

# God's Government

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By way of introducing this morning's message, I want to do something with you that's a little bit like word association. I'm going to give you a word, and I want you to take a moment and sit with that word, and feel what that word means to you. Just write down, or note in your mind, whether the thoughts and feelings associated with that word are positive, negative, or just neutral to you. The word is "government".

For many people, the word "government" has a negative association, for many reasons. Just yesterday, we commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. He was killed on November 22, 1963, fifty years ago, and it was also on a Friday. One of the big topics in the news this week, and on many of the talk shows on the radio, is the fact that most Americans do not believe that the story that the government gave us about what happened that day is true. The Warren Commission was the official government story of what took place, and they said that a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, shot the President from the book depository. Most Americans don't believe that's true. There are just too many things about it that don't add up.

But whether it's true or not, most Americans believe that the government lied to them about that, and covered up, and didn't investigate thoroughly. They don't trust the government.

Last week, I met an attorney in the course of my work. This man used to work as a prosecutor in the justice department in Washington, DC. He told me about something that happened when he was working there. It's commonly known as the Saturday Night Massacre. It's a very interesting story.

The background behind it is that Richard Nixon and his administration broke into the Democratic National headquarters at the Watergate Hotel to steal files, and they were caught. The President and his administration tried to cover it up in their attempts to try to hold on to power. The Senate appointed a special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, to investigate what really happened. The Senate made an error in administering this, in that they housed Archibald Cox at the Justice Department. Thus he became, technically, under the control of the Justice Department.

On this particular Saturday, President Nixon had instructed the head of the Justice Department to fire Archibald Cox. This event, which became known as the Saturday Night Massacre, was the firing of the top two people at the Justice Department. The head of the Justice Department had refused to fire Archibald Cox, so he was fired. The President then instructed the next man in line to fire Archibald Cox, and he refused as well, and he was fired. The third person was the Solicitor General, and he went ahead and fired Archibald Cox.

This is a bit of an aside, a bit of trivia that you may find interesting. This man, years later, was nominated to the Supreme Court by Ronald Reagan, and the Democrats hadn't forgotten what he did. They gave him a really hard time in his confirmation. To this day, when someone is given a rough time in a confirmation, it's known as being "Borked" – the man's name was Robert Bork.

My point in telling this story is that the governments of men are mostly interested in getting and holding on to power. Richard Nixon's administration wanted to cover this up, and they wanted to get rid of that prosecutor because they wanted to hold on to power. The governments of men, human governments, will do just about anything to get power and hold on to power.

One of the things that's happening right now that a lot of people are upset about in this country has to do with so-called "Obamacare". President Obama and his appointee in charge of this healthcare overhaul told the American people that we would be able to keep our existing healthcare policies if we wanted to, that the government program was just for people who wanted it, or people who couldn't otherwise afford health insurance, or people who wanted to switch over. Now, as the deadline for enrolling in this program is approaching, people are finding out that they're not able to keep their coverage.

Another thing that the current administration has recently done is that they have decided that next year, they're going to move the enrollment period back a month. Even those news media outlets that are quite liberal and lean toward the Obama administration in their coverage of the news were forced to report that the reason that the Obama administration is doing this is so that, next year, when people sign up for health insurance and there is very likely going to be huge increases in the cost, it will come after the elections. This is not for the benefit of the people. This is for the benefit of the government that is in power. The Democrats are in power, and they want to stay in power. That's what human governments are mostly about. And that is just one of the many reasons why people do not trust government, and why people have a negative association in their mind when they hear the word "government".

