

God's Umbrella of Authority

By Warren Zehrung - December 10, 2011

The title of today's sermon is "God's Umbrella of Authority."

I picked that title, brethren, because I want to picture a place where we are under God's authority; and it is a place that we want to be.

Brethren, let us begin with a basic premise of our faith.

God rules the universe.

There is no place where God is not in charge, in authority, or where God is not ruling. There is no place that is not under **God's Umbrella of Authority**.

Isaiah 40:21-22 Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

We can see God's authority going to the entire universe.

Isaiah 40:22 It is he that sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that *stretches out the heavens* as a curtain, and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in:

Isaiah 40:23 That brings the princes to nothing; he makes the judges of the earth as vanity.

God rules over all, brethren; and if we can keep that in our mind we would be able to understand some of the questions that come up and plague us.

If we believe this basic truth that God rules the universe, it will help us to discern when attacks come against our faith. When there are hard-to-answer questions, let us remember that God rules.

We have had a church culture that has basically said: "It is okay for a minister to go outside the bounds of normalcy – because, after all – he is in charge, and he has the authority to take extraordinary measures. We have to give him some leeway." Nobody says that he has license to sin; but brethren, let us call a spade a spade.

In the Old Testament there was a priesthood that stood between the people of Israel and God.

Brethren, a church minister is different from a priest. The minister does not stand between the member and God.

The Catholics have priests, and they refer to him as an "*alter dei*" – meaning 'Another God' – he stands in place of God - between man and God. Let us not have that kind of thinking come into the Church of God.

We have heard so much about church government, and many are confused.

Brethren, I know that we all, ostensibly, supposedly, want to obey God. The problem arises when we do not know who it is that is speaking for God.

We should never rest assured that some man or some group is doing our thinking for us.

There are a lot of examples that we can fall back on. Go back to Diotrephes in III John. Or you can go back to the Worldwide Church of God.

There are many examples where people looked to men, looked to organizations, and they called it "the church." But that man, or that organization took everybody off the deep end – taking many church people down with it.

Answer this question: Where does authority originate? There is no place that is not under **God's Umbrella of Authority**.

David put it like this:

Psalms 139:6-10 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

God's umbrella of authority extends throughout the universe. There is no place that is not under God's umbrella of authority. That is a truism. However, history is replete with examples of those who would usurp God's authority. Satan was the first to attempt to do so:

Isaiah 14:13 -14 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

Some translations say, "*I will be the most High.*" Satan intended to bump God off His Throne.

And Satan has been tempting men ever since to do the same – to appropriate to themselves that which belongs to God alone.

Anytime we infringe upon any of God's laws, statutes, judgments, or His perfect way, we have stepped out from beneath His protection, approval and godly government – and we are not acting on His behalf, no matter how important and no matter how highly esteemed we might think ourselves to be.

Over the years there has been a great deal of confusion over the difference between the Government of God and so-called "church government."

The difficulty arises primarily because of a misuse of the word, "church." The Church of God, as we see it in the scriptures, is not a physical organization or corporation; but the Church of God is a spiritual entity. The Church of God is the called-out body of true believers – the Body of Christ.

Corporate organizations are governed by men, whereas the Church of God answers directly to Jesus Christ - the Head of the Church.

Jesus Christ is the Head of the church – the “church” being each and every individual – not some corporate organization ruled by men. We have to keep that straight in our mind.

I have hesitated to use the word “church” a great deal because people will think “Headquarters” or “Pasadena.” When you think “church,” think *you!* Think the brethren that you sit beside at Sabbath services. That is why I use the word “brethren” more than I do “church.”

In the second half of the last century, the gospel, as a witness and a warning, went to the world with great power, and we are all aware of the history. Many people repented, were converted and learned the true doctrines of Jesus Christ.

But, at the same time, many brethren suffered to one degree or another from the heavy hand of wrong organizational government. It finally came to a head.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrestled with the subject of authority, rule, or government within the corporate body of the church organization.

In 1939, Mr. Armstrong came to understand that hierarchical – or some would say, pyramidal, from the top down – government was *not* what Christ intended for the church organization.

But, as the church grew and grew, church structure began to change. It was the Radio Church of God, and then it was the Worldwide Church of God. The way things ran in the office and among the ministry began to change.

There were so many constraints on the corporate church organization and its many departments and its offices. There was the Fleet Program, there was Printing, there was Ministerial Services, there was Publishing and Mailings and Ambassador College; and all of these different offices and congregations in major cities that a structure began to emerge where people had a boss. Ordinations came in and people were saying “I am over you” and confusion set in between God’s Government, and the day-to-day running-the-office kind of government. This structure began to emerge that was not unlike the military version of ranking men, generals all of the way down to privates. And the Roman Catholic’s hierarchical form of offices, with the Pope at the top, you come down to the cardinals and all of the way down to the parish priest.

