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UNDERSTANDING THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD

Mr. Armstrong frequently said something to this effect:

"The only place on Earth where the government of God is in existence today is in the Church of God."

BUT THIS STATEMENT BY MR. ARMSTRONG IS INCORRECT!

Exactly what did Mr. Armstrong mean? Why did he say this? Let's understand this clearly because the Church still claims to represent "the government of God". And this claim is largely responsible for many people going along with the changes the Church has made ... because "the government of God" has (supposedly) initiated those changes!

The truth is that "THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD" has not initiated a single one of the changes that have been made since the death of Mr. Armstrong! Not even one!

For a start, the expression "the government of God" is never used in the Bible. The word "government" appears exactly 4 times in the KJV text of the Bible; in Isaiah 9:6; 9:7; 22:21 and 2 Peter 2:10.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the GOVERNMENT shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of [his] GOVERNMENT and peace [there shall be] no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

The Hebrew word in both these verses is "misrah", which comes from a primitive root meaning "TO HAVE POWER". The word "misrah" is not used anywhere else in the O.T.. These verses talk about THE POWER that will be vested in Jesus Christ! Keep in mind that when Isaiah recorded these two verses there was no such thing as a "government", in the way we today tend to view this word, anywhere ... not in Israel or in Egypt or in Babylon. Nations back then were ruled by a single individual. The point in this prophecy is that THE POWER TO RULE will rest "ON CHRIST'S SHOULDERS", as opposed to the power in worldly kingdoms resting on a human king's shoulders. The expression "upon his shoulder" makes clear that this is something referring to an individual, not to some kind of "governing body".

Similarly, verse 7 tells us that "of the increase of Christ's POWER and of peace" there shall be no end. It is not in any way referring to some kind of "governing body" getting bigger and bigger and bigger ... for all eternity! That's absurd!

This Scripture is one example of people taking a biblical term and INTERPRETING it in terms of OUR OWN MODERN SOCIAL STRUCTURES! We know what WE mean when we use the word "government". But that is not what Isaiah meant when he used the word "misrah". The whole concept of "a government", as we think of it, was foreign to people in biblical times.

This example of reading OUR meaning of "government" into this word "misrah" is similar to reading the word "CONVERSATION" in the KJV and inferring that this is a reference to "SPEAKING", which is not true at all. In the KJV "conversation" refers to conduct and behaviour ... and we today use the word to refer to a very specific and limited area of behaviour; speaking to other people. Similarly, the Hebrew word "misrah" is used twice to refer to the power vested in the One who will rule ... and we today are used to the concept of ruling being something that a constituted body (i.e. a government) does.

Now obviously, a ruler will delegate certain responsibilities to some of the people under him. Anciently, the closest rulers came to sharing their power was that they had "counsellors". But those counsellors and advisors didn't really form a government to rule with the king. Their positions were totally dependent on the king's favour.

God IS going to form a government, which will be inducted into office at the time of the first resurrection. It will be a perfect government and it will be in office for ever ... that is what is meant by all those in the first resurrection becoming ... "a PILLAR in the temple of my God" (Revelation 3:12). That perfect government will consist of God the Father and Jesus Christ and exactly 144000 resurrected individuals. And that government will rule over the rest of the Family of God, over the angels and over all of God's creation for ever. During the millennium that government will rule WITH Christ as "kings and priests".

But this government has not yet been set up! Currently God the Father and Jesus Christ rule without that government assisting them, because that government is still in the process of qualifying. The purpose of the first resurrection is to FORM the government of God. Currently God the Father and Jesus Christ GOVERN, but they do not have a government to assist them in this activity! They rule not unlike the kings of old ... assisted by many counsellors and advisors (in God's case the 24 "elders" around His throne, the living creatures, Gabriel and the archangel Michael, etc.). At the first resurrection, however, a real governing body will be inducted into government positions, which Christ is currently still preparing (John 14:2). There will be exactly 144000 positions to fill in that government. Every member will have a portfolio which God the Father and Jesus Christ have decided upon.

Consider the word "ISRAEL".

God gave this name to Jacob because it has a very specific meaning, one that is sometimes overlooked.

And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: FOR AS A PRINCE HAST THOU POWER WITH GOD and with men, and hast prevailed. (Genesis 32:28)

God Himself defines this name here as meaning : "AS A RULER to have power with God"! Do we grasp this? WHO is going to have "power WITH God as a ruler"? Who has thus far in human history had "power with God as a ruler"? Thus far nobody!

