

Government (Part 5)

The Problems of the Government

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In last week's sermon, we saw two major reasons for most governmental problems. The first reason is the failure to live within the limits set by "the governor." In most cases, we are reasonably aware of the limits; but we make justifications to give us permission to not have to submit to them. We have a very strong tendency to make ourselves "a special case."

The second reason is very closely related in that we fail to take the opportunity to do good for one and all. Instead, our acts tend to be self-centered rather than God-centered. And yet this is the very quality that makes life attractive, and fulfilling, and promotes contentment. But it requires service and sacrifice, and so we shy away from it.

I want us to begin this sermon by turning to Acts 10: 34-38. Notice what it says here about Jesus. I have chosen this series of verses mostly because of one word here, but it gives a pretty good summary of what we are talking about.

Acts 10: 34-38 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Please notice the word "*righteousness*" (in verse 35) and the phrase "*who went about doing good.*" It is not a matter that Jesus Christ was "righteous" in the sense that He kept the commandments of God. He did not limit it to that. He did not limit it just merely to being a good person. But He extended Himself. He sacrificed Himself. He did acts of generosity, of kindness, and of good. He "*went about doing good.*" This is the pattern!

Perhaps the word "righteousness" might sum up both aspects. But, on the one hand, we have to understand that there is the strictly legal aspect—which might be looked upon as being essentially negative. The Commandments state: *You shall not commit adultery; you shall not bear false witness; etc.* But there is also its counterpart where one is conscientiously looking for, and sensitive to, ways of doing "good." That is, acts of kindness, of generosity, of mercy, and even correction (if it is done in the right spirit and way). Very frequently, to correct someone is

to be merciful to him or her—even though it may be painful (to them and to you) as well.

Next we saw that our responsibility is directly to God—that there is no spiritual hierarchy between Him and us. We have the same kind of access to the Father as Jesus Christ did. And we are to use our "powers" in the exercise of His purpose.

We saw that no government—No, not even God's government—will work without each individual *submitting* in his area of responsibility. The smallest unit of government is *the individual*; and God is dealing with us on this most basic level.

We saw that, when God installs a person in office (or, permits a person to take an office), it does not mean that He endorses everything that they do. It is in such situations—where authority is oppressive and overbearing—that one's individual responsibility to God clearly comes to the fore.

God's commandment is clear. We are to obey Him rather than men. Whether the authority is a civil official, a religious figure, a parent, a supervisor, teacher, or mate—our direct individual responsibility is to God, while at the same time being subject to the human authority. I gave you the examples of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They put their lives on the line. You might say that they defied the human authority; and they did it because of their conscience toward God.

I showed you the example of Peter there in Acts 10 and 11 (but, specifically, in chapter 11). How that *a voice from heaven* came; and it, seemingly, bid him to "rise and eat" those things that were not clean. And Peter refused! Three times, he rejected the voice from heaven. That is where God is. He is up there. So, one would think that "Surely, if one heard a voice from heaven, it must be coming from God. And God would not do anything like that (as to allow us to be tested in such a way that we would break His command)." But Peter saw through it. His responsibility was clearly to God; and he obeyed God, rather than that voice which came from heaven.

I gave you the example of Lucifer. Did God want those angels (one third of them) to submit to Lucifer? Was Lucifer God's representative, God's agent, on earth? Surely, Lucifer represented the government of God. Absolutely he did! He was the one in authority. But did God want the angels to submit to the one who was encouraging them to break the higher law of Almighty God? Of course not!

The picture is clear. Our individual responsibility is directly to the Father. Regardless of whether that person is a religious figure (even within the true church); we are to go directly to God in regard to our obedience.

|| Peter 2:10-13 [A]nd especially those [the unjust, verse 9] who walk according to the

flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord. But these [men], like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions [Now, look at this phrase.] while they feast with you.

These people are *right in the church*. The thing that is of such concern, to you and me, is not that they are just "in the church;" but we saw (especially last week) the example from the apostle Paul that these people can be installed in the very highest of offices. The apostle Paul called some of these people "false *apostles*." That is a pretty high rank.

Matthew 23:1-3 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not according to their works; for they say and do not do.

I think that this example, from Jesus' life, is especially interesting in that (in the book of Matthew) this was Jesus' last public preaching. And it had to do with authority, and being subject to authority. So, He is touching on an issue that is important to us, in light of these sermons.

