

Is God's Government in the Church?

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Is God's Government in the Church?

The Cult Leaders that have taken over the church of God are still clinging to the idea that God's government is in the church of God. Also, that God's Apostle whom they claim to be-the successor to Herbert Armstrong is supposed to be over and govern the church and administers the government. Are these claims true?

These Armstrongite splinter groups are continuing to preach and teach that the government of God is in the church. Many make claims that only God's Apostle can administer the Government of God in the church, some hierarchical form of Government in the church of God.

Of course this originates with Herbert Armstrong's ideas of how the church should be organized. The "Chief Apostle" and God's government in the church administered by the "Chief Apostle." He says in *Mystery of the Ages*, "Peter was the first and chief apostle...Jesus chose his chief human apostle and the other original 11..."

"The Roman Catholic Church is organized on the hierarchical system with the Pope in supreme authority, a college of cardinals next in authority, a curia at headquarters in the Vatican with archbishops, bishops and priests.

"The Presbyterian Church is organized with the presbyters or ministers in control. The Congregational Church delegates top authority to the congregation -- 'government by the consent of the governed.'

"And so it goes. THE CHURCHES OF THIS WORLD OF SATAN ARE ORGANIZED ACCORDING TO HUMANLY DEvised PATTERNS. (Emphasis mine).

Mr. Armstrong goes on to say: "But the Bible gives explicit directions in regard to Church government. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. God's form of government is, indeed, HIERARCHICAL. God the Father is head over Christ -- the sole Lawgiver and supreme authority.

"Also an apostle was given supervision over all the local congregations or churches (1 Cor. 16:1). The apostle Paul had oversight over the churches of the Gentile world (2 Cor. 11:28).

"Old Testament Israel, the Church of the Old Testament, was also a nation in the world--though not OF the world as God organized it. Its GOVERNMENT was HIERARCHICAL. It was theocratic government--government from the top down--the very opposite of 'democracy.'

"The CHURCH is organized under theocratic government, hierarchical in form." (*Mystery of the Ages*, pp.183, 200, 202, 203, emphasis his and mine).

Interesting that Mr. Armstrong has just finished saying that the HIERARCHICAL form of government used by the Roman Catholic Church is "of Satan" and "organized according to humanly devised patterns." Then, he claims "God's form of government [in the Church] is, indeed, hierarchical." It would seem that Mr. Armstrong is admitting right here that the form of government practiced by the old Worldwide Church of God (and other breakaway groups) is SATANIC AND PATTERNED AFTER HUMANLY DEvised ORGANIZATIONS! He also says that there is no "democracy" in the church of God. Was God's form of running the church Hierarchical? Was it divided by ranks and orders?

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Interesting how in the early days of the Worldwide Church of God Herbert Armstrong preached the opposite of this, but did God set up a hierarchical form of government at Mt. Sinai? Or, was the government set up very similar to that of the New Testament form, with ELDERS in each town and judges guiding the nation.

Really, The HIERARCHICAL form of government didn't come into existence until the people rebelled against God's system and asked for their own king -- Saul. God complied with this request, issuing a warning about what would happen if they continued with this HIERARCHICAL type of government. You can read about this in I Samuel 8.

Again notice the early days of the Worldwide Church of God's belief about the church and its structure, "When Jesus called them, and ordained them, did We give them AUTHORITY TO RULE? Just what did He give them POWER and AUTHORITY to do?

"Notice it, in Luke 9:1-2:

"Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority' -- for what? To GOVERN? To RULE the Church? Notice carefully! Let us have a BIBLE REASON for all we accept and do! ' . . . and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he SENT THEM to' -- He sent them to WHAT? To rule and govern? To have supervision over the spiritual affairs of an organization? Notice it, IN THE BIBLE! "He sent them to preach the Kingdom of God, and to heal the sick."

"An apostle does not mean one IN authority, but one UNDER authority -- one SENT by the authority of another! The only power and authority Jesus ever gave even His original twelve was to heal the sick, and cast out demons. ***And He SENT them, not to rule, but to PREACH -- not to BEAR authority, but to MINISTER, to serve!***

"Nowhere in the Scripture do we find the slightest hint that the twelve constituted a higher-up church board, and nowhere were they even given power to rule, or govern, or decide what doctrines the other disciples must believe." (Did Christ Reorganize the Church, by HWA, <http://www.giveshare.org/library/hwa/1939art.html>).