The name "ISRAEL" refers to all those who will form the government of God with Jesus Christ. They are the ones who will have "power WITH God". Can we understand this? The definition God gave here in Genesis 32:28 is a PERFECT description of all those in the first resurrection. They will form "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16) ... the ones to rule with Christ (Revelation 5:10). Those in the first resurrection are Abraham's seed, as far as God is concerned (Galatians 3:29). And it is, after all, GOD'S VIEW that counts in deciding who is "Israel" for all eternity, and not just for a short physical life-span.

So the government of God is set up when those who will have power with God "as rulers" are inducted into their offices. It will be a government that will have no end. God Himself has always ruled ... but thus far never yet WITH a government! Jesus Christ will be the Head of that government as king of kings and Lord of Lords (under God the Father, of course); God the Father will have vested in Christ the power to

control that government. What will be "upon his shoulder" will be the power to rule. Those in that government will have inherited "ALL THINGS" WITH Christ (Revelation 21:7; Romans 8:17).

The government of God will NEVER make a mistake, not even a single one. God is perfect and His government is going to be perfect. The government of God is one in which ONLY GOD makes decisions. This is one more point why those who "have power with God" must also themselves be Gods! Any government in which individuals who are not God-beings make decisions is simply not "the government OF God". It is only a government by those individuals.

THE CORRECT PICTURE OF "THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD"

The government of God will govern according to the law of God. Now the law of God is nothing more than an expression of the NATURE of God, the way God IS! To perfectly govern according to the law of God is only possible for those whose very nature is expressed by that law. Because the law of God is an expression of the very nature they have acquired in the resurrection, therefore it is guaranteed that those in the first resurrection will always govern according to that law.

Anyone who is not God cannot be a part of the GOVERNMENT of God. The angels are not the government of God, even though they do carry out the instructions of God. Similarly, human beings cannot be a part of the government of God, even when they do carry out God's instructions. For that matter, even the demons carry out God's instructions, and they certainly are not a part of the government of God. The government of God is not something an individual can be made a part of and then later removed from! The government of God is PERMANENT! Once God has formed that government, it will NEVER be changed.

Exactly what is it that the "heirs of God" (Romans 8:17) who will "inherit all things" (Revelation 21:7) are going to inherit? It is not that they "get" the new heaven and the new earth ... the universe is not something anyone can "get". When people inherit something, they get CONTROL over that something, i.e. "power" over that something. So likewise the heirs of God are going to receive CONTROL ... POWER ... AUTHORITY over all things; they will RULE over all things. And that is precisely what the government of God will do ... control all things.

To inherit all things means to become a part of the government of God! But true Christians are at this stage only "heirs" and not yet inheritors. Therefore true Christians are also NOT YET a part of the government of God. We are only in training to become a part of that government. If we are faithful, then God will MAKE us rulers ... induct us into His government.

His lord said unto him, Well done, [thou] good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I WILL MAKE THEE RULER OVER MANY THINGS: ENTER THOU into the joy of thy lord. (Matthew 25:21)

Until we are "made rulers" we are not a part of the government of God!

WHEN GOD SENT SATAN TO THIS PLANET

Mr. Armstrong ASSUMED that when God sent Satan to this Earth with one third of the angels, that this was so that Satan would establish "the government of God" on this Earth. But that was not God's intention at all!

Mr. Armstrong's idea, without ever being stated in so many words, was based on the concept of a colonizing power. For example, the government of Great Britain was extended every time a new colony

was annexed and a Governor-General was appointed. Likewise, Mr. Armstrong reasoned, the government of God was extended when "a colony of spirit beings under the leadership of Satan" was sent to this Earth.

But that analogy doesn't hold true. God's rule over all of His creation is not dependent on spirit beings being present on any given planet in this whole universe. God "governs" all things on His own at this point in time. He controls it all!

God was not establishing "a government" through Satan. Satan and the angels were sent to this Earth in order to be TRAINED and TESTED to see if they could be used as "guardian angels" for the mortal human beings that God would create in His own image in the next phase of His plan. Specifically, their training consisted of preparing this Earth for human habitation.

God gave Satan and his angels specific instructions, as well as the abilities to carry out those instructions. But they were beings with free moral agency. They had free wills. And the law of God was not their nature. Therefore it was not guaranteed that they would always "govern" as God would govern.

Satan was supposed to carry out God's instructions as a servant, or "ministering spirit" (Hebrews 1:14). "Servants" are not a part of THE GOVERNMENT of God. Notice how Jesus Christ explained the difference between "servants" and "friends" ...

