

Self-Government: Overcoming

Follow the Truth

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The first scripture I am going to eventually get to here is in Romans 10 so you might want to be turning to that. But one of the subtle spinoffs from the recent history of the church of God and the breakup, especially of the Worldwide Church of God, has been the revelation that all of us have been to some degree guilty of worshipping the church. Now, I feel certain that it was never intended to be that way. I feel equally certain that many do not realize that they have been doing this and that they would be very reluctant to admit that they have been doing it.

Now, an idol is created when something comes between us and God to the extent that we give it our respect, fear, or our submission rather than God. It becomes something that motivates us to sin. And I am using sin here in a very broad sense, in the sense that we are now missing the mark, that we are going off the path, that we are trespassing, we are going out of the way, we are losing, somehow or another, the high way that God sets for us to reach the Kingdom of God and being motivated in that way to sin. It makes us do things in order to please *it* rather than God.

Our obedience to it, that is, to the idol, may be hesitating, it may be given with regret, it may be given with an uneasy feeling, but it is nonetheless given. Now, there were, of course, mitigating factors. One of which was the concept that it was the true church or one might honestly rationalize by thinking, "Well, I don't really understand what it is that they are saying. But these are educated men, they know all about these things, and who am I? And so they are probably right in what they are saying."

Another mitigating factor would certainly be of wondering what one's alternatives might be if one refused to believe what they were saying and then chose to simply drop out, leave. And so one would say to himself, "Well, where would I go? Who would I fellowship with? Surely God will do something soon!"

But, brethren, mitigating factors occur in all instances of idolatry.

Now, the element that made this idolatry involving the church more difficult was that so many were sharing in the same deceitful delusion at the same time.

There is a principle that we need to begin with here and I am extracting it from Romans 10:16, and I am going to put it together with Matthew 10:40-42. And that principle is, if we ever get into this situation again, if something should ever arise, you must *always follow the message*. Is that clear? You follow truth, you follow the message. Now, guess where I learned that? I learned it from Carrol Allen. You thought I was going to say somebody else, did you not? But she just said it in a way to me when she came to the Church of the Great God. She had reasoned this thing out, wondering where she was going to go after she left the Worldwide Church of God. And she came to the conclusion that you always have to follow the message. In a sense, we might say, regardless of who the messenger is, you follow the message.

And so we find here, Isaiah expressing something that is part and parcel of this proposition. He said,

Romans 10:16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah [a messenger of God, somebody that God chose to bring His message to the Jews at the time that Isaiah was living] says, "Lord, who has believed our report."

Now, I do not know a great deal about Isaiah. I do not know what area of the Jewish community he came from. I have seen speculations that he seemed to have been somebody who was part of royalty. He seemed to have contacts right on the very highest levels of government and religion. Maybe he was even part of the family of monarchy. I do not know. But regardless of who he was, his concern was, who has believed the report that he was the man who was chosen.

Now we find back here in Matthew the 10th chapter, Jesus interjecting something in regard to this thought in verse 40. He says,

Matthew 10:40 "He who receives you [meaning the apostles in this case and in the broader sense, anybody that God Himself sends] receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

Do you see the chain here? Is it possible to break that chain and then still be acceptable by God?

Now, here I have shifted from the message to the messenger, but I am tying the messenger, the true messenger of God, and the message together, and I am telling you that they both go together, not by John Ritenbaugh's word, but by the Word of God.

Matthew 10:41-42 "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. [Here comes a reward for those who receive the prophet. Now, prophet, is just one who speaks under the inspiration of God, a true prophet anyway.] And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

I bring this up at the beginning of this sermon and laying part of the foundation for this, that some people have or do self-righteously hate Herbert W. Armstrong and they reject him, they reject the man, they hate the man, are bitter against the man that God used mightily. Who else in our period of time in our life did God use to the extent that he was used? I am saying, regardless to any perceived weaknesses that Mr. Armstrong had. And I say perceived because do not believe everything you hear on the street about him was true. You know how things get twisted in the telling and you know what hate-filled people will say about somebody, in accusation against anybody, regardless of whether it is Mr. Armstrong.

But it was him, regardless of his personality or whatever, that God *chose* to give the message to the end time church. And the acceptance of him is tied directly to the message and our acceptance to God. And to hate him now or

to be bitter against him, to quote Harold way, "We are not going to earn reward for running him down." That is an exercise in futility; or for being bitter against him or bad mouthing him. That does not do any good for us.