I think that it is too bad that we cannot hear the inflection in Jesus' voice when He spoke this. I wonder if maybe there was not an ironic cast to what He said. Or, should we be so bold as to say that maybe there was some sarcasm here? I mean, "*They sit in Moses' seat!*" The reason that I ask is because there is evidence that the Jews of His day called the seat from which the leading rabbi of *any* synagogue—not the chief synagogue, we might say, in Jerusalem; but any synagogue—they commonly called it "Moses' seat." And so there were "Moses' seats" all over the nation.

In addition to that, the grammar here indicates that the phrase could have been translated that they "sat down," or (to make it a little bit plainer) "have seated themselves." Or, (even more forcefully) "have presumed to sit" in Moses' seat. All of which can lead one to ask whether their authority was truly real. Or, rather, was it was something that they had *grasped at* when the occasion arose for them to take it?

Is Jesus telling us that we should obey everything the religious leader tells us? That cannot be. Remember that Jesus was the one who told His disciples to "Beware the leaven of the Pharisees." (Matthew 16:12) That leaven, the context shows very clearly, was their doctrine.

He said to beware of what they were teaching. And yet it appears to say here that whatever they tell you to do, that you should do. No, we are not to do everything that they tell us to do.

Jesus' own life was an example; and He did not do that. He did not do everything the religious leaders of His day said to do—not in the least! He frequently had confrontations with them. He was accused, by them, of breaking the Sabbath; and, in turn, He told them that they were of the Devil. In addition, right in the context, He showed that the fruit of their lives cast suspicion on their teaching. So, He is not telling us that we should obey everything that they say.

He is telling us that we are to obey what they tell us that is *in agreement with God's Word*. That we should obey. However, even if what they say in their teaching is wrong and we cannot obey it, we are still subject to them if, indeed, they are the human authority. Jesus Himself followed that responsibility. He lived well within the limit of His authority. We are going to examine here a couple of examples of how Jesus lived within the limits of His authority; and I want to show you something that is very interesting. That is, that Jesus' authority was not always constant.

Now, if Jesus' authority was not always constant, neither is ours constant. Let us turn first to John 17. Here is Jesus' prayer to God, just before He was taken to be crucified.

John 17:2a As You [the Father] have given Him [the Son] authority over all flesh.

That is a pretty high office. That is a lot of power! And Jesus recognized that He had that power as the Messiah. He had authority over all flesh.

John 17:2b That He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

That qualifies His authority. His power was essentially given to do the work of salvation, or to work toward the salvation of all of men.

Now, Jesus could have broken the commandments. He could have killed. He could have lied. He could have stolen. But He did not! He did not sin under any circumstance—no matter how much pressure was put on Him. No matter how alluring the temptation might have been for Him to sin, He always resisted. And I am sure that He did so because of His feeling of responsibility both (1) *to God*, in submitting to Him; and also (2) His responsibility *to man*, in using His powers to provide salvation for all of mankind. So, He exercised His responsibility and His powers in that regard.

There is another example in the Jude 9. It is the example of Michael, the archangel. He is one of the covering cherubs. And under the Father and Son—in the order of the hierarchy of the angels, I do not know if there is anybody of any higher authority than Michael. Undoubtedly, there are at least two others who have equal authority. One of those is Gabriel; and the other is Lucifer, who has become Satan.

According to the story, there in the book of Jude, a confrontation took place as Satan and Michael argued over the body of Moses. Michael had been dispatched to bury the body of Moses; but Satan felt that the body belonged to him. So we have a confrontation here of two great and awesome angelic powers.

Where was Michael's authority? Could he have said, "I am righteous. You are a sinner. Therefore, my authority is greater than yours." No, he recognized a limit to his authority. It says that he did not dare bring a railing accusation. That is, an insulting or derogatory remark he would not even make against Lucifer—Satan, the arch-demon, the worst of all beings. He would not run him down. Instead, he said, "The Lord rebuke you." He deferred to Almighty God.

That was a little digression there—on Michael—to show you this great archangel, living within the limits of his authority. Now, back to Jesus. Let us go to John 8:44. I think that we are all pretty much aware of the context of this chapter. There is a confrontation between Jesus and the Jews. The Jews did not understand the position that they were in—in relation to God. That is, that they needed to repent. Jesus, in the course of His argument with them, says:

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

I submit to you: That is pretty straightforward! I do not know if a human being can get a stronger rebuke than that. Here is "God, the Creator" as a human being. They did not look at Him as "God, the Creator." But, nonetheless, He was!