Henceforth I CALL YOU NOT SERVANTS; FOR THE SERVANT KNOWETH NOT WHAT HIS LORD DOETH: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (John 15:15)

"Servants" don't have the same MIND as their master. Now Christ came to reveal the Father ...

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and [HE] TO WHOMSOEVER THE SON WILL REVEAL [HIM]. (Matthew 11:27)

... to help us understand the mind of the Father, at least to a small degree. That is the starting point. But before someone can become a part of the government of God another step is needed. That individual also has to receive the very nature of God, to become God.

Mr. Armstrong thought that with Satan's rebellion the government of God was removed from this Earth. That's not correct. God ALLOWED destruction to take place, but God was always in full control! Likewise, when Mr. Armstrong said that at present the government of God is not found anywhere on Earth EXCEPT in the Church of God, then that was also not correct. God is still in full control of everything on this Earth ... down to the level of every living creature and even every single HAIR that falls to the ground!

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (Matthew 10:29-30)

In fact, God is in SUPREME control and absolutely NOTHING ever escapes His awareness and His control. But the "government" that God is going to establish has not yet been formed. Currently God is ruling like a king without a government assisting Him. The time for that government of God is not far off now.

OTHER VERSES WITH "GOVERNMENT"

Earlier I mentioned that the word "government" appears four times in the KJV. We've looked at only two of those places. Let's now see the other two verses.

And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit THY GOVERNMENT into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. (Isaiah 22:21)

The Hebrew word used here is "memshalah". It is used 17 times in the O.T. and only here is it translated "government". It is usually translated as "DOMINION", which is derived from the Latin word "dominus", meaning "lord". So "dominion" means "supreme authority", "sovereignty", etc..

This Hebrew word is first used in Genesis 1:16, where it is translated as "to rule".

And God made two great lights; the greater light TO RULE ("memshalah") the day, and the lesser light TO RULE ("memshalah") the night: *he made* the stars also." (Ge 1:16 AV)

It should be clear that this verse is also not a reference to a "government" of any kind. It is speaking about someone whose "dominion" or "supreme rule" over an area is going to be transferred to someone else.

The fourth verse is in the New Testament ...

But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise GOVERNMENT. Presumptuous [are they], selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. (2 Peter 2:10)

The Greek word used here is "kuriotes", which is a derivative of the Greek word "kurios", which means "lord". "Kuriotes" is used only four times in the N.T. and is translated in the other three verses as follows:

- in Ephesians 1:21 as "dominion";
- in Colossians 1:16 as "dominions";
- in Jude 1:8 as "dominion".

The Greek word "kuriotes" basically means the same as the Hebrew word "memshalah". "Kuriotes" also refers to "dominion" or "supreme rule". Peter tells us that these presumptuous people despise rulership. This is common in our present age, in which rulers are constantly criticized and ridiculed in magazines and in newspapers. But again, this reference in 2 Peter 2:10 is not a reference to any "government".

The plural "governments" also appears once in the Bible. It is in 1 Corinthians 12:28. There the Greek word is "kubernesis", from the verb "kubernao" which means "to guide". A similar noun, from the same root, "kubernetes" is used twice in the N.T. to refer to a pilot or helmsman of a ship (Acts 27:11; Revelation 18:17). Here is this verse:

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, GOVERNMENTS, diversities of tongues. (1

Corinthians 12:28)

Paul wasn't trying to make the statement here that ... "God has set GOVERNMENT in the Church". He was simply enumerating different functions that are being fulfilled. The word "kubernesis" is not translated as "governments" in any of the newer translations; the word would be better translated here as "advisors, counsel, guides", etc..

We have now looked at all four Scriptures where the word "government" is used in the KJV, as well as the one time where the plural "governments" appears. In none of these verses is it speaking about a "government" as we today think of it! Thus, not only is the expression "the government of God" never used in the Bible; but even the word "government" itself is never used. In all five places it is really a mistranslation, being more accurately rendered as "dominion" or "power" or "rule" or "guide".

While the WORD "government" is not directly used in the Bible, the government of God is certainly inherently implied in the word "Israel" and it is described to some degree in the book of Revelation.

However, Revelation makes very clear that "the government of God" is something that is still future. Currently God certainly "governs" His whole creation ... but He has no "government" to assist in this task. But in the future He WILL have a "government" in place. And that government will be in office for ever! It will be made up of resurrected sons and daughters of God, under the leadership of Jesus Christ, who in turn will be in submission to the Father. All those in the first resurrection, and only those, will be in that government.