Do we see Hierarchy in the Church of God?

The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that there is no hierarchy in the church of God, no top down government, notice, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called *me* by his grace,

"To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; *immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:*" (Gal 1:15-16). Paul did consult people about his calling, he knew he was called. He did not need to cleared it with a "chief Apostle."

Paul goes on to say, "*Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.*

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

"But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

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"Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.

"Afterwards *I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia;*

"And *was unknown by face* unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ:

"But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed." (vv.17-23). This would not work with a hierarchical governmental structure as Armstrong claims the church had. Can you imagine someone in the Worldwide Church of God just popping up out of nowhere, preaching all over the countryside; and then, after 3 years, deciding to go to headquarters in Pasadena to get *acquainted* with one of the evangelists-and *not seeking approval* for his actions?

Notice what he says, "Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also.

"*And I went up by revelation*, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain." (Gal 2:1-2) It wasn't until 14 years later that Paul went up to Jerusalem to let the people there know what he had been doing for the last 14 or so years! And was he *summoned* to Jerusalem by the head apostle or leader of the Church? No, not at all! He went to Jerusalem "by revelation." *God was in charge* of what was going on the church, *not policed* by a "chief apostle." Jesus is the head and leader of the church.

Paul then says, "*But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:;) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:*

"But contrariwise, *when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter;*

"(For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, *the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)*

"And when James, Cephas, and John, *who seemed to be pillars*, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

"Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do." (Gal 2:6-10).

The Apostle Paul in the above verses said that these who were "somewhat" in the church, meaning " 'men of great esteem:' high in the opinion of all good men" (Gill's Commentary). Not that it mattered to Paul because "God accepteth no man's person;" "added nothing to me," meaning, "They did not then impose upon me any new obligations;" (Barnes, Notes). This "...proves to the Galatians his independence as an apostle." (JFB Commentary). Does this demonstrate a hierarchical government in the first century church? No it does not! Also, Paul said that the gospel to the gentiles was "committed" to him and the gospel to the Jews committed to Peter. Who determines this? Peter? No! Jesus Christ! He is the head of the church and makes the decisions for the church of God!

Peter "Chief Apostle"?

What of the claim of Peter as the head of the church?

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This claim and the claim of God's government on this earth through the church is a claim made by Catholics that Herbert Armstrong borrowed from them to prove to his congregation that he was God's Apostle, and so solidify his position in an hierarchical government.

The examples in the Bible however reveal a different story about Peter. First, Armstrong quotes Matthew 10:2 that says, "Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; *The first*, Simon, who is called Peter..." Now because he is named "first" Armstrong claims it is because he was the chief Apostle. Nothing could be further from the truth! The context is *not* rank, but *order* into which they were mentioned. These two sources say, "*We are not to suppose that the word πρωτος, first, refers to any kind of dignity, as some have imagined; it merely signifies the first in order - the person first mentioned... He is said to be the 'first;' not that he was the head of the rest of the apostles, or had any primacy, dominion, and authority over them...but chiefly he is said to be so for order's sake; for, some one in the account must be named first, and he as proper as any:*" (Clarke & Gill's Commentary, emphasis added).

Notice other examples in the Bible. Paul and Peter had it out face to face due to Peter's racism against the gentiles, "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

"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?" (Gal 2:11, 14). If Peter was a "chief Apostle" no way this would have happened. But notice how the apostle Paul, Peter's *absolute equal*, stood up to one of the "pillars" of the church.

Here another example. When the Apostles heard that the Samaritans "received the word of God," the Apostles, "sent" Peter and John! "Now when the *apostles* which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:" (Acts 8:14). If Peter were in charge shouldn't it read "Peter sent"? Instead we see that the "*Apostles*" *plural*, made a decision and *they* decided to send Peter and John. They all got together and decided what to do.

Another example is time when the Mother of the Zebedee's children came to Jesus and asked, "...Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom." Now if they all knew that primacy was given to Peter why would she ask this question?

Notice Jesus' answer, "But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

"And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: *but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*" (Matthew 20:21-25). If it was already decided that Peter was the "chief Apostle" why would Jesus make such a statement?