Human governments are often unjust. Sometimes it's because of favoritism, or corruption. Sometimes it's just because of the size of the government, and the right hand doesn't seem to know what the left hand is doing. For example, another thing that was in the news this week is, a man has been caught and is being prosecuted for arranging phony marriages, so that people from outside this country who are not citizens can become citizens, because once you marry an American citizen, then you also become a citizen. This man is facing thirty years in prison for this. And yet at the same time, we have approximately twelve million illegal immigrants that have come into this country illegally – that's why they're called illegal immigrants – and nothing is being done to prosecute these people that have come here illegally. They're being offered driver's licenses, they can get Welfare, and many people are pushing for a reform where these people would be given amnesty and made citizens. You've got all these people that are coming into the country illegally, nothing's being done to them whatsoever, and yet one man helps a few people become citizens illegally, and they want to put him in prison for thirty years. This is just one example of the inequities and the unjust things that happen with human governments.

It is with good reason that people have a negative reaction and emotions when they hear of or think about the word "government". But what about the government of God? How do we feel when we hear the words "God's government"? Unfortunately, for many who have been associated with the Worldwide Church of God, and with the many various splinter groups that have come from the wreckage of the Worldwide Church of God, these words also convey a negative connotation, and negative feelings.

We were told that God's government had been restored to the church, and thus, for many, the concept of God's government became associated with the inequities that inevitably accompany any large organization.

Today I want to explore a little bit, in the limited time that we have, the concept of God's government. What is it? How does it work? How does it apply to us today?

The subject of God's government is found throughout the scriptures. I'll just quote a few scriptures to you. They're probably very familiar to most of us. We'll start with Isaiah chapter 9.

**Isaiah 9:6-7:** *"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."*

**Mark 1:14:** *"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God -"*

So Jesus preached a message about the government of God. The kingdom of God is both the family of God and the government of God.

**Mark 1:15:** *"And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."*

Acts chapter 3 is the story of Peter and John coming to the temple, and the healing of the lame man. When all the people came together, Peter preached a message to them. He preached the same message that Jesus preached.

Every time that Jesus is talked about preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, it is associated with the concept of repenting – changing. That's what Peter says here.

**Acts 3:19-21:** *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."*

The restitution of all things is the restoration of God's government to the earth. God gave Lucifer the responsibility of governing the earth, and Lucifer rebelled and became Satan, the adversary. God is going to restore his government to the earth. The plan of God has everything to do with the restoration of his government to the earth.

How do we define "the government of God"? What is it? Simply put, God's government is God's rulership. In the largest sense of it, we have to understand that God's government has always existed and always will exist. God has always been and always will be ruler over everything. God the Father and the Son delegate, but they still are overall in charge.

**Daniel 4:24:** *"This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king..."*

So even though God's government is not here on the earth at this time, God still reserves to himself the right and ability to intervene in the affairs of men, and he intervened here in the kingdom and rulership of Nebuchadnezzar. He tells him that he would be driven from men, and that he would dwell with the beasts of the field.

**Daniel 4:25:** "...till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

So God is the one that sets up kingdoms here on the earth, and gives rulership to men. This is one of the reasons why we are told to obey the civil governments of men, because God is ultimately in charge. We do it not out of fear for men, but out of respect for God.

**Daniel 4:34:** "...and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation..."

So God's rulership is complete, it is absolute, and it has always existed and always will exist. But how does God's government work?

God administers his rulership differently at different times. But there does seem to be a constant, in that God does not force people to live according to his way of life. Not that there aren't consequences. There are natural consequences to going against God's way of life. But God allows people to go against his way of life. He allowed Satan to rebel. God could have stopped Satan from doing what he did. There's coming a time when God is going to take Satan and bind him and put him into a prison. God could have done that the minute that Satan rebelled. He could have stopped all the destruction, all the problems that have been taking place in the universe since the time that Satan rebelled. But he chose not to, because he has a bigger purpose than that. He allowed Satan to do all of that.

Adam rejected God's rulership in his life. He rejected the government of God, and God allowed him to do that. Now, he put him out of the garden, and he cursed the ground for Adam's sake. There were consequences for Adam doing what he did, but God allowed him to do it. God does not micromanage, typically. He allows people to do things that are contrary to his way of life. And yet, God's government is still in place. It does not change the fact that God is overall in charge of everything.