WHY MR. ARMSTRONG USED THE TERM

When Mr. Armstrong said "the Church of God is the only place on Earth where the government of God exists", he meant that God rules in His Church. After all, Christ is the Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18). So Christ controls the Church.

This is all correct!

However, by using the term "THE GOVERNMENT of God", unfortunately a far tighter control over all decisions and actions in the Church is implied than is actually the case. You see, if something is GOD'S government, then it is obviously above any question or any challenge to correctness. The term "government of God" was used and still is used to settle all arguments. Church members are expected to "SUBMIT" to the government of God. Implied is that those who don't "SUBMIT" to all decisions by that "government of God" are probably not repentant.

When this approach is taken, we are really no different from the Catholic Church, which claims that upon it was conferred the authority of Peter, referring to Matthew 16:18-19. It uses this claim to justify all doctrinal decisions it takes, placing those decisions above question or challenge. We know that Pope Pius IX (his real name was Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti), who was Pope from June 21, 1846 until February 7, 1878, proclaimed ...

"the infallibility of the Pope when he speaks 'ex cathedra'".

That's the ultimate conclusion when one starts with the assumption that the government of God is found in some church on Earth. It appears to be a logical conclusion, because the government of God will never make a mistake (i.e. it is indeed 'infallible').

The problem with this claim that someone on Earth represents the government of God (be it Satan when

God first sent him to this Earth, be it the true Church of God, be it the Catholic Church or be it a king or emperor) is that sometimes that individual has made right decisions and sometimes he has made wrong decisions. The right decisions are then attributed to the government of God. But the wrong decisions then have to be justified in some way ... and that usually requires involved and convoluted arguments.

The facts are that since its creation up to this point in time this Earth has been a "Training Ground" for the moulding, shaping and developing of right character. As long as someone is "in training" he is obviously not part of a government! He is only "in training" for such a job!

When Satan and the one third of the angels were sent to this Earth, they were being trained and tested ... to determine how God would be able to IN FUTURE use them. They were given responsibilities and a job to perform, but they were not part of a "government". As it turned out, they failed the test of character ... they didn't keep "their first estate" (Jude 1:6).

With God there is no such thing as becoming part of a government BEFORE being thoroughly tested!

When God created Adam, He did not immediately place Adam into some kind of "government". Adam had no experience and no character. What God did do is give Adam A JOB, a responsibility. That responsibility was: "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the Earth and subdue it, and have dominion over all animal life" (Genesis 1:28, paraphrased).

In fulfilling these responsibilities and exercising dominion over all animal life, Adam had A CHOICE! He COULD do it God's way, or he COULD do it Satan's way. God forced Adam to choose. And as it turned out, Adam chose Satan's way. Adam rejected "God's way" or "God's rule" over his life ... but it had nothing to do with any "government". However, having coined that phrase "government of God" (which is never used in the Bible, remember!), it is easy to then introduce the claim that ... "Adam rejected the government of God". And the conclusion is that every disobedience amounts to a rejection of the government of God. The government of God becomes the central issue.

The principle of "submission to government from the top down" becomes more important than whether such submission is actually right. The point is made by references to Scriptures about submission to civil rulers.

Consider Satan and the angels that were sent to this Earth by God: Satan was appointed by God as the leader. The angels under Satan knew that Satan was put in charge by God. So they submitted to Satan's leadership. Then Satan went off the track! He became vain and ambitious. He initiated changes that produced a violent and extremely competitive environment. He corrupted the wisdom God had given him (see Ezekiel 28:16-17). What should the angels under his authority have done? How should they have reacted to the way Satan changed from God's original instructions? Should they have said: "Well, God put Satan in charge and told us to listen to him; so it is up to God to correct him? And IF what Satan is doing is really wrong, then God would certainly step in and correct Satan. So, since God hasn't stepped in and removed Satan from that position of leadership, I guess it must have God's approval." Is that how GOD wanted them to react?

Or should they have stood up before all the other angels and confronted Satan with: "I know that God put you in charge of this whole project, Satan, but I want to tell you that what you are doing and wanting us to do is not right! It makes no difference that you are in charge ... it still is wrong! And I am not prepared to go along with your way of doing things here on Earth. You also need to know that God will surely punish you for what you are doing, because you are not doing God's will at all! I know, because I was there when God gave you the specific instructions for what God wants us to do on this planet." Is THIS how God would have wanted them to react?

Those who have a wrong understanding of "the government of God" would view this second approach as "REBELLING" against the government of God. But that is not the case at all!

