation from Jesus Christ of the difference between God's governing and the governing that is done in the world.

Luke 22:24-26 Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' [Notice the term "benefactors." They exercise lordship, and they exercise authority.] But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.

Unconverted mankind's basic approach to government is entirely different from God's. In this very brief overview, we can see it is based on the application of external pressure to gain submission. It is because of this that there are so many wars, so many divorces, so many on-the-job firings, and so forth. It is not without cause that force needs to be applied because, remember the people we are dealing with have the carnal mind. They cannot subject themselves to God's law because human nature simply is not willing to submit. What is so really weird to me is what Jesus said here: The ones applying the force are called benefactors.

I would like you to think about what is happening in the United States of America. The present administration is rapidly stripping away liberties we have held since the foundation of this nation, and yet the administration is held to be a benefactor by many people.

To me it is incredible, trying to look at this from God's point of view. I think it is probable they call them benefactors because these men, with their rigid rule, bring a sense of security and order out of what people fear could be a chaotic situation. And so for them, they feel somewhat comforted, and feel that the guy is a benefactor, all the while the liberties are being stripped away.

Jesus clearly said, "It shall not be so among you." That is a pretty strong hint that God's government does not operate the way He just described in Luke 22. God's government does not control through the application of terror even though He could very easily do it. God governs in such a way as to elicit the voluntary subjection of the governed. The carnal mind simply does not want to be subject to anybody.

Recall Adam and Eve again. Satan interposed himself between them and God, and convinced them that *they* should take control, and they did. They in fact said, "I will decide for myself what I will do, and what my destiny will be." They just pushed God's counsel, God's education, aside.

I find three influences that apply to virtually every one of the bad choices that are made by us and others. I will not go into them very deeply, but just to mention them with a brief explanation.

The first influence is pride. Humanly we think we know better how, why, when, and where, or by whom, something should be done. Now the cure for this is humility. God has many, many ways to knock the props out from under us.

The second influence is fear. We want to control because we fear things will not work out in *our* best interest, and we will have to suffer inconvenience, or at the least pain. So in order to ensure that what we fear will not happen, our deceitful heart motivates us to a variety of alternative options. Some people get belligerent, threatening harm or pain, and bully their way through to overpower opposition through intimidation. Others gather friends that agree and force their way through numbers.

Others manipulate by argument, by not letting an issue go. They talk, they talk, they talk until the other person gives up in exasperation just to get peace, but the manipulator is working to get *control*. Others bribe their way through gifts or the promise of something like sexual favors. Some pout and manipulate, trying to make the other feel guilty, because they made *them* feel so bad.

There are others who say, "Well, this is the way it's going to be, and if you don't like it, you can lump it," and so they arbitrarily decide that way since they feel threatened with loss of control because they fear someone else might come up with a better way that might make them look dumb. Human nature wants to control.

The third influence is covetousness. We decide we want something, and we will do whatever we feel necessary to get it, and this drive overrides our willingness to sacrifice.

The solution to all these ways is a humble recognition of truth and having living faith *in* God's truth. He says, "I will provide."

The government of the church that most of us came out of was essentially authoritative, in control of others. I do not know how it came to be that way, but a major part of the governance of that church was based on the notion that the ministry is the government of God. The government in that church was not mean. I do not mean that it was a terror to people, but it was quite rigid in its operation. It is not a question of whether the ministry has authority to do its job. That is absolutely provable by Scripture, but I want to ask a question: Is the ministry the government of God?

Here comes a third thing. There are no such words in the Bible. The correct operation of God's government absolutely depends on each person possessing God's truth and governing himself to never go beyond the authority God has given him. Jesus executed that flawlessly. That is why He could say what He did in John 8:29.

Galatians 5:16-18 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

This is where the rub comes in, in governing ourselves. That is because the human nature that remains in us following conversion still wants to go beyond what God has given, just like the benefactors Jesus spoke of in Luke 22. That in principle is exactly what Adam and Eve did in the Garden. They went beyond the counsel God gave them.

I want you to notice that in verse 18 it uses the word "led"—"led by the Spirit." This term indicates *voluntary submission*. A person who is led is not being forced, and being led requires choosing self-discipline to overcome the pulls of human nature still resident in us. Now we are not helpless in the making of choices because of conversion. The power to follow the leadership of God's Spirit is also resident in us as well as human nature.

Our study of God's Word largely becomes a search to find the parameters of our authority, and to find what our attitude is to be toward authority, whether it is civil, church, or personal, and to find what our response is to be toward authority, whether it be civil, church, or personal.