This dovetails with this subject because there are those out there who want to turn people aside by pointing to these perceived weaknesses of Mr. Armstrong. But do not let anybody fool you. Follow the message that God revealed through him and that is being carried on, regardless of whether it is with us or somebody else. You examine the message and you follow the truth because it is very likely that that is going to be a man that God is using. In other words, that is His messenger, there might be several messengers, and I am sure there are. But if there are several messengers, they are going to have the same basic message that was given by God to His end time church through Mr. Armstrong.

So our response to God, our fear of Him, our submission to Him, always has to be in regard to His truth.

This is very clearly pointed out in an end time prophecy that I know that you are all aware of in II Thessalonians the second chapter, when He warns about the departure from truth that is going to come upon the church in those days. And we are in those days.

II Thessalonians 2:10 and with all unrighteousness deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

II Thessalonians 2:12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

This makes it very clear that people perish who are condemned because they do not believe and love truth, but rather have pleasure in unrighteousness; and righteousness is obedience to truth. Now, our God is very merciful. He takes all of these mitigating factors into consideration and as we have repented, He forgives. But in order to do so, we have had to leave the corporate structure that had been our church home for very many years.

One of the mitigating factors that was working against us was this "one true church" concept. And indeed, there is only one true church, but the concept that was told us strongly implied, and wrongly, that it was bound up in one corporate body even though the evidence was all around us that this simply could not be. Mr. Armstrong made it very clear that he believed that the Church of God Seventh Day was part of the true church. Now, there is the messenger telling you the truth and he was telling you in effect that the Worldwide Church of God is not the only corporate body.

However, in his enthusiasm to get the support of the people within the church, he emphasized the work that the Worldwide Church of God was doing because that was obviously where God was doing His work. It was not being done through the Church of God Seventh Day. Their period of time had passed by and they did an acceptable job. They did a worldwide work. And this is why when, let us say, the Worldwide Church of God and its message finally reached into places like South America, Argentina, Uruguay, and other nations; Chile, the Philippines, there were already people there keeping the Sabbath at least and maybe some of the holy days as well because the Church of God Seventh Day had already been through and some people had hung on to some of the truth. It is interesting though that they recognized that there was a different spirit and very few of those people came with the Worldwide Church of God. And so even the historical references are there, the evidence, and it was in the Bible as well.

A second mitigating factor, a very strong one, was the church government was the government of God. I have had many people remark to me that you just do not go against God's government, and that is absolutely correct. You do not go against God's government. You see, that immediately equates church government with God's government. Are they one and the same?

Did God ordain that there be government in the church? Absolutely! Without government in the church, you have confusion and you have maybe every person in that group has an entirely different doctrine or set of doctrines than everybody else.

So did God ordain that there be government in the church? Absolutely. Did God put government in the church? Absolutely. He did not just ordain it, He did it.

As you can probably begin to guess that this message is evolving and church government is going to be the subject today, because from my perspective that there is no more important subject to get a good hold of on in these critical times. And the reason is because overcoming and being prepared for God's Kingdom to the greatest extent possible is directly tied to our understanding this subject. Now, please do not think that this sermon is going to cover every nuance of this vital subject. You are going to find that it is going to overlap very much with Darryl's sermon, somewhat with Helmut's sermon, and somewhat with Richard's as well.

I do not want to in any way con you into thinking that I know all there is to know on this subject. I will only be able to give an overview. And I think that you will see that God's government is far less complex than many have thought. In fact, I think it is downright simple. In fact, it is so simple we might be overlooking how simple it is because it *is* so simple.

We are not going to go there yet but guess where God's government in a way has its roots? Genesis 2 and 3. But we are going to turn first to Romans 13. Now let me read to you a scripture that I gave in the sermon the other day, this time in Matthew. Remember the one in Matthew 10, verse 29? Test your memories. You do not have to turn to it, you can just write it down.

Matthew 10:29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Here is a major overall principle. God knows what is going on in His creation and His knowledge of what is going on is expressed by Jesus as being so complete that He has every hair in our head numbered. It is so complete that the psalmist in Psalm 139 said, "Where can I go from Your Spirit?" And he was not upset about that. He was happy about that, that there was no place that God would not be aware of the psalmist regardless of whether he was down in the deepest pit or the furthest place in all of the

heavens. God was able to understand. He knew not only where the person was, but He knew what was going on in the person's mind as well and what their needs were perfectly; that God is aware of what is going on in His creation.

