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Restoring God's Government

**Is the Church of God modeled on the Levitical Priesthood?
On secular government? Or some other form?**

by James McBride

'Governance' is a sore point among various churches, with numerous claims and counter-claims. Rather than uniting it divides. A survey of the churches depicts variety - from the tightly structured Roman Church through to the largely unstructured, often independent, 'home church'. Most will agree, however, that Jesus Christ will return as Supreme Ruler to establish his Kingdom - and governance. We have but a glimpse in Scripture as to what that perfect state will be!

The Bible provides no 'thus says the Lord' on God's governance up to the time of Moses. Having created mankind, He instructed them as to how to live in harmony with their deepest human needs. In general His governance was largely 'hands off', though He had His servants who conveyed His message.

Divine Guidance

Law is pointless without enforcement. Divine 'Law' - *Torah*, instruction - existed from Creation and enforcement was delegated to mankind. But when it became necessary, and having given warning, He intervened - spectacularly by means of the Flood in the time of Noah some seventeen hundred years from the time of man's creation. Later He scattered the nations at Babel. He also stepped down to eliminate the gross perversion of Sodom.

After Babel nations, in rebellion, set up their own forms of government, largely rejecting the divine *Torah* and dreaming up their own idolatrous - and largely Satan-inspired - religions. Recall that Jesus, in contending with Satan, did not contest the latter's claim to world rulership (Matthew 4:9). He - Satan - is, too, 'the god of this world' (II Corinthians 4:4). He founded and perpetuates all religious belief contrary to the Scriptures, and inspired rebellion to God's guidance.

Of course, God throughout history continued a personal relationship with those individuals who willingly served Him. He entered covenants with them, promised them - and delivered - blessings (eg Genesis 26:2-6).

A Model Nation

But to further His promises to Abraham, God rescued his descendants from slavery and idolatry in Egypt. The Israelites were, under the direction of Moses, forged into a nation. It was

a nation purpose-made to model God's way of life.

As with any nation a system of governance was essential, and Moses was given, by the LORD, a system designed to curb the excesses of human nature. (The Israelites did not in general have faith nor the indwelling divine Spirit!) God's *Torah*, His instruction, was enshrined as Law for Israel (Galatians 3:17). It has, though, universal application - the perfect form of government for any nation - ignored at our peril. Its basic principles were the age-old - even then - 'Ten Words' (Heb *dabar*, commandments). The legal system God gave to Israel was its national constitution.

Initially the 'top man' of Israel's government was - God Himself. He guided His nation through a series of prophets and judges who conveyed His will to the people. The strategy for the occupation of Canaan was devised by God. The partition of the Land to the various Clans was God-guided. Strategies in battle emanated from God. Personal disputes beyond human solution were settled by God. The Creator was, in other words, active in the governance of His special nation.

At the human level was the clan system. The 'patriarch' of each extended family governed his own, with ear attuned to the words of God's mouth-pieces, the prophets, and to God's *Torah*. Disputes were settled according to the divine Law devolved through the court of the elders of each city. They were responsible for local law and order. At the grass roots each individual was responsible for his own behaviour: 'every man did that which was right in his own eyes'. And, of course, each was subject to the law.

Human Government

But true to human nature community leaders sought personal power. They sent a delegation to the prophet Samuel and called for a king 'like the other nations', to be their judge. God outlined for the people what that would entail - heavy taxation, centralization, conscription, bureaucracy, a standing army and an arms industry, an expanding Court, confiscation of private property (I Samuel 8). (Doesn't that sound modern!) Said God: "They have not rejected you [ie Samuel the prophet] but they have rejected Me... Make them a king". 'Democracy' had its way - and the nation descended into disorder and idolatry,

Restoring God's Government

eventually to again feel the hand of God on their destiny. Disgusted by the state of His nation God, to stop the rot, exiled them into foreign lands. [*Request the free article **The Two Nations of Israel!***]

Religious Life

The seven annual festivals [*see* Leviticus 23] were at the center of Israel's religious life. The 'pilgrim feasts' (Passover and Tabernacles) drew multitudes from throughout the nation and beyond to the central altar in Jerusalem. No coercion to attend - but in times of national concern or spiritual awakening men and women flocked to the city to the Temple and its worship. Locally, meetings were held Sabbath by Sabbath in every city in the synagogues - often several such to a city. Each synagogue had its own rulers who conducted worship, instructed the people from the Scriptures and often dispensed secular justice according to their understanding of the Law. Synagogues were scattered throughout the world (Acts 15:21).