There are times when God intervenes, and we don't always understand why God chooses to intervene sometimes in the ways that he does, but there have been times where God has immediately punished somebody for something that they did wrong. When Aaron's sons brought strange fire into the tabernacle, God immediately killed them. When Ananias and Saphira lied, God immediately killed them. When Uzza touched the Ark because he was afraid it was going to fall over when it was being carried on the cart, God struck him dead. We don't always understand why God does things the way that he does them. We see through a glass darkly now. But typically God does not do that. Typically God gives people time and space to repent and to change. Again, this is because God has a bigger purpose in mind than forcing people to do what he wants them to do right now. I'm sure that the occasions where God intervened immediately was also for the same reason.

When we read about what happened to the world during Noah's time, man was so wicked at that time, and so evil, that it says that God was grieved in his heart that he had created man. He said, I'm going to destroy all human life, except for the few that he was going to save in the ark. But he said, the days of man will be a hundred and twenty years. From the time that God decided he was going to destroy people, he gave them a hundred and twenty years. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, and he preached to them to repent, for a hundred and twenty years. God is very patient. God gives people time and space to repent and to change.

God is not creating robots. If God's purpose was simply to have people obey him, he could have made human beings in such a way that we had no choice but to do what God wants us to do. He could just direct everything that we do, he could force us to obey him, but God is not doing that. God wants to restore his government to the earth, and he wants to do it with beings that are just like him. He wants to create in people, not pure blind obedience, he wants to create in us his righteousness, his character, his nature. Yes, God wants us to obey him, but righteousness is not blind obedience. Righteousness is choosing to do the right thing. It's a person choosing of their own volition to do the right thing. God requires obedience of us because it is through obedience that we are able to come to the place where we have his character and his nature.

Our minds are made up of synapses. There are connections inside our minds. Every day, we're confronted with choices. We're influenced to go in certain directions, not just by peer pressure, not just by the influence of the god of this world and his spirit that pervades the world, but we're influenced to go in certain ways by these synapses, these roads if you will, inside our heads. We have created paths that become deeper and deeper, the more we go in a certain direction, and the more difficult it becomes to go in a different direction. Think of a cart that is going down a deeply rutted path, and the wheels of the cart are in those ruts, and imagine those ruts being six, eight, nine inches deep. It would be very difficult to turn that cart around. It wants to keep going in the same direction.

God is working with us through his spirit to change the way that our minds operate. He's giving us the ability and the power through his spirit to turn out of those ruts. He is in the process, for those who are allowing themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, of healing our minds. Giving us a new start, if you will, putting us on a different path. Taking us out of that rutted path that we could not, of ourselves, get out of and turn around. He's putting us on a different path – the path of life and righteousness. But once we're on that path of righteousness, we must obey as we move down that path, so that we don't go back into the ruts that we were in before. God isn't doing this just so he can have blind obedience. The obedience is for the purpose of creating different pathways.

As I said before, God administers things differently at different times. During the time of Moses, if a person was caught committing certain crimes, they were stoned to death. During the time that Jesus was here on the earth, a woman was caught in the act of adultery. Jesus did not stone her, and didn't advocate stoning her. He told the woman, go and sin no more. God's law has not changed. Adultery is still a sin. But God is administering things differently now.

God is not governing everybody on the earth right now. He's only governing a few. The way that God administers his government with those few that he is governing is by his spirit.

***Romans 5:5: "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us."***

It is the love of God, which we receive through the Holy Spirit, that allows us to love God, which is to obey him and to follow his way of life. We don't have that of ourselves. That's not a resource that we have within us. One of the popular themes in the world today is to just access the god within, the power within. "You have the power within you to be something great." No you don't. Apart from God, we are nothing, and can do nothing. Jesus Christ himself said "Of my own self I can do nothing". How much more does that apply to us? But through the love of God shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, we then do have the ability to live God's way of life.