John 8:58-59 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." [He shows them His identity; and they recognized it.] Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

There, Jesus was using His authority as God. But I am sure that He still stayed well within the limits. He did not take their lives! And we just read (in John 17) that He recognized that *all power* was given to Him. But He stopped well short of that, did He not? He went around doing good.

God has the right to do those things. But, is our authority the same as Jesus'—though we are a part of His Body? No, it is not! Let us go back to I Peter and we will continue to look at Jesus' example of living within the authority given to Him.

I Peter 2:18-23 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of

conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth", who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

Jesus could have struck out at these people, who took His life. But remember the context of this chapter. We have gone through it before. We are to do what we do in relation to these civil authorities (and other authorities over us) for the Lord's sake, and because we are the servants of the Lord. We submit—we are subject to them—out of respect for God.

I am going to show you that this is what Christ did. He deliberately chose not to revile those people in this circumstance. He really "laid low" those people in John 8; but the circumstance has shifted somewhat here. And He chose not to lash out at these people in any way.

Before we leave this section, I want us to understand that what is commendable here—mentioned in verse 19—is not going through the suffering; but the *devotion to God* is what is commendable. When we couple that with the going through suffering, then that is commendable. But it is really the devotion to God that Peter wants us to focus on. We do this (going through the pain, going through the trouble) because of our respect for God.

Think about Jesus again—that He did not revile. Think of the awesome powers of discernment that He had! It says in another place, in the Scriptures, that He knew what was in the heart of men. He, undoubtedly (as we would say today) "had the goods on" those people—on those who were reviling Him. But "He opened not His mouth." Instead, He lived within the limits of His human authority.

Let us turn to Matthew 26, where this "activity" was going on. (That is, during that period of time that Peter was describing there in I Peter 2.) This is that period of time leading right up to Christ's crucifixion. Beginning in verse 52, He is in Gethsemane, and He is being taken.

Matthew 26:52-53 But Jesus said to him [Peter], "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"

Do we see how far His authority extended? Now, did He live within it? Did He call for the angels? No, He did not. He lived well within the limits of His authority. What was restraining Him? Look at the next verse.

Matthew 26:54 How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"

Do you see what restrained Him? The Word of God! (And, in this case, the prophecies relative to His death as the Lamb of God.) So, we can see that, though *Jesus had all power*, there were times when He was restrained by the circumstances. But, always He lived well within its limits. So, they fluctuated according to the situation; but always they were subject to the Word of God.

Let us look at an example from the apostle Paul's life, when he made a fairly serious mistake.

Acts 23:1-3 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

Now Paul was legally correct, except that he did not know who he was speaking to.

Acts 23:4-5 And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" [And the apostle quickly repented.] Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

"You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people." I want you to think about what is going on 'out there' in some aspects of the church (and maybe even right amongst us) considering this—that *you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people*. There are people 'out there' who are calling Mr. Tkach "the man of sin," "the anti-Christ," and telling anyone (who will hear) of all of his sins that they want men to be aware of.

There are others who are doing the same thing with Herbert W. Armstrong. How quickly they forget that like Paul (that is, in like manner), Mr. Armstrong is our father in the faith. People do this with an air of justification because they feel that he (either Mr. Tkach or Mr. Armstrong) has hurt them, or disappointed them. Indeed, maybe they have. But I think that there is very strong evidence that we had better be awfully careful of what we are saying about these people.

In Ecclesiastes 10:20, we find a very interesting comment from Solomon—where he says:

Ecclesiastes 10:20 Do not curse the king, even in your thought; do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird of flight may tell the matter.

Certainly, I think that we can say that perhaps Solomon did not have exactly the same thing in mind; but we have to remember that this is part of the Word of God. It is there for our edification. It does not mean that one cannot even talk about a leader's mistakes (or even his sins). But we had better be absolutely sure that we have the facts straight and that we are not slandering them, gossiping about them, or simply operating out of our vanity to elevate

ourselves.

It is awfully good to remember Exodus 16:8 at this juncture, where Moses said about those who were murmuring against him: "Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord [against God!]."

It is very clear that God takes those things as a criticism of Him. That is, that He is not doing His job well. And we are saying, "If I was God, I wouldn't be allowing these things to occur." Brethren, that is not within the limits of our responsibility. If the leader is hurting us, we can get out from under his authority; but do not try to bring him down in other people's eyes. Our responsibility is in Philippians 3:

Philippians 3:13b-14 [F]orgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, press toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

There is our responsibility—to be ready for Christ when He returns. Reviling the leader is not going to help us in this regard.