Brethren were taught to look to a corporate headquarters, and to be loyal to the man at the top. You can put a little red flag there because things are starting to go wrong; something is getting its foot in the door that ought not to be. The honor, the worship and the glory goes to God; and it should not go to the minister or to his superior, or all the way to the man at the top.

Our brethren were taught to check with a minister for virtually everything. I do not know where the impetus for that came from; but there were men that were very glad to get their hands on that kind of power and authority and to rule at a whim.

Sadly, many brethren relinquished their moral responsibilities in lieu of a minister making their decisions for them. The minister ruled their lives, and made big decisions in their lives.

Some of the brethren were taught to stay in the church (meaning the corporate organization) because there was “no salvation outside of the Worldwide Church of God.” People were having difficulty, especially when the ministry was not always true to God’s Word. Some ministers would

lie, cheat, fudge; some of them would have attitudes. There were problems that put a lot of pressure on the brethren.

Ministers made decisions in families' lives that should only have been made by the head of the family. I was personally involved where another minister of the Worldwide Church of God absolutely forbade a member from moving to another town where he had been offered a much better job to support his family. Ministers had to check with Pasadena for the most mundane local matters.

We must understand, brethren, that members cannot, and will not, grow spiritually when a corporation or a minister makes all of their decisions for them. Making decisions is a part of growing up spiritually.

Hebrews 5:13 For every one that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

Paul here is talking about the very straight-forward things, like going to church on the Sabbath, clean and unclean foods, the Ten Commandments, etc. He is calling those kinds of things "milk." There are many people in the world that can quote the Ten Commandments. That is not wrong; but they are basic. A baby must have milk; but we should not stay babies.

Hebrews 5:14 But strong [*spiritual*] meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

We should all be growing up into the stature and the fullness and the perfection of Christ.

We have to learn to make decisions for ourselves so that we can tell good from evil.

Someone will say – "Aren't we supposed to be submissive to those who have the rule over us?" The answer is yes; but God and His principles overrule all of man's authority.

Acts 5:29 ... We ought to obey God rather than men.

Any time there is the slightest conflict between what God says to do and then a man wants to come along and give you a dispensation – or he will say, "Just this once" or "God will look the other way for five minutes," he has stepped out from under **God's authority**. He is not speaking for God and he is not doing the will of God – nor serving the brethren.

When the apostasy came in full force after the death of Herbert W. Armstrong, many of the brethren had great difficulty deciding what to do. Why? It was because they had not learned to make hard spiritual decisions for themselves. They said things like. "God put me in this church; I had better stay here."

The ministry was wrong to teach people to think that way. And the brethren were wrong for allowing the ministry to usurp their God-given responsibility to have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

As a result, many brethren made the terrible mistake of being loyal to a man or to an organization. They were loyal to the Worldwide Church of God by accepting its heresies, and discarding their devotion to God's truth. That was a terrible thing and many of us lost many friends.

Situations come up where a favorite man – somebody the people love dearly – begins to let down and go off track. All ministers are human and they *can* go off track. They are sheep and they are our brothers. We have to help them too. We *are* our brother's keeper. When a minister goes off course we are to help them, just like when our brother goes off course. But what some people will do when a minister begins to stray – they will contort their minds in order to justify a man's shortcomings and sins. They will say to themselves, "God set this man up and gave him this office. Who am I to speak against God? God will have to remove him." You might go back and try to figure out where the fallacy is in there. The fallacy is that we are not obeying God. God says, "Do not sin, do not lie, do not cheat, do not hurt others, and do not defame the name of other people."

How many people are still in the Worldwide Church of God, or whatever the new name of that worldly organization is today, with all of its heresy – the Trinity..., you do not have to keep the Commandments..., you worship on Sunday..., you do not keep the Feasts of God, etc. What are the former brethren doing? They are waiting on God to do something about it? They say that God put them in this church and God will fix it. No! We saw the answer to that in Hebrews 5. We need to know how to make a decision between good and evil. When false doctrine, false practice, lying and cheating abound, it is no longer the Church of God. Deciding when it is no longer the Church of God, deciding when a man is sinning, and when it is time to separate yourself from him because he will not listen to his brothers, even if they go to him with Matthew 18:15. Even if they set aside their gift as it says in Matthew 5:24, before they go to church services; they try to reconcile and they try to address the problem; and he *still* will not hearken to God's directions. There comes a time, and this is to each one of us to decide, when do we say, "Enough is enough"?