That is how God governs us. Again, God does not force us. The Holy Spirit does not force you to do anything. It leads. Throughout the scriptures, God through his word speaks about being led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads, and it is up to us to follow. God does not force us. He gives us time and space to change. It takes a lifetime. Who has there been that, upon learning of God's plan for mankind – that God is reproducing himself – upon learning about God's law, which outlines his way of love, who has there been that has just immediately been able to start living that way?

One of the false concepts that is promulgated by popular main-stream so-called Christianity is that being saved is an instantaneous thing. Now, in one sense, we are saved immediately, because we were all under the death penalty for having sinned in the past. When God wipes away our past sins and removes that death penalty from us, we are then saved from death at that moment. But it's like a man who is on death row for committing a murder, or a capital crime, and he receives a pardon from the governor at the last moment, and he's allowed to go free. He is saved from death. But if he goes out and commits another capital crime, he's going to find himself right back where he was before. The only way for that man to be saved long-term is for him to change his way of life, and to not commit capital crimes any longer.

It's the same with us. The scriptures talk about being saved. We are not only saved initially, but we are being saved, because being saved is this process of our minds being changed, and of God leading us by his Holy Spirit in the direction that he wants us to go. We have to allow ourselves to be governed – God does not force it upon us. It is a life-long process of learning that and growing in that. Again, the false concept that Protestant Christianity preaches is subtle, but it's very destructive, because it gets at the very heart and core of what it is that God is doing. A lot of people believe that the thief on the cross was saved and is going to be in the first resurrection. That's impossible. No one can change their life that quickly. It is a life-long process of learning to be governed by God. And the extent to which we are being governed by God is up to us.

***Romans 8:14: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."***

If we are going to be in the family of God, as spirit-composed members of the government of God, ruling and reigning with Jesus Christ over the earth and over the human beings on the earth, we have to first learn to be led by God's government. We have to learn to be governed by God through his spirit before we can govern others.

***Galatians 5:5: "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith."***

God tells us that this is what he is doing. God says, this is the new covenant, this is the covenant that I will make with them. He says, I will write my law in their heart, I will put it in their mind. We have to believe that. We have to have the faith that is the belief that God will accomplish this. That's what he means when he says that we through the spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. That is what gives us the ability to live God's way of life, and as we live God's way of life, through experience it becomes a part of us. Jesus said, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

It is through this process of walking by faith, of yielding ourselves to God's government in our lives and to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, it is through believing that God will conquer sin, and purify our hearts and our minds, that we are made righteous. Again, this is how God governs us. He does not force us to do anything. He leads. The more that we allow ourselves to be led, the more God gives us. The more he opens our eyes to see. David said in the psalms, a good understanding have all they who keep thy commandments.

The way that God works with us is all about love.

**Galatians 5:6:** *“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”*

God’s government is all about love. It is a sad thing to me that, for many people who have been a part of the Worldwide Church of God or the church of God groups that came from that, have a negative connotation when they think of God’s government. Because God’s government – truly God’s government – is all about love. It is about God shedding his love abroad in our heart, giving us his love that enables us to live his way of life. It is about the fact that he loved us even when we were yet sinners. The scriptures tell us that Christ and God the Father commended their love toward us in that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. God makes the first move. He shows his love toward us. He showed his love for us by giving his son for us. Christ showed his love for us in giving himself. But we must respond. Again, God’s government does not force us. We have to respond.

God gives us understanding. He begins to open our mind, to show us a different way of life. He shows us the way that is so different than the way that this world lives. This world operates on the principle of “get for the self”. This world operates on the principle of coveting material, physical things. This world operates on the principle of competition and strife and pride. Getting power over other people. That’s how the governments of this world work – getting and exercising and keeping power. God’s way is so different than that, and God begins to open our eyes to see that different way of life, but then he waits to see how we’re going to respond to that. If we respond by doing those things that God shows us that we should be doing, even though we don’t necessarily understand exactly why sometimes, he then gives us a little bit more understanding, and a little more understanding, and our eyes are opened, and we see more and more. Not only are our eyes enlightened more and more, as we go along this path and move forward down the path of life and righteousness, but our light – the light that we shine – becomes brighter and brighter.