Now here in Romans the 13th chapter, another part of this overall principle, but this time as it applies to government.

Romans 13:1-4 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God [that is kind of hard to grasp, it is so simply stated], and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister [servant]. . .

He is the servant of God. I did not look the word up but I would guess it is deacon, *diákonos*. You thought we only had deacons in the church? No, no. The policeman is a deacon. The mayor is a deacon. The councilman is a deacon. All those people who have a measure of authority, they are ministers of God and they are carrying out things in His behalf, ordained by Him to do those things.

Romans 13:4-7 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for He is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who does evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

So all authority in towns, cities, states, and nations—or church—is derived from God. It is all part of His governance of the creation. He has delegated authority, governmental authority to whomsoever He chooses. And as we

find out in Daniel 4 and 5 that sometimes He chooses to give it to very evil people in order that they might carry out some portion of His purpose.

Is there anybody here who is prepared to say that God did not appoint Joseph W. Tkach? I think it is obvious that if He had wanted things to continue as they were, He would have made a different appointment.

Again, let me repeat, He does not *make* people sin. He does not *make* people do what they do. But He does at times move people into position whose character, whose personality, whose perspective He knows inside and out and He is pretty sure of exactly what they are going to do whenever He puts them in the position that He wants them in. So God does not make them sin. But as soon as they get into the position, it seems like the character begins to come out exactly as God judged it and they begin to do the things that are going to bring about His purpose.

Now, because this is true in the world that all power devolves from God, are those governments God's governments? That is a question that *has* to be resolved. Nobody ever thinks of them in those terms. Nobody ever thinks of the governments of the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Russia, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Japan, nobody ever thinks of them as being God's government. And yet this principle here shows that God either appoints or He allows, He passes on those people and those people are considered by Him to be His ministers, but they are not God's government.

Why do we think that the government in the church is God's government? Again, there are reasons why we think this way but we will eventually get to them. But I do not want you to get me wrong. I am not saying there is no church government. I am not saying that church government should not be as close to God's government as possible, but, brethren, for that matter so should the nations because they are His appointment. What I am saying is that God's government and church government are not one and the same thing. God's government is *God Himself* governing. We will see this clarified as we go along.

God's government is God Himself governing. When a person repents and surrenders because of what God has revealed to Him, because of that change

in the person's mind that God makes possible so that the person then begins to use his free moral agency to choose to submit directly to God's governance, He is coming directly under God's government—directly.

Now does God's government *ever* sin? Does God's government ever come up with wrong doctrine? Men do. Men sin and men come up with wrong doctrines. And you know what this has led us to do? It has led us to make all kinds of excuses and justifications for what the church has told people to do, and people do, then, in obedience to the church. And so in the aftermath of that, as people begin to see that this might not quite be right, then come all kinds of justifications that usually have the tagline, "But the church told me to do it," meaning the church government told me to do it.

(You know that the Nazis after the Second World War used exactly the same justification. There have been so many times that I have had it at the forefront of my mind to show the movie, "Judgment at Nuremberg" at some time during the Feast kind of like as a church activity. One of the things that has stopped me from doing it is because we would probably bring our children. And it is not that the movie is so bad for them to look at because it is not that kind of a movie. It is not a movie in which the point or the purpose is to follow action. It is a movie in which you follow reasoning and what the movie does is it powerfully takes you through the justifications that the Nazis made at the trials at Nuremberg and then the judgments that were handed down by the judges as a result of those things.

And you would be surprised; you would find that what they said is exactly what you heard from those people who are in the Worldwide Church of God. Some of the very things we said. So I would not want the kids here mostly because you need to concentrate and listen to the dialogue of the prosecuting attorney and especially the attorney for the defense. I thought Maximilian Schell who played that did a tremendous job. But that was a little aside.)

Now there may be many others between us and God to which there is responsibility, as we just saw here in Romans 13. But brethren, they are not God.

Let us go back to Genesis 2, verse 15.

Genesis 2:15-17 Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to tend it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die."

This covers, I am sure, what was a multitude of instructions that God gave to Adam and Eve because He certainly did not put them in there knowing absolutely nothing. But it gives the essence of what He said to them so that we will understand it in simple terminology. I want you to notice that it was God who did the instructing directly to Adam and Eve.