Our brethren that were in Worldwide did not know how to remain under **God's umbrella of authority**. They did not realize when they were out from under it. They were not doing the will of God and keeping His Law; but they thought, "God rules." God is *not* ruling in the hearts of men who disobey Him. God does *not* hear the prayers of sinners. Some people say that God hears *all* prayers. Brethren, do a Bible study on that and find out what prayer God hears and responds to (**1 John 3:22**).

So we see it brethren – even today – those who are allowing, permitting, going along with sin in the church. Have we not learned our lesson?

Some corporate church organizations have fallen back into the same idolatrous trap of putting loyalty to men and organizations ahead of **loyalty to God**.

The answer is not to love an organization, but to love God and to love one another.

Many brethren have suffered abuse and neglect at the hand of a hireling minister causing them to be less inclined to trust any other minister. It has deleterious effects when a minister cheats, steals, and breaks God's Law. Even today members are still hurt, even angry, bitter, and resentful at the Church of God, because of the treatment that they and their families suffered at the hands of hard ministers – maybe even *evil* ministers.

Brethren were taught incorrectly that the ministry could rule over their lives and that, if the minister made a mistake, it really was not a mistake – because God would set it right.

One minister that I knew preached that he could do 'whatever he wanted' because he was the Pastor. He thought that he had carte-blanche from God to do whatever he wanted to do. I cannot imagine how he came to that; but he was taught that when you get to be Pastor, then you do what info@sabbathcog.net

you want to do; you are above the law and you are in place of God. He believed that he could literally do whatever he wanted!

Too many ministers taught that their every action – good or bad – was sanctioned by God's Government. Brethren, please understand this: No minister is ever above God's law!

Whenever a minister sins, then he is no longer under **God's umbrella of authority**. God's Government does not extend beyond His law – into lawlessness and into sin. God's Government begins with God the Father and it flows through Jesus Christ and extends to every member of the entire Body of the Church of God, but *not* through any minister. It does *not* flow through a minister to you – not even if that man claims to have received the baton or mantle of authority, and subsequently thinks that he rules over the brethren of the church, in God's stead. There are people that think that! Many ministers have seen themselves in that position.

Many brethren have been led to believe that organizational "church government" is merely an extension of "God's Government," exercised and administered by the ministry. That is not the case. [Godly Authority comes from God the Father, to Jesus Christ – directly to the Church brethren.] Authority does *not* come from God the Father, to Jesus Christ, to a Pastor General to the Head of the Church Administration, to your local minister, and then to you. That is *not* the way God's authority works. God has set His Law and it is spiritual and goes beyond the physical. It cannot be changed by man; it cannot be usurped by man. Church government, the way that you run the offices, who is in charge of the Xerox machine; these do not fall under the purview of God's Government. That is the way that you run the office; but God's Law is eternal. In the past, there have been many ministers who abused the brethren in this way. That is why some of the brethren are still angry; and that is why some of them are still hurt. Those ministers were hard taskmasters who demanded obedience to themselves. Brethren were taught that their salvation was at stake if they did not yield to every whim of the pastor, because he represented the Government of God on earth. That was a false teaching.

Here is the problem that we ran into. There was a time when there was a minister every hundred miles, in every town of any size across the nation, across Canada and many other places around the world. One of them had a church and he knew where the boundaries were of his church area. There was a secretary on the fourth floor in Pasadena who knew, if a call came in, which Pastor to send it to; because the lines of demarcation were very clearly drawn on the map.

Now and then, as will happen, there is a sin or a problem that arises in the congregation. Sometimes it was the minister who was at fault, and the minister was breaking God's Law severely. There was adultery, child abuse, theft – big violations of God's Law. Other ministers tacitly approved of and even supported that ungodly ministerial behavior by turning a blind eye to the evil that was being perpetrated on innocent brethren.

Does God allow us to turn a blind eye when we know that there is trouble going on? Does God allow a minister to turn a blind eye? Does God allow *anyone* to turn a blind eye to violations of God's Law?

Leviticus 5:1 And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then **he shall bear his iniquity**.

That is saying that, if the minister in area A knows about the sin in area B, and he says, "I don't want to get involved; I want to stay out of trouble; I don't need another problem; I'll put it in God's

hands; It didn't happen in my church area"... God says that if you know about a terrible sin; if you have seen it; if you have heard of it; if you have known about it... then God says that you *are* involved. As your brother's keeper, if you do not come to his aid, you are held as guilty in God's eyes as the perpetrator of the sin.