Jesus instructed us to be a light. He said, you are the light of the world. Let your light shine. That light is fueled by the Holy Spirit. God gives his spirit to those that obey him.

I think we’re all familiar with the parable of the wise virgins and the foolish virgins. The foolish virgins’ lamps were going out. Have you ever seen an oil lamp as it starts to run out? It gets dim and it flickers, and the light begins to fade. If our light is going to shine brightly, it has to be fueled by the Holy Spirit, which God gives more and more to us as we respond to the leadership of that spirit. But again, it’s about being led, and about allowing ourselves to be led, to be governed. The way that God governs us now is, he does not force us. He shows us the way, he leads us, he gives us the resources that we need, but he doesn’t force us.

How are we going to govern in the world to come? Certainly, we’d have to say that we’ll have to wait and see - there are details that we don’t know. But there are some things that we do know. I think one of the things that we can know is that God is still going to operate by the principle that he does not force anyone to live his way. There will be consequences for people that don’t, but God is still going to give people access to his spirit, he’s going to reveal his way of life to them, and then it’s going to be up to them to respond. But he’s going to allow people to not obey. We read that if the nations don’t come up to keep the Feast, there will be no rain. The implication is that they won’t come up to keep the Feast. The implication is that they will disobey, and there’ll be consequences for it. But God is not going to force them, because God is still, during the millennium and beyond, with the human beings that are on the earth, he is still working out the same purpose with them, of changing them. Not to become robots that just blindly obey, but to become righteous character, as he is. That requires that God leads. And it will be administered in love, which means that people are dealt with patiently, and with kindness. It means that people are given time and space to repent.

Now, it's true that God orchestrates our lives in such a way that we go through trials and difficulties, in order for us to change, to wake up, to turn around and go a different way. But even that is administered in love. God deals with us as with children. Any good parent disciplines their children, because they want what's best for their children, and they know that if they allow their children to do things that are harmful to them, they're going to get hurt. They know that if they don't discipline their children to instill certain habits and good character, it's going to harm the child. So every good parent chastens and disciplines their children. God deals with us in the same way. We're told in the book of Hebrews that if God does not chasten us, we're not his children.

I believe that our job in the world to come is going to be to administer God's government for the people that are placed in our care, in just the same way that God deals with us now. I think the only difference is that we are going to be walking amongst them. The scripture tells us that people will hear a voice behind them saying, this is the way, walk you in it. It says that their teachers will no longer be hidden, but they will see them. We know that in times past, God has manifested himself as a human being and appeared to different ones that he was working with, for example, Abraham, probably Jacob.

I believe that in the world to come, our job is going to be to walk amongst the people that God has given us, into our care, and to administer his government for them in exactly the same way that God administers his government to us now, which is that he leads us, gently and kindly and patiently, in love, so that we can develop his same nature and character that he has.

I was struck this week by all the rhapsodizing about how wonderful the Kennedy administration was, and how wonderful things would have been if John F. Kennedy had lived. I couldn't help but reflect on the fact that man's governments are, by nature, self-centered, self-serving, and even the best of people are limited by that and by what they can do, how much influence they have and what they can accomplish. But we are looking forward to a government here on the earth where no assassination can put an end to it. We're looking forward to a government that is not self-serving, but is for the purpose of serving those that it governs. We are looking forward to a government that will never end, and that will bring peace and prosperity and all the good things that everybody wants, but doesn't know how to achieve.

But ultimately, whether we're a part of that government is up to us. We have to allow ourselves to be led by it. Ultimately, whether or not God is governing us, the ball is in our court. We are governed by God to the extent that we yield and surrender ourselves to him, and allow him to lead us.