F.F. Bruce says, "The making of the request shows *how little* [Matthew] 16:18 was looked on as giving primacy to Peter" (The International Bible Commentary, p.1141, emphasis added).

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One more example is in Acts the 11th chapter. They heard that Peter was with the gentiles and opened the door of faith for them, and there were those that "contended with him" (v.2), in Jerusalem. "Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." (v.3). Does this sound like someone in absolute power and control of the church of God? Absolutely not! Peter was not a chief Apostle, and there was no hierarchical structure or government in the church.

Also, the office of an Apostle ceased when the last of the remaining Apostles died and there was no succession, this source writes, "In spite of the theory of 'Apostolic succession' that developed in the church's doctrine of the ministry, the title and office of apostle were NOT TRANSFERABLE and DIED OUT with the passing of the original bearers of the name. Whenever it is applied to individuals in later Christian literature, the use of the term is metaphorical. THE CHURCH HAS NEVER HAD APOSTLES IN THE NT SENSE SINCE THE FIRST CENTURY." (The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol.1, page 172. Article "Apostle" emphasis added). (Read also our booklet, does God work through one man at a time for further details; and was Herbert W Armstrong God's Apostle?).

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So what of Government? Is God's government in the church of God right now on this earth? Herbert W Armstrong and of course his successors seem to think so. Notice this quote from his article, Christ Did Put Authority and RULE in His Church! He says, "The government in the Church is the government of GOD, thru Christ, the living HEAD of the Church. God's ministers are yielded, submissive to GOD'S will... And so God has placed GOVERNMENT in His Church. *It is the government of GOD.* It is government from the top down. God the Father is at the top. Christ does nothing of Himself — but He acts as the Father commands Him. And Christ, in turn RULES His Church. He rules it, first, thru His own chosen apostles, then next under them in rank thru evangelists, then pastors, then other elders." (Good News Magazine, Jan 1957, emphasis his). Nothing can be further from the truth!

When does God establish his government? Is it here now? The Catholics claim this as well. They believed that the church was an "earthly form of the Kingdom of God" (Encyclopedia of Political Theory edited by Mark Bevir, p.94).

The Bible plainly speaks of when and where the Kingdom of God will be established; and who will establish it.

Isaiah says, "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." (9:6-7).

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Who "orders" and "establishes" the government? An Apostle? No! Jesus Christ! The government is on "his shoulder." This means to "sustain" it see Isaiah 22:22. A Chief Apostle doesn't sustain it, Jesus does!

To "order" means to "put in form" (Gill) and "raise up" (Barnes) and "establish" or to place it on a "firm foundation" (Barnes). How can there be a firm foundation in the church when the church is prophesied to "fall away" (2 Thess 2:3)? It says the Kingdom will be maintained by God not men.

This is done from the throne of David. The throne of David is it in the church? No! It's in England ruling over the house of Israel.

What of the "judgment" and "justice" aspect of the Kingdom of God? Who only is allowed to execute judgments including the death penalty for sin? The Judges and the rulers, *not* the church.

"As the judges determine...And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." (Ex 21:22, 23-25). Christ is the King, he executes the judgments as well as the Kings under him. The Saints when they are resurrected will be "kings and priests:" (Rev 5:10). They will be given that responsibility as well but only when they are resurrected at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Paul said, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Corinth 6:2). Notice the "world." Not the Church! Saints do not judge fellow church members about salvation. This Kingdom of God is a world ruling government that will be placed on this earth.

In Daniel the second chapter it makes it clear, "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet *that were* of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: *and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.*

"And in the days of *these kings* shall the God of *heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed:* and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, *and it shall stand for ever.*" (vv.34-35, 44).

Isaiah says, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: *for the earth* shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." (11:9). Not the "little flock" that only has the truth, *but the whole world* will have the knowledge of God, and it's on this earth!

Is the kingdom here ruling over the whole world? No!

Is Jesus on his throne ruling? No!

The whole world know the truth of God? No!

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Is Satan still ruling this world? Yes! Evil is still in this world today! The Kingdom of God is not here yet and the Kingdom is not in God's church!

Jesus told his disciples...

Jesus plainly told his disciples when they asked about the Kingdom, "...Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). If they knew the kingdom of God would be in the church, why would they ask such a question?