Let us go to I Peter 2 and we will see an example. Things are not always clear as this is, but it gives us an example right out of God's Word.

I Peter 2:13-17 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man [Boy! There is a parameter!] for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

The context goes on there, but I want you to notice the parameters. He says "every ordinance." We cannot pick and choose which ones we are going to submit to, or which ones we are not. There is one exception, and this is, if submission to men causes us to disobey God, then Acts 5:29 comes into play, where it says, "We ought to obey God rather than men." But even though we obey God, we are still subject to the law and the penalties attached to it for our disobedience. If our obedience to God causes us to disobey men's laws, then we must submit to the penalty man imposes.

What if an elder in the church tells you to do something that would cause you to sin? Well, there is an answer to this, and it is given by Paul. In I Corinthians 11:1 he said, "Follow me [an elder and apostle] *as I follow Christ*." This puts the onus on us to know what Christ said and what Christ did, and if we know, then we would know if Paul said to disobey Christ and obey him, that he was really not following Christ. Therefore you disobey what the elder said, and you follow Christ.

What if an elder or a deacon in the church tells you to do something that is not sin, but simply not the way you would do it? Now we have a clash of wills or something! Well, there are two alternatives. One alternative is to go ahead and do it the way he wants you to do it. It is not sin. It might be more difficult and harder for you to do it that way, but you go ahead and do it, and then afterward you

suggest to him, "In doing that, I think there's a better way of doing it." There is nothing wrong in doing that at all. You have kept peace. You have kept order. You have submitted to something that was not really unreasonable.

Now what, if on the other hand, the request by the elder or deacon, though it is not sin, it is also unreasonable and highly inconvenient for you to do it? Then you suggest before hand. Rather than get in a bad attitude, the best thing to do is go to the person and say, "Well, I want to submit to this, but I think there might really be, from my experience, a better way of doing it." Often the problems of offense are caused more by the *way* something is done, by the attitude in which something is done, and by an order given or responded to, or failed to do, than just doing what God says. Submit, and go on. Get it done and over with.

Let us go to Colossians 3:12-15, because this has to be our approach in all cases. Since God has broken the bondage to Satan, we are free. We have free moral agency in a way that the world does not on the basis of our conversion and the knowledge of God. God has empowered us with the ability not only to be free, but also to make right choices that the world has not been given. This is one of the things we have to learn that will help us very much in our governmental responsibilities with one another.

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.

I want you to notice that these are things we are empowered to do. They might not have been part of our life in the past, but having the Spirit of God, we are now free to make the choice to be merciful, to be kind, to be humble. Humility is a choice. Meekness is a choice. Longsuffering, being patient under pressure, is a choice.

Colossians 3:13-14 Bearing with one another [putting up with one another], and forgiving one another, [We are empowered to be able to forgive.] if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

Paul is illustrating this by a picture of putting on clothing. You make choices every day as to what you are going to wear. So Paul, by using that illustration, is showing that we can make the choice to put on these characteristics. These are *governing* characteristics—*self-governing* characteristics. We govern ourselves to be merciful, kind, humble, meek, longsuffering. We are controlling ourselves so that we are following the direction toward God's objective, and it is by this means of governing ourselves that we are actually being conformed. God is writing them into our heart so that they are part of us, but we have got to make the choice to do these things.

Colossians 3:14-15 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

You be the umpire ruling your heart. You have a choice to make. The umpire says, "You're out!" You say, "No, I'm safe!" Which is right? Well, the peace of God will be the umpire. That is the objective.

If we would take the time to go into James 3 and read about the importance of peace, at the end of that chapter James gives indications there that the character, the mind, the love of God must have peace in order for it to be developed. That is an easy principle to understand. As long as there is anger, as long as there is warfare going on, your mind is on the anger, your mind is on the warfare, your mind is on getting even. Your mind is on everything that will prohibit peace from actually being produced. That is why Paul said, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful."

Let us conclude in Matthew 5. Jesus has all these rules that He has laid down here about going the extra mile, and giving to those who want to borrow from you, and whatever.

Matthew 5:43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; [That kind of choosing to govern ourselves will produce conforming to the image of Jesus Christ.] for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect [or mature], just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Now listen to this definition that Herbert Armstrong gave for character. I copied this from the Ambassador College Correspondence Course, Lesson 16, page 14.

"Godly character is the attainment of the ability, in a separate independent entity of free moral agency, to be able to discern right from wrong—the true values from the false—truth from error—the right way from the wrong; and then to make the CHOICE or DECISION, even against self-desire, impulse or temptation; plus the WILL and self-discipline to resist the wrong and DO the right."

May you do well.