God has not, however, 'gone away' leaving man to his own destructive devices. The 'government of God' was hands off and from time to time He inspired prophets to warn, to call to repentance. Usually His message was rejected, with awesome consequence as mankind reaped the fruit of disregard for God's perfect guidance.

So by the time of Jesus both government and religion were in the hands of the people. God did not intervene personally. For some four centuries there had been no 'word from the Lord'. When the time was ripe, however, God stepped in by the birth of His Son, Jesus.

He intervened in visible power when 'the Word became flesh', and when Jesus was resurrected - and some fifty days after his resurrection.

The Church

At this latter intervention - at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2) - God made His Spirit available to mankind. Upon repentance, acceptance of the shed blood of Jesus for forgiveness of our sin and following baptism the Holy Spirit could dwell within individuals (Acts 2:38).

That indwelling Spirit is a channel for the power of God's grace to transform lives - to enable us to take on the very character of God, to move us to willingly submit to His instruction, His *Torah*. God's influence, His governance, is thus embedded in the mind of each Christian (I John 2:27). As he is the Head of the Church it is to Christ we submit - directly and not through any intermediary. Each of us is responsible to him for our behaviour and for our beliefs.

The church of God is made up of individual 'families' of Christian brethren. Each such family is directly responsible to Jesus Christ. As in any sound family there has to be order. At

home there's the father and the mother who lay down the guidelines for that family. In the local churches there are overseers and deacons to serve the 'family' - both carefully selected according to inspired criteria (I Timothy 3, Titus 1 - and Matthew 20:20-28).

Jesus Directly Involved

Within each assembly there is an array of Christ-given spiritual gifts which when integrated can perform the work Jesus has for that assembly at that time. The leadership is charged to develop, encourage and use those gifts for works of service, the nature of which is determined by the gifts Christ has there bestowed (Ephesians 4:12).

Jesus is directly involved with these local assemblies. An example is how he intervened in the welfare of the 'seven churches of Asia' (Revelation 2, 3). He knew specifically the problems and the challenges faced by each independent assembly. And he dealt with each individually, even to knowing the names of individual brethren, good and bad. He had the authority to 'close down' an assembly (*ch* 2:5, 3:16).

Each assembly, through prayer and fasting, sought Christ's direction without recourse to a central authority. The assemblies in Antioch are an example (Acts 13:1-4). Paul, too, while expressing his need to confer with others, asserted his independence from Jerusalem (Galatians 1:15-20).

In sum, God has a 'hands off' policy regarding secular government reserving the right to intervene to bring about His overall purpose. Christians are to submit - but not blindly - to the devolved authority of secular government (*cp* Romans 13:1-5), excepting only when it is contrary to God's instructions (Acts 5:29). Remarks the apostle Paul '*law is for the lawbreaker*'.

Within the local assembly there are 'leaders' [*KJV* 'them that rule over you'], to whom we voluntarily submit. ['Obey': *Gk peitho* = be persuaded]. "The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion" (Vine: *Expository Dictionary*). Each individual Christian and each local assembly leader - who '*must give account*' (Hebrews 13:17) - is responsible directly to Jesus Christ for personal behaviour, for beliefs - and for an orderly assembly.

Jesus Christ is Head of his church, given this responsibility by our Father who has '*given all judgment to the Son*' (John 5:22). He has given us the guidance we need through the writings of the Scriptures. And he will when necessary intervene personally to protect his 'precious jewel', the church.

Jesus actively governs His church - when necessary by-passing any form of humanly-devised system of governance.

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