Jesus said to them, "*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power*" (v.7). Jesus told them it is not for them to know when the kingdom was coming-so by Jesus' own words we should know that the kingdom is not in the church. If it was, why didn't Jesus say, "the Kingdom is already here," or "I will establish it on Pentecost when you receive the holy spirit." But he didn't did he!

When Jesus said the Kingdom is "within you" (Luke 17:21). With this statement, many people believe that the kingdom only exists in the hearts and minds of men.

Such assumptions are incorrect for several reasons. The Greek word *entos*, translated "within," is better translated "in the midst of" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "Within"). Several translations, including the New American Standard Bible, Modern King James Version and Green's Literal Translation, translate Christ's words as "the kingdom of God is in your midst."

Jesus could not have meant that the kingdom was in their hearts. The Pharisees wanted to destroy him, (Matthew 12:4; Mark 3:6).

Instead, in this passage Christ was pointing out the paradox that the Pharisees did not have the spiritual discernment to recognize that the message of the Kingdom of God was at hand or being offered to them (Matthew 23:15-17). To punctuate this point, Jesus, referring to Himself, said "the kingdom of God is among you" (New Revised Standard Version, New Jerusalem Bible, New American Bible, New English Bible). The spiritually blind Pharisees did not recognize Jesus as the divine Representative of that Kingdom.

Rather than telling the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was something in their hearts, Jesus Christ warned them that they were so spiritually blind they couldn't recognize the very personification of that Kingdom in Him. There is no basis in this passage for believing the Kingdom of God resides in one's heart.

Jesus said plainly, " My kingdom is *not of this world*: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36). The Kingdom is not of this world, and will not be brought about by men, but God. This can only be done by the coming resurrected divine Christ, and his armies from heaven, and not from men and their ways. And as Isaiah says it will not be maintained by men-the church of God comprised of men cannot maintain the kingdom of God, only God can.

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How did Jesus Structure the Church?

Clearly the Kingdom of God is not in the church. But how is the church to function?

First, Jesus told his church *what not to do*, he said: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles *exercise dominion* over them, and they that are great *exercise authority upon them*." (Matthew 20:25). That is, "They tyrannized and exercised arbitrary power over the people. This was certainly true of the governments in our Lord's time, both in the east and in the west." (Clarke's Commentary).

Clearly Jesus did *not* want some hierarchal government in the church of God. Instead Jesus said, "*But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;*

"And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (vv.26-28).

Jesus said that those who "will be great among you" means, "Jesus does not condemn the desire to become great. It is a laudable ambition. There are 'great ones' (*megaloi*) among Christians as among pagans, but they do not 'lord it over' one another (*katakurieuosin*), a lxx word and very expressive, or 'play the tyrant' (*katexousiazousin*), another suggestive word." (Robertson's Word Pictures). But they are "great," How? Do the church members make them great? No! As Jesus said the great ones become ministers, they minister to the brethren like everyone else. They are great by class. There are rich people in the church, and there are poor people in the church, but that does not matter to God. James says, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons.

"For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

"And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

"Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" (James 2:1-4). Like James, Jesus said no one gets special treatment, all are treated the same.

Jesus established a system of *ministering* to the church, not some hierarchy dictatorship, this source comments on the above scripture, "A servant. The original word is deacon - a word meaning a servant of any kind; one especially who served at the table, and, in the New Testament, one who serves the church, Acts 1-4; 1Tim 3:8. Preachers of the gospel are called minister's because they are the servants of God and of the church 1Cor 3:5; 1Cor 4:1; 2Cor 3:6; 2Cor 6:4; Eph 4:12; an office, *therefore, which forbids them to lord it over God's heritage, which is the very opposite of a station of superiority, and which demands the very lowest degree of humility.*" (Barnes Notes, emphasis added).

The Apostle Paul says plainly, "*Not* for that we have *dominion* over your faith, but are *helpers* of your joy:" (2 Corinth 1:24). Instead the Apostle Paul said that Christians should, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

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"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12-13). Salvation is personal, a covenant relationship between you and God, and the ministers are "helpers" of your salvation not rulers over it. Your salvation is in the hands of God and God alone (see John 10:27-29).