We all know that the sinner bears his iniquity; but the person that will not do anything about it also **bears the iniquity**. Brethren, how many scriptures are there like this? These are indictments on us in the Church of God that wink at, close our eyes, turn our back on sin among the ministry.

When I was attending a ministerial conference in the Global Church of God in San Diego, years ago, the entire ministry was instructed by the head of Church Administration to "distance ourselves from child molestation cases." We were told not to get involved in any of them that we became aware of.

Obviously, the church leadership was more than willing to condone sin and corruption rather than *lay their lives down*. "If you do not utter it you will bear the iniquity," God says.

Brethren, if there was ever a time to lay your life down – in a child molestation case, that would be the time.

It never dawned on that "high ranking minister" that, quite possibly, God would let a minister find out about a travesty like that for the very purpose that someone could come to the aid of the children being abused.

It is making big news and it seems to be going on all over the place and has been going on for the last century. The Catholic Church has been terribly guilty of it [pedophilia], and now it seems to be widespread in the sports arena; but it should *not* be in the Church of God – closing your eyes to sodomy, child molestation, and things like that. And it was done in the Church of God! God says that, if you know about it and you do not do something about it, if you do not utter it, you bear the iniquity.

It is the same today. If we see a minister sinning, hurting someone's reputation, lying, and you do not do anything about it but you close your eyes and say, "God put him in that position," brethren, you do not understand the law of God and you do not understand the **umbrella of God's authority**. The minister has stepped out from under God's authority when he breaks God's Law.

What does God think when a minister tells you to distance yourself from a child molestation case?

The minister was simply doing what he thought was expedient, but that is not the right criterion is it? Expediency and avoiding problems is *not* the decisive factor in God's eyes. Let me tell you the result if you want to know what happened. It is just like Worldwide, it is gone – it is just like Solomon said, "It is all vanity and it is blown away in the wind." The minister is gone and the church organization is gone. God and His principles did not rule in their lives! They were out from under the **umbrella of God's authority**.

God rules His Creation.

Let us look at a couple of examples, starting with Adam and Eve. People will say, "Oh no! Here we are going back to the two trees; going back to the beginning; I have heard it before." God put it there for an important reason. Adam and Eve were created and placed in the Garden of Eden.

They were taught and instructed by their Creator God – Jesus Christ. They knew Who made them and they knew Who had authority over their lives.

Genesis 1:26-27 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Genesis 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eat thereof thou shalt surely die.

If you eat of that tree then you have stepped out from under the **umbrella of God's authority**. Adam and Eve were created by God to be ruled by God. Adam did not hearken to God, and he would not allow himself to be ruled by God.

Genesis 3:17, 23 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

Just like Worldwide is no more; just like this man [Head of Church Administration] is no more; just like the Church organizations were that were out from under the **umbrella of God's authority** are no more; so Adam and Eve were *no more* in the garden:

Genesis 3:24 So He drove out the man;

He drove him out because he did not follow Jesus Christ; and God did not rule in his life.

There are a lot of other examples. The population of the earth grew very large; but were those people ruled by God? No!

Genesis 6:4 ... daughters of men, and they bear children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

This is the culture right before the flood. These men had positions and they had authority. Brethren, do a word search on "men of renown." They had authority over other men and they were ruling the lives of other men. There was fundamental slavery involved. So what happened? God brought the flood and wiped out all in whose lives He did not rule.

But because Satan was active, it was not very long after the flood that Nimrod came on the scene. Are you seeing a pattern here, brethren, with this vanity and this blowing away? If God does not rule in the lives of the men, they are gone!

Genesis 10:8 ...Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. [*ruling the lives of men*]

Genesis 10:9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD [*instead of God; in place, of God*]: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.

God is serious about being recognized as the Ruler in our lives. Moses was a good man and he was used mightily by God. But there was one time – one momentary act of unbelief – when Moses

whacked the stone instead of speaking to it. He did not believe what God said and he was not following Christ. That kept him from entering the Promised Land... and that is an example and a warning to us!

God's authority extends to men, and to the whole universe.

Daniel 4:25 That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will.

Brethren, have we learned that lesson? Or do we, even in the Church of God, allow men to come in and break the rules of God, come out from under **His umbrella of authority** while they do their ministerial jobs.

The other example that I wanted to touch on is in I Kings 8:

I Kings 8:60 That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else.