As it has turned out, ALL OF THE ANGELS UNDER HIS AUTHORITY took the first approach. They accepted the changes that Satan introduced. This in turn affected THE WAY they thought and behaved. Their MINDS were changed by this acceptance of Satan's ways. They started to think in different ways. In some way resentment towards God entered their minds. Eventually they were prepared to rise up against God in active rebellion. As a result all of them have become demons, with nothing but a miserable and frustrating future to look forward to ... FOR ALL FUTURE ETERNITY!

If any of them had taken the second approach and actually challenged Satan's attitudes and actions, they would NOW be a part of the holy and righteous angels of God! But apparently none of them did this.

Now when Satan made his first cautious and thoroughly disguised deviations from God's instructions and one of the angels affected had spotted this deviation and had come to YOU for advice: which of the above two courses of action would YOU have recommended the angel should take? Understand that it is only the second approach that REALLY puts God first. The first approach puts the appointed leader first. And that is the difference.

Understand this: when people appeal to "the government of God", they are usually trying to achieve submission to the rule of some MAN, who claims to represent the government of God by virtue of holding some office. It is imperative to understand that such an appeal to the authority of the government of God can NEVER OVERRIDE the clearly stated instructions in the Word of God. What God Himself has plainly stated in the Bible ALWAYS takes precedence over any submission to a supposed "government of God".

Don't follow the disastrous example of the angels under Satan who did nothing more than submit to the authority God had initially vested in Satan!

Then Peter and the [other] apostles answered and said, WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN. (Acts 5:29)

This is the example to follow!

PAUL'S EXAMPLE

In the book of Galatians Paul tells us that he confronted the apostle Peter at one time. Christ had appointed Peter as the leading apostle. Peter was in charge. So was Paul going against the government of God?

Those who have this wrong concept of the government of God have to use all kinds of reasoning to justify why Paul could actually dare to challenge the leading apostle. Usually the reasoning goes something like this:

"Well, Paul was the apostle to the uncircumcision and Peter was the apostle to the circumcision. (This is correct.) THEREFORE Paul was basically on an equal level of authority with Peter. (This reasoning is not correct. With God someone must always be in charge. Anyway, let's continue with the reasoning.) THEREFORE Paul could correct Peter on the level of one apostle to another.

But this kind of reasoning is simply not true! The whole incident had nothing to do with authority and "the

government of God". Notice:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I WITHSTOOD HIM TO THE FACE, BECAUSE HE WAS TO BE BLAMED. (Galatians 2:11)

Why did Paul confront Peter? Because he was also an apostle? No! Paul confronted Peter because what Peter was doing was not right! The government of God didn't come into it in any way.

But WHEN I SAW THAT THEY WALKED NOT UPRIGHTLY ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL, I said unto Peter before [them] all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Galatians 2:14)

What Peter, the chief apostle, was doing was not right. THEREFORE Paul confronted him with this ... precisely the same thing that the angels working under Satan should have done to Satan, but apparently didn't do.

When you see that the leadership in the Church of God is not walking ... "uprightly according to the truth of the gospel", that it is perverting the true teachings of the Bible, then you should confront and withstand, just like Paul did and like the angels under Satan should have done. Whether you have any rank or authority in the Church has absolutely nothing to do with it! That is the way to "obey God rather than men".

Yes, certainly, there is authority in the Church of God. But that God-given authority is not God governing. It is MEN who govern. And when those men in positions of authority make right decisions, THEN God will certainly back those decisions up.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

And when those same men make wrong decisions and don't stick to "the truth of the gospel" (as was the case with Peter in Antioch), then God does not back their decisions. Putting God first means sticking to the truth of the gospel, even when some leaders above us in authority don't do so.

Consider some more examples:

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL

Up to the time of Samuel God ruled the nation Israel through a number of judges. But when Samuel was old the people asked for a king. At that time God told Samuel:

And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but THEY HAVE REJECTED ME, THAT I SHOULD NOT REIGN OVER THEM. (1 Samuel 8:7)

So God selected a king for them, Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. But, considering this verse we've just read, did that king represent "the government of God"? Well, no! The whole purpose behind getting a

king (according to what God told Samuel!) was so that God would not be the One to reign over Israel. So during the reign of Saul, it was Saul who reigned, not God. This is clearly reflected in Saul's actions and behaviour.

God then selected David to be king after Saul. Well, did David then represent "the government of God"? Did God change His mind and decide to now reign through human kings? David was, after all, a man after God's own heart, right? No, David's reign wasn't the government of God either. God's government is perfect, and David's was not. God's government will never do things that God does not approve of. David murdered Uriah and David numbered Israel, things that the government of God would not have done, because God did not approve of those things.