Paul also said, "What will ye? *shall I come unto you with a rod*, or in love, and *in* the spirit of meekness?" (1 Corinth 4:21). The "rod" meant a "rod of Iron" (see Rev 2:27, Rev 11:1, Rev 12:5, Rev 19:15) This means a "scepter" to rule (see Strong's #4464). He said he comes to them in love and meekness, wanting to help and *not* a ruler over them.

What of church organization or structure? It's *not* the government of God-That is a world ruling government that will rule the world and the saints as kings and priests for the world and Jesus as the king.

Instead today in the church we have, "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 Corinth 12:28).

What was the purpose of all these functions in the church? To be "helpers" in their salvation, and "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:" (Ephesians 4:12).

Now what of "governments" as it says in the above scripture? Is there church government?

Actually the word for "governments" is "kubernesis *koo-ber'-nay-sis*; From kuberna (of Latin origin, to *steer*); *pilotage*, that is, (figuratively) *directorship* (in the church): - government." (Strong's 2941).

Its Hebrew equivalent is "tachbulah *takh-boo-law'*, *takh-boo-law*; From H2254 as denominative from H2256; (only in plural) properly *steerage* (as a management of *ropes*), that is, (figuratively) *guidance* or (by implication) a *plan*: - good advice, (wise) counsels." (Strong's 8458).

This source says, "Dr. Lightfoot contends that this word *does not refer to the power of ruling*, but to the case of a person endued with a deep and comprehensive mind, who is profoundly wise and prudent; and he thinks that it implies the same as *discernment* of spirits, 1Cor 12:8 (note). He has given several proofs of this use of the word in the Septuagint." (Clarkes commentary, emphasis added).

Basically what it means, "Greek. *kubernesis*. Only here in N.T., but found in the Septuagint. The word means 'guidance'" (Bullingers Companion Bible notes). Not the power to rule!

The word "Torah" means "instruction" or "guidance." The guidance we get for salvation is from the law of God. Jesus said, " but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." (Matt 19:17).

One asked Jesus, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

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"He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?" (Luke 10:25-26). This is what the Apostle Paul means by "guidance" incorrectly translated "governments." The law of God as our guide for salvation! So the law of God is part of the structure and organization in the church as commandments from God that we all must follow. As mentioned above it is commanded by God to keep his law, but it's up to the individual to obey, "work out your own salvation" the Apostle said. It is not up to the church to police your faith as Paul said, "*Not* for that we have *dominion* over your faith." A person must "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God *with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*" (Deut 6:5). The law is obeyed because one loves God of his own free will to "*choose* life" (Deut 30:19)-not forced!

Now Paul said, "First Apostles." Yes God put the Apostles in the Church of God as the foundation for the church to stand on with Jesus being the "chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20). Now, since there are no more Apostles in the Church (for full details read out booklet Does the Role of an Apostle Continue today?), we have their *writings*, and their authority is still in the church of God today.

Then Paul says, "secondarily prophets." Again, the foundation of the church rests the "apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 2:20). The Old Testament prophets, their teachings, doctrines, prophecies of the end time and the prophecies of the Messiah-Jesus is the foundation of the church of God (see Romans 16:26). Also, the New Testament prophets as well. The Book of Revelation is a cornerstone book for the church of God. Its prophecies are for the end time and vital for the work of the watchman (Rev 1:1).

The prophecies of Paul are also important for the church of God. His warnings to the church as well as end time events of the Temple of God, and the false prophet are vital to our understanding of what is to take place.

In Ephesians 2:20 as noted it says, "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*;" This can mean, "The Greek syntax here, with one article governing both nouns (as at 3:5) suggests *one foundational group, apostles functioning as prophets* (i.e. bringing revelation), *rather than two*, though a separate group of prophets are also know at [Ephesians] 4:11...In the commentary on [Ephesians] 2:20 we noted a syntactical reason for thinking this may mean '*apostles functioning as prophets*,' though the syntax could allow the meaning '*apostles and prophets functioning as a unity*.' The strongest argument for the latter is [Ephesians] 4:11, but it has to be said *we know of no prophets in the earliest church (other than the apostles) who were credited with such important revelation, and the context is specifically Paul discussion of his apostolic commission*" (The New Bible Commentary, pp.1233, 1234, emphasis added). As noted above, the Apostle John, Paul and others gave prophecies of the coming end time, so the foundation is the Apostles understanding Old Testament prophecies as well as the prophecies given to them by the holy spirit and recorded in the Bible for us today.