Genesis 3:1-5 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day that you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

As with every other subject in the Bible, it seems that God shows a pattern in very simple terminology or by example, a word picture, very early in this book, in the book of Genesis. Now God's government and our relationship to it is no exception. I want you to pay special attention: *our* relationship. This is not the world's relationship, this is *our* relationship. You might recall something that Darryl said in his sermon, that when Jesus Christ died, and God began calling people into His church and He began making the New Covenant with us, what happened was we were thrown back into the same situation, or there was a restoration of what the situation had been at the very beginning with Adam and Eve. Now there is *nothing* between us and being governed directly by God. There was nothing between Adam and Eve and being governed by God *until* somebody interposed himself in between.

Now, God allowed it and He permitted it because we must all choose. Adam and Eve had to make the choice of whether they were going to be directly

governed by God or were they going to put themselves into a position for someone like Satan to be in between them and God? Well, we all know what they chose. Now, was there anybody who seems to have had a clearer right to be called the government of God than Satan? He had been delegated governing responsibility over the earth, over one third of the angels, but was he in reality the government of God? He was not God. He had only been appointed by God. Whose government should the angels have obeyed? Should it have been God's or Lucifer's, Satan?

Let us change the wording just a bit. In a simplified way government is merely the administration of laws. Another way of saying it is that government is the means of guiding or controlling. Now, whose administration, whose guidance or control should the angels have submitted to? Whose administration, guidance, and control should Adam and Eve have submitted to?

Now, back to the Garden of Eden. Just as clearly as Satan interposed himself, Adam and Eve made a choice to submit to a way that was clearly opposed to God's government. It was clearly opposed to God's governance of them. This is very clearly shown in God's reaction to their choice. They showed who they believed and whose government they were under by their actions, they chose to be governed by Satan. Now, in this simple example, it shows that even though Lucifer—Satan—was appointed by God and delegated authority, had delegated authority to carry out his responsibilities, he was *not* the government of God. He was actually opposed to God and would not submit to Him and actively influenced others to submit to his rather than God's governance. So you see, they were no longer under God's governance at all; they were now under Satan.

Let us go to Deuteronomy, the 30th chapter. This is the chapter that eventually leads up to where He commands us to choose. Let us look at it from the beginning in verse 1:

Deuteronomy 30:1-2 "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you [The "all these things" are the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28 and then further explanations and ramifications and exhortations in chapter 29.], the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, that you shall call them to mind

among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and you shall return to the Lord [Return? What is he talking about? He is talking about allowing Him to govern them.] and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul."

As we go through this chapter, I want you to understand that the emphasis is on His as opposed to anybody who would teach us differently—His laws, His governance. Now, God intends that everybody obey His word. Let us carry this a little bit further.

Deuteronomy 30:6 "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

I mean, He wants us so badly to be under His governance that He says that He will go to the place where He will circumcise our heart in order to make this possible.

Deuteronomy 30:8 "And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today."

Deuteronomy 30:10-14 ". . .if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."

Brethren, you remember what is at the end of this chapter, where He commands us to choose to obey Him? Is He not saying, "Will you not allow Me to govern you? Will you not willingly allow Me to govern you? Will you

not willingly, since I have revealed these things to you, since I am willing to circumcise your heart, since I am willing to reveal My law, I'm willing to give you My Spirit. I'm going to give you everything you need. But you have to make the choice to put yourself under Me and be governed by Me in the face of all the appeals that come from other voices that are interposing themselves between you and Me."

And as we have already seen, we have experienced it ourselves, this happens right in the church. People interpose themselves between us and God and lead us astray.

Deuteronomy 30:15-17 "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 that the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you will not hear, but are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them. . ."

Do you see where I get the idea that without realizing it, we were drawn into worshipping the church. They were drawing us away from the commandments of God, the government in the church, and God says that is idolatry to worship other gods, give you respect your honor, your deference to.

Deuteronomy 30:18-20 ". . . 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 against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore [use your free moral agency to] choose life [Obey Me. Let Me be your governor. Let Me be your government.], that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice [not other voices, His voice], and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Now, what is the sum of that chapter? His government is something that, once we have had it revealed to us so that the barriers between us and Him no longer exist, because He has revealed His truth, He has led us to repentance, and we indeed have repented and we have been buried in water (a watery grave), and we have been resurrected from that grave and have had hands laid on us, because we have accepted the blood of Jesus Christ, and He has forgiven us, and now we receive His Spirit—there is nothing between us and God. We have gone back to Genesis the second chapter, God's government is established in our life. God's government is government by God Himself.

Let us go to I Samuel 8, verse 7. We all know the situation here. Israel wanted a king.