Now, turn with me to I Samuel 19. Here we have a sequence of events that took place in the life of David. I think that this circumstance applies to you and me, in this situation that we find ourselves in right now.

I Samuel 19:9-11 [This sets the stage.] Now the distressing spirit from the LORD came upon Saul as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing music with his hand. Then Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away from Saul's presence; and he [Saul] drove the spear into the wall. So David fled and escaped that night. Saul also sent messengers to David's house to watch him and to kill him in the morning. And Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed."

There is very immediate pressure from the leader—persecution of the worse degree. Saul was seeking to take David's life. Have we had our spiritual life threatened? I think we have. And we have done what David did. David fled. We have fled, as well—from the persecution that we were receiving.

There is another example in chapter 23. Again, I just picked this out as an example. You know the story. David fled into the wilderness. There he kept himself—and the men and women that were with him—on the move. He had to do that because Saul was, in this case, pursuing him from place to place. And Saul had his operatives (his CIA, his spies, his FBI, his secret police) who were 'out there' trying to find where David was."What's David doing? Where is he? Am I able to catch him at a time when he is weak?" So, here is the example.

I Samuel 23:26-29 Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them. But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!" Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place the Rock of Escape. Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi.

There were times that David had the opportunity to harm Saul, but he did not. One of these occasions arises in chapter 24. We will pick this up in verse 5, which is after David had the opportunity to do it.

I Samuel 24:5-10 Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe. And he said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD." So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way. David also arose afterward, went out of the cave, and called out to Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down. And David said to Saul: "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Indeed David seeks your harm'? Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.'

Now, one more section in chapter 26. Again, David had the opportunity to do damage to Saul.

I Samuel 26:9-11 But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?" David said furthermore, "As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go."

David had opportunities to do Saul all kinds of damage (even to the point of taking his life); but he did not. David's group of men became a haven for those who were "on the outs" with the leadership. And God kept delivering David and his group.

It is God's prerogative to govern His creation. In the circumstance that arose in David's life, he made a wise choice—and lived within the limits of his authority. This example is one of

the major reasons that this group [Church of the Great God] is operating the way it does. There is no indication that David went about recruiting people to join him. *God brought people to David*. David went vigorously (and tactfully) "about doing good" for God's people, Israel. And, when God's time came, God restored to David what was rightfully his.

Our responsibility, in God's scheme of things, is to show God that we will submit to His governance. I purposely brought an example from David's life into this because I want to bridge from David into the next step in this series.

David and Saul are an interesting contrast. Regardless of how specifically we might evaluate the qualities in one as compared to the other, I think that the difference comes down to one clear quality that sets David apart to such an extent that he becomes *the model* of what a ruler ought to be. He, among all the kings of Israel, is the "type" of Christ. That quality was that David was *governable*. Saul was not.

Saul was not 'any less of a man' than David. And he, too, was given the Spirit of God. But the narration that is given here in I Samuel is that Saul conscientiously *chose to rebel* whereas David conscientiously *chose to submit* (regardless of what it cost him, personally).

David feared God. That is very evident in the Psalms. It was a deep and abiding reverence—laced with a measure of terror. David humbled himself before that God; and, therefore, he exercised his belief in that God by doing what He said.

David was a man accustomed to both wealth and power. And yet, there is almost no evidence that he ever abused his authority. The reason that he did not abuse his authority was because he lived within the limits of his "governor"—and his Governor was God! That attitude (of living within the limits) was rooted in his own personal submission to God. Another way of saying it is that he was faithful in the little things, himself.

Now turn with me to Psalm 72. This psalm has an interesting background.

Modern commentators will tell you (probably, accurately) that it was really written by Solomon. The thinking is, because of the subject material, that Solomon wrote a prayer of David while David himself was on his deathbed. That is, this was actually a prayer of David and Solomon set it into poetry.

Fathers, husbands, mothers, and wives—I want you to pay particular attention to this because David is summoning from his experiences as king the needs of a leader; and he is requesting them *from God for* Solomon. This is why this is so important: The quality of leadership (whether it is in a nation, or whether it is in a family, or whether it is in a company, a church, or whatever) is, to a very great extent, going to determine *the quality of life* of "the governed."