What of Ephesians 4:11? The context is, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:" (v.12). This word "prophet" can also mean "inspired speaker" not just foretelling future events (Strong's #4396). So the context makes it clear what it is meant-of explaining and expounding the Old Testament prophecies by the Holy

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Spirit revealing to them the prophecies of the Old Testament and teaching the church the meaning. This can be said of many in Antioch (Acts 13:1; Acts 15:30-32). "Prophets and Teachers," "It is probable that these were not distinct offices; both might be vested in the same persons." (Clarke's Commentary).

But there were prophets during the time of the Apostles that gave prophecies. But those prophecies were not relevant for the future church. Those prophecies were more for what was going on in the church *at that time*, as it says, "And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

"And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar." (Acts 11:27-28). The prophets of the New Testament (not the Apostles prophecies) their prophecies were only relevant for their day, not for the future church.

In Acts 21:10-14, Agabus gives a prophecy about the coming trials of the Apostle Paul, nothing for the church in the future.

Acts 21:9 we see women who "prophesy." Clarke again says, "Probably these were no more than *teachers* in the Church: for we have already seen that this is a *frequent meaning of the word prophesy*;" (emphasis added). The context is also the same for I Corinthians the 14th chapter, of inspired speaking; teaching the church the Bible as revealed to them by the spirit of God.

So the "prophets" as the foundation for the church means the prophecies of the Old Testament, and the prophecies of the New Testament given by the Apostles. But nowhere does it say that these positions *will continue*. The positions of Apostle and prophet were to cease at the close of the canon. Their purpose is accomplished, the only positions that are left are the elder's, teachers, pastors and evangelists (Read out booklet Does the Role of an Apostle Continue in our day? for details).

The New Testament give no prophecies about future Apostles to come, or future Prophets. There is no Apostolic succession. The Two witnesses are called "prophets" but again, their ministry does not predict future events, but rain down God's judgments on the earth. That is their role and not foretelling future events. We have all the prophecies we need in the Bible.

But the New Testament does give prophecies about false Apostles (Rev 2:2). About evangelists being here till he comes (Matthew 10:23). Future pastors and teachers to continue with the teachings of the Apostles (2 Tim 3:14; Acts 20:28), and false prophets (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:28). The Evangelists, Pastors, teachers and overseers of the church of God were to continue.

As Paul says, "thirdly teachers after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." Ephesians 4:11 adds "evangelists." This means in the original Greek "euaggelistes"-which means: a publisher of good tidings, a preacher of the Gospel. (A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament, by John Dawson).

These offices were to continue, and "were to *become the permanent teachers and superintendents of the church, and to continue the work of the church of God of preaching the*

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Gospel and feeding the church of God till he comes. "The apostolic office ceased, and evangelists and pastors became the permanent teachers and superintendents of the church" (Church Polity, pp. 33-34, emphasis added). These are the "...differences of administrations...diversities of operations..." (1 Corinth 12:5, 6) that was to function in the church of God, and these are not *ranks*, but *functions* in the church.

One scripture the pastors of the church should contemplate is Romans 12:3 that says, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, *not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly*, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." This is a caution against pride. Instead of judging by what constitutes true excellence of character, they pride themselves on that which is of no intrinsic value; on rank, and titles, and external accomplishments; or on talents, learning, or wealth.

So these function were all in place to guide and teach the church the will of God (1 Corinth 12:18), to "help" the people in the church with their *personal* salvation, and *not* to rule people with an iron fist. All have various talents and those talents are set in the church of God for various reasons the way God sees fit.

Do these offices bear rule?

Are these offices set in the church to rule like a government? No! Let's examine the scriptures.