I Samuel 8:7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."

Maybe that verse will mean more to you now, At that time, Israel had a system of government that operated through judges, and after this time, God appointed a king to reign over them, which meant a more centralized form of government. I want you to understand that there is nothing wrong with centralized government. People get all up in the air that there is something wrong with centralized government. God's government is centralized. The outstanding government in all of the universe is centralized in heaven from which He operates everything.

The problem is not centralized government. The problem is in the people. That is where the problem has always been and that is what it says there in Romans 8:3, where Paul said in such a simple statement, the law was weak through the flesh. That is where the problem was. And that is where the problem is today. There is nothing wrong with centralized government. The problem is in those doing the governing, and let us not leave this out, those *being* governed.

Now, I have heard a thousand stories of wicked, hard, harsh ministers who ran people's lives. And I know that some of that took place. But I also know

that much of those stories are pretty greatly exaggerated, *greatly* exaggerated. And I know from my own experience that very many of the ministers in the Worldwide Church of God were very serving, loving people, just as converted as you. But men, the priesthood primarily, were always standing between them and God.

Much of the book of Hebrews is devoted to the ramifications of those who have made the New Covenant with God because of what Christ did—His life and death—and because He is now our Eternal High Priest and He stands there between us and God, that He is God, and He has restored the privilege that Adam and Eve had at the very beginning. And we now have direct access to God. And so we begin to see Deuteronomy 30, verses 11 through 14 beginning to come to pass. That is where God (we just read it), said, "You don't have to go all over the heavens and all over the earth looking for My Word. It's right in you. It's near to you, it's in you." And Jesus confirmed that in John 14:23 where He said that if you repent and you are baptized, the Father and I will come and make Our abode in you; and that is done in order to give us this opportunity to be directly under the government of God.

Brethren, that puts each and every one of us directly under God, with nothing, with nobody in between. Now, do you get that? There is *nothing*, *nobody* between us and God's *direct* governance in our lives. That word "direct" is very important. But this does not remove our responsibility to other governments. As we just saw in Romans 13:1-7, we have a responsibility to civil government. But this does not remove from us that every choice in life should be a choosing to be governed by God. That is the end of Deuteronomy 30. That is what He said at the end, the last two verses. Every choice in life is a choice to be governed by God.

Let us go to I Peter, the second chapter. When I say choice, I am talking about things that involve moral and spiritual areas. It would involve other peripheral areas of life as well. But maybe "every" is a little bit too strong. Maybe it is not strong enough. I do not know. I am learning as we go along here. He does say that we are supposed to bring every thought into captivity to Christ and so maybe I was not wrong. And by saying that every choice in life is a choice to be governed by God, governed by self, governed by Satan, governed by this world. We make the choice. And in many cases, we are ignorant of what is the right choice and we make the wrong choice. But God

is patient, He is merciful. He says, I want you to be right. So we will forgive, we will remove the ignorance, and we will give you the opportunity then to choose to do the right and choose to be under My government this way.

I Peter 2:13-17 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man 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 well. 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 your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as the bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Now, what this series of verses do is that it puts our subjection to civil governments in their proper perspective. Listen very carefully to this: our obedience to them or our subjecting ourselves to them, I think that would be a better word, is something we give to them because of our respect and submission to God. I will read that to you in verse 13, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." We are to consciously and voluntarily choose to submit to them in every ordinance, of course, excepting those things that would cause us to break the laws of God. But you see, in subjecting yourselves and submitting yourselves to the ordinance of men, we are obeying God's government. That is so simple.

Let us notice Christ's example. In verse 18, Peter says, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear." And he says in verse 19, "For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God, . . ." Why are we supposed to submit ourselves to employers, even employers who are not very good employers? It is because of our respect for God.

I Peter 2:20-22 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this were you called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth."

Pay attention to the context. The context here is in relation to being submissive to the civil governments of men as well as being submissive to employers and to employers who are not good employers, they are harsh and cruel.

Christ set this example. He did no sin in this kind of a situation. Now, why did He do no sin? He did no sin because He respected the Father and He did what the Father said to do. He was subject to God.

I Peter 2:23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

There is a mouthful.

What that says is that Christ lived His life by faith. Peter is not saying that the governments of men were fair. He is not saying that the governments of men were honest. He is not saying whether it is in a religious area or a civil area that these people who are interposed between Christ and His Father were doing things right. But because Jesus Christ lived His life by faith, He knew that God was fully aware of what was going on, how these people were reviling Him, how they were treating Him harshly, being mean to Him, saying terrible things about Him, plotting His death, getting ready to make a martyr out of Him—He did not do anything except He committed the judgment to God. To do what? To do what God saw was right.