Then Solomon became king. It was God who gave Solomon wisdom and the office of king ... but Solomon did not represent the government of God. During his reign it was the rule of Solomon, not the rule of God. Now certainly, in the first part of his kingship Solomon TRIED to please God ... but it was still the government of Solomon. Solomon had the free will to govern God's way or to reject God's way. Notice the conditional statement God made to Solomon in a dream:

And IF THOU WILT WALK IN MY WAYS, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, THEN I WILL LENGTHEN THY DAYS. (1 Kings 3:14)

As it turned out, God did not lengthen Solomon's days ... Solomon actually died quite young, in his mid-fifties after reigning for forty years.

Now the point is this: here is a king who had clearly been appointed by God and who had God's blessing. Yet he still had the free will to decide for himself whether to walk in God's ways or whether to reject God's ways.

THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD DOES NOT HAVE SUCH A CHOICE!

Can we understand this? The government of God simply does not have the choice whether to walk in God's ways or not. Such a choice would be a contradiction of terms!

So here is the point we need to understand: individuals (be they angels or be they human beings) that have a CHOICE as to whether they will "walk in God's ways" or not, CANNOT yet be a part of the government of God. They can be in training, yes. But they can only really become a part of the government of God when it is absolutely certain that they will ALWAYS walk in God's ways! As long as they still are able to give consideration to maybe rejecting God's ways, they can't be a part of God's government.

God is not running a government that goes through the constant process of hiring and firing individuals. That's how human governments operate. God, on the other hand, first tests and trains individuals. Only once they have proven themselves to be reliable and faithful, does God place such persons in His government. Because at the resurrection the very nature of God will become their nature, therefore their faithfulness for future eternity is absolutely certain.

GOVERNMENT IN GOD'S CHURCH

Jesus Christ is the Head of God's Church (Colossians 1:18). This means that He CONTROLS the Church. He does so by allowing human beings to exercise authority ... to make decisions. But He does not do so to the degree that the human beings are nothing more than robots, carrying out pre-programmed actions. No, the human beings that God works through continue to have minds of their

own and a free will.

God expects such leaders to SEEK an understanding of God's will (Isaiah 55:6). The more fervently they seek contact with God and have a desire to understand the mind of God, the more likely they are to make decisions, with their own free wills, that are in agreement with the mind of God. But it will still be the people making the decisions, not God. If the decisions are right, then God will bind them (Matthew 16:19); if the decisions are not right, God's control is such that God can still make it work out right, even though the decisions were not the right ones. "The government of God" would not have made such a wrong decision; but the power of God, vested in Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, can see to it that even a wrong decision can be used to achieve a desired result.

An example: Elijah was being used powerfully to do God's Work. But Jezebel threatened him and ELIJAH DECIDED to flee for his life (1 Kings 19:3). It was not the government of God that decided to flee; Elijah himself made that decision. Later God confronted Elijah and made clear that this had in fact been a wrong decision (verses 13-16). Yet, once Elijah had made the decision to flee for his life, it was God who supernaturally fed and strengthened him (verses 4-8). Thus: Elijah made a decision which the government of God would not have made; but God nevertheless used this wrong decision to still achieve the right end-results.

In the last nearly 2000 years the leaders in God's Church have made many wrong decisions. We have already looked at Peter's wrong example in Antioch (Galatians 2:11). Other wrong decisions by leaders in the Church are reflected in the messages to the seven eras of the Church in Revelation chapters 2-3. Mr. Armstrong, likewise, acknowledged that he had at times made wrong decisions.

Those numerous wrong decisions over the centuries (adding them all together!) are not a reflection of the government of God. The government of God never makes wrong decisions! They are a reflection of the government of MEN, who, to varying degrees, looked to God for help and guidance in making decisions and in exercising authority. They also, at times, reflect decisions made by people who ... "crept in unawares" into positions of leadership (see Jude 1:4). That too God has allowed and used in achieving His own goals. All the way through God has let men do the "governing". Such men are not a part of the government of God; it is just that, irrespective as to how those men do "govern", God sees to it that His purposes are fulfilled. And God will reward those men according to their works.

Thus, to summarize this particular point: Jesus Christ controls the Church. And God has given a certain amount of authority to human beings in leadership positions within the Church. Those human beings can make right decisions and they can make wrong decisions ... and they have done both over the centuries. The responsibility to make certain decisions within the Church does NOT mean that those human beings in leadership positions are therefore "a part of the government of God". Nowhere in the Bible does God state or imply that some HUMAN BEINGS are a part of His "GOVERNMENT". Rather, the Bible shows that in this age we are "in training" for becoming a part of the future government of God.