Paul said, "Remember them which have the *rule over you*, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation....Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: *for they watch for your souls*, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you." (Heb 13:7, 17). These rulers are, "pastors of churches are subordinate governors; who rule well when they rule not in an arbitrary way, according to their own wills, but according to the laws of Christ, with all faithfulness, prudence, and diligence. *The word may be rendered 'guides' or 'leaders'; for such point out the way of peace, life, and salvation to men, and direct them to Christ; and guide them into the understanding of the Scriptures, and the truths of the Gospel; and lead them in the paths of faith and holiness, and are examples to them.* The Greek word, here used, is what the Jews call Christian bishops by; and γ, is, by Maimonides (w), said to be the same as פקידות, 'a bishopric': to 'remember' them is to know, own, acknowledge, and respect them as their governors; to obey them, and submit to them; to treasure up in memory their doctrines and exhortations; to be mindful of them at the throne of grace, to pray for them; and to take care of their maintenance and outward supply of life:" (Gill's Commentary; see also Barnes Notes, emphasis added). So those that "rule" really are "guides" not dictators over your faith (2 Corinth 1:24). The Apostles plainly said that the Elders, pastors, teachers, Evangelists are to shepherd the church and feed it.

"One *that ruleth* well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; "(For if a man know not how to *rule his own house*, how shall he *take care* of the church of God?)" (1 Tim 3:4-5). Does this imply government type of rule? No! It says if one cannot rule his own house how can he "*take care* of the church of God?"

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The word "rule" here means to "preside over" as Thayers points out:

- "1) to set or place before
- 1a) to set over
- 1b) *to be over, to superintend, preside over*
- 1c) *to be a protector or guardian*
- 1c1) *to give aid*
- 1d) *to care for, give attention to*
- 1d1) profess honest occupations" (emphasis added).

It's about *caring* for the church as his own family, not tyrannical rule. "one who properly presides over and governs his own family. One who has the command, of his own house, *not by sternness, severity, and tyranny*, but with all gravity;" (Clarke's Commentary, emphasis added).

1 Timothy 5:17 the same word is used for "rule." And that these people it says should have "double honor." This means "What the Apostle probably had in view when he used the expression of 'double honour' to the elder, was the law that gave a double portion to the elder brother." (Jonathans Edwards Notes on Scriptures). Not that he was better than the others but that he was *given more responsibilities than others* and he was accountable to the father for the welfare of his younger brothers and sisters. In the absence of the father he had the responsibility over his brethren, nothing about being honored like he is some sort of special anointed one of God, not at all! It's about responsibility, because, "they who labour in the word and doctrine."

The same Greek word is used for the English word "rule" in Romans 12:8.

What of these two scriptures? "Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power [Grk. "Authority"] which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction." (2 Corinth 13:10).

"For though I should boast somewhat more of our *authority*, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:" (2 Corinth 10:8).

Paul is not saying he has authority over the church, but that authority was *given to him by God* for edifying the church, not to rule them like a dictator. The Apostles were under the authority of Jesus-They were SENT by the authority of *another*! The only power and authority Jesus ever gave His original twelve was to heal the sick, and cast out demons (Luke 9:1-2). And He SENT them, not to rule, but to PREACH-not to BEAR authority, but to MINISTER, to serve!

What are we to judge in the church?

Does the church have the authority to "put" people out of the church? In what matters are we to judge?

We are not to judge like governments, the government of God is not here, and only the governments can put people to death for evil (see Romans 13:1-4). The saints are not kings and priests yet so they cannot be given this power till the kingdom of God is set up on this earth.

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The Apostle Paul says, "Dare any of you, *having a matter against another*, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?"

"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye *unworthy to judge the smallest matters*?"

"Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?"

"If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.

"I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?"

"But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers." (1 Corinth 6:1-6). The Apostle Paul couldn't believe that the Corinthians were actually going to the courts of the unbelievers to settle matters between Christians brothers, when the church was capable of solving the problem. These were the "smallest matters." "things that pertain to this life." These are personal matters between brother and brother (see also Matthew 18:15-18). Nothing about salvation, that is between you and God.

Jesus said that salvation is for him to give and take away. And really the only reason it is taken away is because the person who has been called and chosen *rejects* the salvation given to him; and his mind is made up and wants nothing to do with God. So, without repentance that person who sins willfully, salvation is taken away.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.

"My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand." (John 10:27-29). Jesus gives eternal life and no one can take it away from you.

No man, no church, no one can do it.