Are we willing to do that? You see, if you have placed yourself under the government of God, you are not going to allow Satan to interpose himself between you and God and trick you into doing something that will cause you to take yourself out from under the government of God by making a wrong choice. Christ never permitted Himself to do that. He never permitted Satan to interpose himself between Him and His obedience to God. Whether Satan inspired the men like Caesar, inspired Pilate, inspired the high priest, or any of the Pharisees or Sadducees, those who sat on Moses' seat, He never allowed any of them to deviate Him away from putting Himself under the government of God with *every single* choice. But always He committed the judgment of this situation to His Father, even to a terrible death.

It is interesting. The last verse in that chapter, "For you were like sheep going astray." Is that not interesting? When we were in the WCG and people were leading us astray, they had interposed themselves between us and our obedience to God by giving us doctrines that were not correct—and we were being led astray. See, Christ never allowed Himself to be led astray, never allowed Himself to be taken away from His obedience to the Father. Now He subjected Himself or submitted Himself to them because He was committed to God.

Let us turn to Matthew the 26th chapter, verse 53. In Jesus' trial, He said,

Matthew 26:53 "Or do you not think I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will not provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"

Do you think that He was powerless to act? No, He was not powerless to act. And He felt confident that if He prayed to the Father, that the Father would respond. But He had committed Himself to God's judgment and therefore He made the choice to let God decide what He was going to do and that He would follow what was written in the Old Testament and what He understood from His relationship with the Father.

Now let us go to John the 19th chapter.

John 19:10-11 Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? [In other words, why are You so quiet?] Do you not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

So Jesus recognized where all power came from; that He would submit in obedience only to the Father. Now by doing as He did, He remained submissive to the government of God regardless of the men, both in civil and religious areas, who interposed themselves between Him and the Father. And

He did it despite the governments of men, authorized by God, they were right there, they were a visual reality right before Him, but nobody was going to turn Him away from His submission to the Father.

Let us look very quickly in the book of Matthew, chapter 22.

Matthew 22:17-22 "Tell us, therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So they brought to Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

You see how neatly He solved that? We give to the civil governments of men what they require unless it would cause us to break the law of God. We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). But God is over all and we always give our submission to Him. And when we give that submission or obedience to civil government, we do it out of respect for God.

Matthew 23:1-2 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say and do not do."

It is obvious here that He is not saying that we should obey them if it is going to break the law of God. But He is making it very clear that if they tell us to do something, if it does not break the law of God, we are to be submissive to them and in so doing, we will be submissive to the government of God.

Now, there are a large number of scriptures in Hebrews (which I will not turn to, but you can mark these down). Hebrews 4:14-16, Hebrews 10:19 and 22, Ephesians 2:6, Philippians 3:20, Colossians 1:13. I arranged them in that

order for a specific reason. And that is, that for those who are in Christ there is not only direct access to God, but we are already in the Kingdom of God in embryonic form.

Who is our government? There is only one answer to that. The head of the Kingdom of God is the Father. That is where our citizenship is. He is our government. Now, the relationship is even closer than that. Here is another string of scriptures: Ephesians 5:1, I John 3:1-2, Romans 8:15-17, and Ephesians 3:14-15. Now, what those scriptures show is that the relationship is so close that we are actually in the Family.

In a family, where does the authority lie? I Corinthians 11:3, with the Father. This is so simple. The basic form of God's government is from the top down. That is the pattern. He has shown it clearly in every government that He had a part in authorizing in His Word, you may call it patriarchal, you may call it hierarchical, whatever you call it, the structure is always from the top down. But the structure is not where the problem lies. God's government is family government as to structure, administration, and attitude. Human family government is intended to be patterned after God's Family government. The church is a family and above all institutions on earth it must be setting the example of how government is supposed to operate.

Now here is Christ's approach. Matthew 23:8-12. I will tell you what this says. He says, "Don't call any man your teacher. There is one who is your Teacher and that is Christ. We are all brothers. We're not the Father, we are not the high priest, we are brothers." There is a brother/sister relationship amongst all of us. We are part of a family. Well, I do not think that could be any clearer considering the context.