It is incorrect and biblically indefensible to claim that any given decision by the human leadership of the Church is an expression of "the government of God". Rather, God sees to it that His purposes are achieved independent of whether human beings in leadership positions make right decisions or wrong ones ... that's how great the power of God is! The most extreme example to illustrate this point is Satan's rebellion. Nobody would claim that Satan's rebellion against God was an expression of the government of God ... but that rebellion is something God has USED towards achieving His purposes. If God's plan can continue to be fulfilled in spite of the magnitude of Satan's rebellion, then God's plan can certainly also be fulfilled in spite of human beings making decisions contrary to how God Himself would "govern".

Short of divine revelation, there is no way that any decision by the leadership of the Church to make doctrinal changes can be attributed to Almighty God. Yet that is precisely what the leaders are requiring

members of the Church to do ... to accept ON FAITH that all of these doctrinal changes are inspired by God Himself.

There is a total absence of any kind of PROOF of inspiration by God as far as all the recent doctrinal changes are concerned!

On the contrary, the biblical evidence which contradicts the new doctrines is overwhelming. Clear, plain Scriptures are frequently glossed over in favour of some poorly translated, ambiguous statements. The desire has been to change whatever had been put into the Church through Mr. Armstrong's ministry.

CAN WE STILL "WALK TOGETHER"?

So all appeals to "the government of God" within the Church are without any merit. Should we then continue to attend with, and be a part of, the church which has changed all the major teachings of the Church, in direct violation of clear scriptural instructions?

NO, WE SHOULD NOT CONTINUE TO ATTEND WITH SUCH A CHURCH!

Amos 3:3 states the following:

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3)

God was referring to His relationship with Israel. And there comes a point where major differences make it impossible to continue to walk together. That is why God eventually "divorced" Israel (see Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8), because He could no longer "walk with Israel".

Israel's conduct leading up to that "divorce" is summarized by God in Jeremiah 32:30.

For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have ONLY DONE EVIL BEFORE ME FROM THEIR YOUTH: for the children of Israel have only provoked me to anger with the work of their hands, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 32:30)

When the church we are a part of very clearly and openly departs from all of the true teachings of the Bible, then it becomes imperative for us to leave that fellowship, lest we ourselves are negatively affected by all of the wrong teachings that are being embraced.

Let's now look at another biblical principle.

WHAT FELLOWSHIP HAS RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH UNRIGHTEOUSNESS?

Here is what Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

Let's see the context of this statement.

After a lengthy section about the ministry in verses 3 to 10, Paul addressed the Corinthians in verse 11.

O [ye] Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. (2 Corinthians 6:11)

Then in verse 14 Paul gives this clear instruction:

"DON'T BE UNEQUALLY YOKED TOGETHER WITH UNBELIEVERS!"

This is the instruction! Paul then presents 5 questions with obvious answers to illustrate and back up this instruction! Those 5 rhetorical questions, which all make the same point, are:

- what FELLOWSHIP has ... with ...?
- what COMMUNION has ... with ...?
- what CONCORD has ... with ...?
- what PART has ... with ...?
- what AGREEMENT has ... with ...?

Then Paul presents his conclusion based on these statements ...

WHEREFORE come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean [thing]; and I will receive you, (2 Corinthians 6:17)

Thus: in verse 14 Paul gives an instruction. This he follows with an appeal to logic in the form of 5 rhetorical questions. Then in verse 17 he presents a conclusion.

Paul's conclusion is: get out from amongst those who would influence you the wrong way! We don't really have any "concord" or "agreement" with those who reject the biblical teachings we believe are essential for a right relationship with God. And "the government of God" has nothing to do with this conclusion one way or the other. We are, in Paul's words, to be "separate" from those who reject the biblical teachings we accept and practise.

RESPONDING TO HUMAN GOVERNMENTS

The government which God is going to set up has not yet been formed. It will only be set up at the first resurrection. Today there is no such thing as "the government of God" anywhere on Earth ... not in the Church of God and not in any secular government. God allows governments to be set up and to be thrown down; God is in full control of these processes, but none of these governments represent "the government of God". All of them are governments of men; men who sometimes make right decisions and at other times make wrong decisions. All the way through God works out His plan, even when governments of men make wrong decisions.