All we have to do to give you the evidence for that is to have you read the lives of the kings of Israel. When there was a righteous king, things flourished and prospered. That is the evidence that God is giving to us—that *the quality of life*, under those kings, was good. When there was an evil king, the leadership was bad and *the quality of life* deteriorated. (And the same principle will hold true within a family.)

The quality of leadership is determined by the relationship of the leader to God. Please, get that! That is the keystone. That is the foundation. That is the fulcrum point; and it is summed up in this psalm by the word "righteousness."

Psalms 72:1-4 Give the king Your judgments, O God [Remember that David is requesting these things for Solomon.], and Your righteousness to the king's Son. [The king was David. The son was Solomon.] He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice [Or, fairness. Or, evenhandedness. Or, equity.]. The mountains will bring peace to the people [That is, *if* the ruler is judging, or dealing in, righteousness.], and the little hills, by righteousness. He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor.

I think that is far enough to go, so that you get the idea (as God is very clearly showing) that the well-being of the people who are under authority depends upon the relationship between the leader and God. The leader, above all others, has to live within the limits that are established by his "Governor"—God.

For you and me—we might choose to use Christ as an example; but, at this point, in this sermon I am using David. The thing that made him successful—the thing that made him the model for all the kings of Israel (and even for the Messiah, the King of Kings, who is going to come)—is the fact that he himself was *governable* and he *lived within the limits of the authority established by God*. The result of this was that David had a reign of righteousness. That righteousness will produce good things for the governed. And, of course, it will produce good things for the king as well.

Now, let us go back to Deuteronomy 17. My Bible has a heading here—"Principles Governing Kings."

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 Also it shall be, when he [a king] sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he

may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

It was a law, in Israel, that every king (when coroneted) was to receive a copy of the law. God was making it very clear that owing to the king's—"the leader." Husband, father, king, it matters not—*duty* to those governed, a ruler's first obligation is to God from whom the ruler's authority flows. God, Himself, is *the model* that the leader (husband, father, king, governor, or whatever) is to follow; and it is God's acts of love and justice that the leader is to keep before his eyes. It is God's qualities that should motivate the act of the leader toward living a blameless life himself.

Brethren, this is the very basis of the way God's government works. We cannot expect somebody else to do it. Whether we are in the position of authority or we are under authority, *we are individually responsible to God in heaven*. Especially, we might say, that onus (or, that responsibility) is upon the leader.

I also want you to see that this is the very basis of the judgment that God is going to make in regard to what we are going to be doing in the Kingdom of God. It is going to be whether we, first, have been able to be governed—whether we have been able to be faithful. It is acts of faithfulness that show that we are governable!

Matthew 25:21 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Is that not clear? Those who are *governable* will *govern*. A *governable person is a faithful person*. (That is just another way of saying it.) This was the key to David's success in the eyes of God. Regardless of his high position, regardless of his power, regardless of his wealth—David submitted to the Word of God.

We saw that emulated in the life of Jesus Christ. Even though "all power" had been given to Him, He would not cross the line. He lived within the limits of His authority, because the prophecy said that He had to die as the Lamb of God. Therefore, He would not make the request to His Father for angels to assist Him. You cannot go any further than that—in living within the limits and being faithful to the Word of God.

Matthew 24:45-47 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he [the master] will make him ruler over all his goods.

In God's order of things, the one in authority is—first and foremost—a servant of God. That is

going to determine whether he is going to abuse his authority either by (1) being a domineering influence or (2) by being ignorant of, and doing nothing for, his people. Either way—it is an abuse of the office.

We are all familiar with the general theme in Matthew 20: 24-28. This was when John and James (and their mother) made the request that one sit on Christ's right hand and the other on His left.

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

We have a contrast here between what is normal for the world (That is, abuse of rulership.) and also what is normal for the Kingdom of God. What we see for the Kingdom of God is an entirely different attitude in the ruler. The one uses his power, to its fullest extent, to serve himself. The other uses his power first to serve God; and, in serving God, he becomes the servant of the governed. That is not directly stated; but it is implied.

I think that it is interesting that Jesus did not rebuke their ambition; but He did question their rashness at assuming that they were fit to bear up under the sacrifice required to rule. And He did question whether they had the proper attitude to rightly rule. They did not, at this time, properly understand the nature of God's Kingdom.