Barclay translates Matthew 23:10. He says, "Nor must you be called leaders. You have one Leader, Christ." What the context involves here is where we are to look for authority and at the same time, it is telling what our relationship is to be. The authority in the church is in Jesus Christ. Christ's own words; not mine, His. And the rest of us are brothers. We are children, all in the same family. You can write down Mark 3:34-35. There again, Jesus directly relates to a family concept and that He is the brother of those who do the will of God. There is to be no status-seeking.

Tyndall's New Testament Commentary on the book of Matthew, page 325,

Over against that unique authority (Christ), His disciples must avoid the use of honorific titles for one another, an exhortation, which today's church could profitably take more seriously, not only in relation to formal ecclesiastical titles (Most Reverend, my Lord bishop), but significantly in its excessive deference to academic qualifications or to authoritative status in the church.

Very quickly, Isaiah 9:6-7. Those two verses tell us very clearly that the government is on Christ's shoulders, the government of God is God. If you look in Isaiah 22:20-22, again, the reference is to Jesus Christ. In Matthew 28:18, "All power and authority has been given Me in heaven and earth." Ephesians 1:22, "He is the Head over all things to the church." The government of God is where God is. Is God here? God is in heaven.

Now, the church has government and that government is ordained of God. It is authorized and empowered by Him. But the government of the church is the government of men. It is a government that is supposed to be striving to operate and function according to the exact same manner as God, even as we are to be doing in every other aspect of life. And we are disciples learning the things of God. But because we are just learning, we do an awful lot of things wrong. And it is right here that I think that the track is so often jumped.

Matthew 20:24-28 And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased against the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The servant attitude is to be the dominating attitude of all within His church. But special attention is drawn to those in more visible positions because they are in positions where authority is most easily abused. Now, if you will

recall, earlier I said there is government in the church, there is authority within the church. We are first to make ourselves slaves of Him and then slaves of each other. The government in the church has a greater responsibility to God than civil governments because He has revealed His purpose and way to it; and to whom much is given much is required. We have been converted, and because we are converted, He expects us to make the right use of our access to Him in choosing to be under His government at all times. That includes not just the ministry, it includes every part of the body.

Now we are working around here to the most important element in understanding this thing. No government will work, not even God's government will work, where there are people of free moral agency unless those free moral agencies *choose* to govern themselves to be under the government of God. That is why He has given us free moral agency. We have to first prove to Him we can be governed. And so we have to use our free moral agency, regardless of who we are in the church—old, young, man, woman, minister, deacon, lay member, it matters not—not even God's government will work unless we choose to submit.

This is also why I said earlier, it was not just the leadership, all of us were involved in this mess. But we have a much greater responsibility in the governance of the church than those in the world because God has revealed Himself, revealed His way. And so the government that is in the church, that God has ordained (even though it is not actually the government of God), He has ordained the government in the church and that government has authority to do things to carry out the work of the church. And it is the responsibility of all of us to submit to that by faith. If you understand what I am saying is, that God will correct if we are truly striving to serve Him and submit to Him. If we get off the track, He *will* do it.

The most important part of this whole thing is that once we begin to understand this concept and to recognize that God has empowered us to obey Him, all of us—not just the ministry, all of us—by giving us His Spirit, by giving us access to Him, that principle begins to work and it is especially noticeable in the ministry. You know, the principle is that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It is not the position. It is *always* the people. The problem has never been the structure. The problem has *always*

been the misuse, the abuse of free moral agency. Sometimes ignorance, but unfortunately, in other times, it is not ignorance, it is the misuse.

So the lesson that we have to learn, every single one of us, is the restraint of power, the judicious and right use of the powers that God gives to us. Now again, all you have to do is go back to the beginning. Pride got to Lucifer and the result was the abuse of power. God gave Adam and Eve free moral agency and He gave them a certain amount of knowledge. Immediately, what did they do? They exceeded the limits in the use of their power and they sinned. That is what almost always happens when we abuse. When we go beyond the limits of our God-given power, we almost invariably sin. And usually what happens is we take the power to ourselves.

What did Cain do? He took power! Lamech took power to himself. The story begins to develop very early in the Bible. One generation after another exceeded the limits of the authority that God had given to them. Have men abused their authority in their domination of women? Have men exceeded the limits that God originally placed on men? Of course they have! Now we see things boomeranging and women are taking authority to themselves and they are exceeding the God-given limits in their area as well.