It's really up to the converted Christian. It is God's will to save everyone, (see 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). But, Paul wrote, "For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

"And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

"If *they* shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing *they* crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

"For if we sin *willfully* after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

"But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

"*He that despised* Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, *who* hath trodden under foot the Son of God, *and hath counted* the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-29). The converted Christian decides to fall away "willfully" and "despises" God. They cannot repent, and they will not repent, it's impossible as Paul says, their mind is made up, therefore one will lose salvation. God will take it from him because of his decision. The decision is really yours and yours alone!

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Does the church have the "authority" to "put out" of the church a person who is a converted member?

One can read in the Gospels those who were "put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22; 12:24). This meant, excommunication and loss of salvation. Does the church have the power? Absolutely Not! As noted above the power is up to the individual not the church.

When one did sin in the church Paul did not teach to "excommunicate" or put some out. He told them not to partake in the same sins as one that sinned but that was all, excommunication did not exist in the church of God. There were those who made "shipwreck" the faith (1 Tim 1:19). That was their decision to make. Did Paul say they lost salvation? No! Paul knows it's up to them and God not him.

What about those he told to "mark" or "note" (Rom 16:17; 2 Thess 3:14) because of the trouble that they were stirring in the church? Barnes, says, "*Do not follow them*; compare 1Tim 6:3-5; 2John 1:10; Gal 1:8-9. That is, avoid them as 'teachers;' do not follow them. *It does not mean that they were to be treated harshly*; but that they were to be avoided in their '*instructions*.'" (emphasis added). We are to *avoid* their *instructions* and not to do what they do.

Then afterwards we are to do what Jesus and Paul said to do, admonish them, correct them. If they do not hearken then "let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." God willing he or she repents so the brother is "gained" once more in the church of God. (Read our booklet "Binding and Loosing" for more details).

This punishment or correction was to let him be unto thee as an "heathen man and a publican." A brother or sister who sinned, and *refuses* to repent was to let him be like a person of the world. Satan is called the god of this world (2 Corinth 4:4). So he was handed over to Satan. Barnes says, "They say, that in the Scriptures there are but two kingdoms recognized - the kingdom of God, or the church, and the kingdom of the world, which is regarded as under the control of Satan; and that to exclude a man from one is to subject him to the dominion of the other."

1 Corinthians 5:1 is speaking of the same thing. Paul said to, "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (v.5). Let him go into the world-not excommunicated but give him what he wants (*since he does not want to repent, and the world refuses to repent, and the brother obviously has the same attitude as the world*) a world that Satan has provided, to see all its evils, and the consequences of sin. To see all that Satan provides for people which is death, destruction, disease and war. When one realizes this, he will "destroy of the flesh" meaning, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify [Grk "kill"] the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom 8:13). The fleshly sinful deeds one will destroy, and he will repent, and the "spiritual" begotten man, the "inward man" (Rom 7:22) will be saved and resurrected when Jesus comes.

"But this handing over to Satan was, as we have seen, designed solely *for a merciful purpose, and to awaken his repentance, so as to secure his ultimate salvation* (1Corinth 5:4, 5)." (Pulpit Commentary, emphasis added).

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The verses in 2 Corinthians 2:5-8 indicate that the man had now repented and was sorrowing greatly over his error. He had learned his lesson. So now he came back into the fellowship of the church and was completely forgiven-by God, and Paul said the church must forgive him as well “lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (verse 11). If God’s people continued to shun this man, he might have committed suicide, “such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.” (v.7). Paul did not want that, but “confirm *your* love toward him.” (v.8) be forgiving and loving towards the person who repents and asks forgiveness.

This is how the church of God should conduct itself with these matters, with love, mercy and forgiveness, not with hate and excommunication. God is merciful and binding and loosing is for correcting the Christian, so one can see why he or she is being corrected, and find the mercy of God in it.

So the government of God is not in the Church of God. The Church is structured with teachers evangelists etc...as guides and helpers of the church of God. Salvation is between you and God and only you are in charge of your salvation or loss of it. The Church does not have the power to take salvation from you, and the church only judges in small matters pertaining to this life. NO ONE CAN "PUT YOU OUT" OF THE CHURCH, THAT'S UP TO YOU!

Please read our other booklets on this subject:

Does God Work through one man at a time?

Where is the True Church of God?

Does the Role of An Apostle continue in our day?

Binding and Loosing: What Did Jesus Mean?