Those in power in this world are accustomed to what we would call "throwing their weight around." Otherwise, they might say, "What advantage is there in being the top dog?" In this world, it is the common approach in rulership to assert rank. It can be done overly—as in the military (with salutes, with bars and stripes and stars). It can be done by innuendo—as by a glance, or some other kind of putdown. Today people are encouraged to make a statement about themselves through clothing, or some other form of style. All of these things are *forms of vanity* done in order to grab "the higher ground." That is, to gain (at the very least) a psychological edge over the other person. Why? They are done in order for one to gain control of the situation.

Why should I raise the issue of control? Because it is central to the difference between the way God's system works and man's system (or, we might say, Satan's). Think about the world out there. Unconverted humanity is a battleground of rival gods. It is a clashing of all kinds of egotism—one person to another.

The church is to be a fellowship of repentant sinners. The Bible tells us very clearly that we are to die to the self. Brethren, it is the only kind of "community" that will work (without self-destructing in warfare and divorce). You might remember that Jesus said, "Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

Man's system functions with the emphasis on being "in control"—illustrated here, in Matthew 20, as a dominating lordship that is self-centered. But notice that Christ said that, in His system, one must first become a servant, a deacon. ('Diakonos' is the Greek word there.) A servant is someone who performs duties in a place of employment, about someone's home, or the person of a master. The servant is not "in control." He is taking orders.

This word "deacon" is also translated, from time to time, in the Bible as *minister*. The word "minister" has an interesting root to it. Our English word is derived from the Latin word "minor," or "less." A minister is someone less than someone else. If that is not enough (so that we get the point), Jesus magnified this statement by saying the person must be a slave and that He, Himself, is the model.

Now, think about this. A *servant* (Let us say an employee.) may have a certain amount of liberty. There is time that he has to himself. He may put in eight (or ten, or twelve) hours at his place of employment; and he is taking orders there. But he leaves there and he goes someplace else—where, maybe, he is "not the servant" (like he was at the place of employment). And so he has some measure of control in his life.

But a *slave* (according to *Webster's*) is one who is completely subservient to a dominating influence. A slave may have no control at all! Someone may be telling him when to get up, when and what to eat, where and when to go to work, where and when he goes to the bathroom, who he marries, if he marries at all. You think of slavery as it existed here in the United States; and you get a picture of a person whose life was absolutely owned by the slave master. And maybe even death could ensue as a result of a decision by the slave master. A slave is one in whom life is lived without "control."

It is right here that we see a major difficulty in making God's kind of government work! Human nature wants to be in control. Lucifer said, "I will be God. I will be the Most High." He wanted control; and he passed this idea on to Adam and Eve. He said, "You shall be as Gods." That driving force is still permeating this portion of creation. We, by nature, want to be *in control*.

Voluntarily giving ourselves over in service requires sacrifice—*the sacrifice of giving up "control."* But this, brethren, is the very approach that tends toward cooperation rather than competition. Competition produces war, destruction, and poverty. Cooperation produces peace and prosperity.

If God's government is going to work, we must make sacrifice a daily part of our life!

"He who comes to Me must deny himself." We must be willing to give up some of our turf; and that turf is the drive to control the situation.

Now this whole way rests on a person first making himself a slave of God. That is what Jesus Christ did. And that is what David strove to do. He did not do it perfectly, but he was an outstanding example. He was governable. And, as a result, he becomes the human type of the way a ruler ought to be.

This choosing is something that must be done conscientiously and deliberately by faith. It will not just happen by accident. It will not happen by magic.

We will conclude by looking at the pattern that was established for us by Jesus Christ. You talk about somebody relinquishing control and then living within the limits of His authority!

Philippians 2:5-6 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

He did not grasp at it! He voluntarily gave it up.

Philippians 2:7-9a But made Himself [It was conscientiously and deliberately done.] of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant [Matthew 20.], and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself [That is a choice that one makes.] and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him. . . .

Because He met the primary qualifications to be a ruler in the Kingdom of God—in that He proved Himself governable. He lived within the limits. He gave up control of His life—completely and totally, to His Father.

Philippians 2:9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.

The way for you and me (in terms of our responsibility) is very clear. Our responsibility before God is individual and personal. We have direct access to the Father—even as Jesus Christ had access to the Father. It is from this access that the Spirit of God flows, which enables us to keep His commands—to live within the limits. It is our responsibility to turn those choices (that are given then to us, as opportunities to deny ourselves) and not give ourselves the opportunity to exert control where our control is limited by some portion of the Word of God.

It is not easy to do. Yet it is necessary that we do. And it is necessary because this is what makes God's government work.