Now authority can be achieved in two ways. The godly way is to let God give it. That is the best. But you know what? People also give authority as well. You are not here because I twisted your arms. You made the choice to come with the Church of the Great God and you have given me, along with what God has given me, but you have individually used your free moral agency to give me the authority to teach you. Now, what I have to be careful of is that I do not abuse that authority, that I do not abuse it by going beyond the doctrines that God has revealed in His Word, that I do not go beyond the doctrines (except in minor refinements, I guess you might say) that God revealed through Herbert W. Armstrong and God gave to the church through Him at the end time.

You see, limits are set there and I have to be very careful that I do not abuse, that I restrain myself from going into something that I might think of that might not be quite right. And I will tell you when I get into an area where I am getting a little bit afraid, and you better keep praying that I do get afraid in some areas, I get a little bit shaky. This is when I turn to you and I say,

"How about counseling me?" In a multitude of counselors there is safety, in a multitude of counselors there is wisdom. Maybe I am not thinking straight here. We are having a little bit of trouble with the doctrine. I need to get it straightened out and I ask you for your help. Because John Ritenbaugh does not know it all and John Ritenbaugh wants to be careful enough that he does not abuse the authority that you have given me and that God has given me to be your teacher.

In that way I introduce to you checks and balances on me. And I have to do that because I feel that I owe it to you and I owe it to God to bring you into my confidence in these ways so that we share the mistakes together.
(*laughter) So I can point the finger at you too.

No, I really want to look at this positively because I know that I am going to get good feedback from you because I will tell you confidently and openly, I have never seen a group of people more serious about their life. We are not the smartest or anything like that. But you people really are *serious* and that is great. And so I feel confident about asking you because I know that God is going to respond to you because He sees your zeal for doing things right, and that you want to be right and you want to glorify Him.

But that is the way a family works. And fathers, you have to be careful like Darryl was saying, that you do not abuse your authority. There are some men who want to make all the decisions in their family. That is not godly. That is like telling your wife she does not have a brain in her head. That really builds her up. The man is supposed to edify the woman, build her up. That is just one small area there, but that is not right.

(Kind of got lost in my notes here. But I do want to conclude this because I am sort of going around in a circle and I am going to have to do like Darryl and jump into it somewhere down the line on the time.)

But let us go right to the end. II Corinthians 12, verse 10. I want you to see how even an apostle, whom I think the Bible shows God has set in the top position, the most responsible position. But he says here:

II Corinthians 10:12-13 For we [and Paul certainly includes himself in this as we will see] dare not compare ourselves with

those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond our measure, but within the limits of the sphere that God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you.

Paul is using himself as an example; that God has established to Paul a limit on his authority. But Paul is explaining to these people that his measure of authority reached to the Corinthians and they were included within the scope of His responsibility to the government of God, which is in heaven.

II Corinthians 10:13-16 We, however, will not boast beyond our measure, but within the limits of the sphere that God has appointed us, a sphere which especially includes you. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.

Even an apostle is limited by the measure that God deals to him.

In practical application, God has dealt to each and every one of us a measure, an area of responsibility. Now it takes faith to make this work. Faith that God is truly with us, that He is leading us to His perfection and that perfection includes oneness with Him. It takes vision to see the end result. It takes a more mature understanding, working with the faith to enable us to submit. It takes humility to consciously choose, and intelligently choose, to submit to God's government.

Now, this sermon did not cover many specifics. To me, it covered only briefly the single most important aspect of government. And that is, that the successful operation of God's government absolutely depends upon faith in God, in us being converted, and consciously, intelligently, lovingly choosing in every situation to submit to His governance, to His law. If I do that and you do that—Wow! We are going to turn this world upside down if God

chooses. If He chooses to use us that way, we are going to turn this world upside down.

You know, the strength of the body does not depend on numbers. Gideon's army proved that, David and Goliath proved that, and on and on it goes. It depends upon the true spirituality of that body, and that true spirituality depends upon us using our faith to consciously and intelligently choose to submit to God. If we do that, we will be submissive to the government of God. Even God's government will not work unless each one of us chooses to voluntarily govern himself.

Well brethren, I think that God has determined we are ready to do this. That we are serious-minded enough to do it. We desire to do it with all of our heart and that we are being brought to the place, finally, where I think we are surely beginning to love one another as brothers and sisters should, and looking to the Father and Jesus Christ to lead the Family and wait until He determines what He wants to do with us.

So this is another step in learning how to rightly use the things that He has given to us. And so it is not my responsibility to beat you into submission, it is all of our responsibility to voluntarily govern ourselves.