It was only because God DOES have the power to bring His purposes to pass, irrespective of whether human beings do things His way or whether they rebel, that God could take the risk of giving human beings free independent minds and wills! If God could not have guaranteed IN ADVANCE that His purposes would be fulfilled even when human beings (or angels, for that matter) rebel against Him and refuse to submit and cooperate, then He would never have given us a free will!

By giving us a free will God was prepared to risk damage being inflicted on His creation. But no amount of damage caused by beings with free wills could hinder God from achieving His purposes. Any damages caused, God planned to take care of AFTER His purposes for the beings He had created had been achieved. That will be at the time of the NEW heaven and the NEW Earth.

The only factor left undecided by giving human beings free wills was the future those human beings would have. And here we have a difference between God's desire and God's plan: it is God's DESIRE that all human beings submit to Him and ultimately attain unto salvation (1 Timothy 2:4), but it is God's PLAN that every human being must shape his/her own destiny by exercising the free will God has given us. The only LASTING destruction that any human being can cause by rebelling against God is the destruction of the self! God planned that we would indeed be the masters of our own destiny. Now for those who submit to God and thereby attain unto salvation, that destiny is obviously still a free and undeserved gift from God. No amount of submission to God can "earn" salvation ... but without that submission God will most emphatically never grant salvation.

So how should we respond to human governments (governments of men) when they expect us to behave and believe contrary to God's Word?

We have a clear example for this in the book of Acts. After Peter and John had been used by God to heal the lame man in Acts 3, the civil authorities threw them into prison (Acts 4:3). Eventually they commanded them to stop preaching.

And they called them, and COMMANDED THEM not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. (Acts 4:18)

This was an instruction from the civil government. But it was also in obvious opposition to Christ's instructions:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (Matthew 28:19)

Thereafter more people were healed through the apostles (Acts 5:15-16). So the authorities again became upset and had the apostles thrown into prison.

And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. (Acts 5:18)

An angel let them out by night and told them to continue to preach the truth (Acts 5:19-20). Then Peter and the other apostles were again brought before the government of the day (Acts 5:27). They were questioned as to WHY they had disobeyed the previous instructions (Acts 5:28). It was at this point that Peter gave the answer we already looked at earlier.

Then Peter and the [other] apostles answered and said, WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN. (Acts 5:29)

The clash here was between the verbal instructions they had received from Jesus Christ and from an angel on the one hand, and the instructions they received from a government of men on the other hand. The principle is very clear: in any conflict situation God's instructions ALWAYS take precedence!

Today we have not been taught by Jesus Christ in person. We don't receive VERBAL instructions direct from God. Today God has given us His Word in writing. So the principle is this:

In any conflict situation with a government of men THE CLEARLY STATED WORD OF GOD ALWAYS TAKES PRECEDENCE! It makes no difference whether that government of men happens to be within the Church of God or whether it is a secular government ... the written Word of God ALWAYS takes precedence! That is what is meant by "we ought to obey God rather than men".

Now in theory there should never be a conflict between what the Bible tells us and what the government within the Church is telling us. But in practice that is not so! And it hasn't been so MANY TIMES during the past 1900 years! However, to force compliance with their own ideas, many people in history have appealed to the government of God ... kings, emperors, popes and other religious leaders. Such appeals have no authority from God. Leaders are in positions of power with God's permission, but no way do they represent "the government of God". If anything, the only possible thing that represents God's government to day is THE BIBLE!

To the law and to the testimony: IF THEY SPEAK NOT ACCORDING TO THIS WORD, [it is] because [there is] no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20)

IN CONCLUSION

Since Mr. Armstrong's death the Worldwide Church of God has totally rejected all the true teachings God put into His Church through Mr. Armstrong. This is easy to prove. Appeals to "the government of God" cannot uphold these heresies.

In response to this situation a large number of people have already left WCG. They have either joined one of the other churches that have been formed or they are just staying at home without contact with other groups. Of those who are staying at home, many seem to have lost interest in religion altogether. Others are very discouraged: they still desire to faithfully obey God, but they are now thoroughly confused by everything that has happened. They are unsure of what it is that God wants them to do. THEY NEED HELP!

Appeals by WCG to the government of God to pressure acceptance of the heresies are all biblically incorrect. The only government of God that the Bible speaks about is one that is still future. It is human beings that govern in this present age, not God. God will govern in the millennium.

The correct "big picture" recognizes that since the days of the apostles the true Church has always included "... certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4).

And when the fellowship we are a part of ceases to believe and practice the true teachings of the Bible, then we must "separate" from them and get out, to avoid being drawn away from the truth ourselves.

Frank W. Nelte