God's authority extends everywhere. In the book of Ezekiel it says at least seventy times, "I am the LORD!" This is a good Bible study, if you want to go and mark your Bible. I have every one of them marked in my Bible. How long is it going to take for people to realize "I am the LORD" [not anybody else!]. Somebody else is not; and somebody else does not have His authority. They cannot change what He has set in eternity; in spirit.

Ezekiel 7:9 And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the LORD that smites.

God has the power to act. If we violate God, He will not spare us and He will not be pitiful. He will not say, "He has been a minister that I put in office so long ago and he is just slipping up and getting old; I will give him some leeway and it will be okay if he starts lying, and dividing the flock." No! God does not say that.

Brethren, we ought to have a big "Danger" sign around scriptures like that. God rules – not men. We have to get back to the Truth of God. There is no man between a Church member and Jesus Christ. Our loyalty is to Jesus Christ and His Father. Anything less constitutes idolatry. That is putting something else in the place of God. Jesus is our Advocate... *"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (1 John 2:1). Jesus is our Mediator:

"There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."
(1 Timothy 2:5)

There is only one mediator between God and men. Not a Priest; not a minister; but Jesus Christ. Does the church of God know that He is the only thing between us and God?

We will speak in a minute about Jesus Christ reconciling us to God.

The Jews are fond of saying that it was Moses who led the Israelites out of Egypt – but we understand that, in actuality, it was Jesus Christ who led Israel out of Egypt. Is Jesus Christ ruling

in our lives? Is Jesus Christ ruling us? Or do we allow someone else to be in Christ's stead and lead us astray?

Exodus 13:21 And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night:

There is Jesus Christ! He is the God of the Old Testament and He is leading them; He is leading the way by the pillar of fire to give them light.

1Corinthians 10:4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

These are Paul's' words; not mine. Where does spiritual food arise? It was from Jesus Christ. He is the spiritual food.

Israel was supposed to be led by Jesus Christ, and they were supposed to follow Christ. The umbrella of protection, the **umbrella of authority** was over them when they were led by Jesus Christ and when they followed the laws of God. But what happened? Just like all of the other examples that we see, it seems like man is prone to do this. Israel sinned and they broke the Sabbath and they went into idolatry. When you think of idolatry, do not just think of a stick in the mud, a carved statue or a Christmas tree. Think of something 'in place of God.' "We will not have God rule over us; we have this other thing we bow before." Idolatry is replacing God and is not having **God's umbrella of authority** over us.

You know the story. They went into bitter and cruel captivity. Everything that they worked for, their schools, their homes, their synagogues, their land, their animals and flocks – all gone because they rejected God. You would think that Judah would have learned, but they did the exact same thing as Israel did! Ditto – Sabbath-breaking and idolatry. They too went into captivity. They said, "The temple, the temple, we have the temple to look to." (**Jeremiah 7:4**) No, we do not look to a corporation or a building; it is God's authority ruling in our lives day and night and always.

God speaks and no man can come between us and God. The Government of God is **His umbrella of authority, is the rule of God in our lives as God's Holy Spirit leads us**. Nothing or no one can supersede that direct relationship we have with God.

Is there a proper place for the ministry of Jesus Christ? The answer is absolutely, Yes! God ordained the ministry and there are a lot of scriptures showing the ministry. There are apostles, there are pastors, there are teachers, and healers. There are lots of gifts that God gives. The apostle Paul said that the work of a minister in the Church is to serve the brethren in Godly love and to feed, nourish, protect, and care for the flock of God. In John 21, Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my lambs, Feed my sheep" – three times.

People come along and they have not heard the Word, and they have not repented. There is a job for the ministry.

The very last time that Paul saw the elders of Ephesus, he admonished them concerning their responsibility to faithfully serve God and the brethren – not to rule over them and draw them away after themselves (**Acts 20:30**).

Acts 20:28a "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you *overseers*...."

Ministers read that and they say that they get to tell people where to get off, and "I get to tell them what to do." That word [*overseers*] means "guardians." Think of a shepherd leading his sheep to find good food and to protect them and watch out for them.

Acts 20:28b to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with His own blood."

There is a need for the ministers of Jesus Christ who preach and teach the Truth... for those who counsel according to the Word of God and getting people to do the things that He wants them to do. We need ministers to counsel people to have godly marriages, and we need ministers to bury those in the faith. We need ministers to visit the sick and to anoint with oil. There is a big job to facilitate the ministry of reconciliation. Brethren, when we see a minister going astray, we must not go, "Boo! Hiss! Flee, run, don't even look in your rear view mirror before you leave!" No, he is our brother, and we are to turn him around. We can see this in Galatians 6:1-2, and James 5:20. We are to turn him around from the error of his ways. Ministers err and make mistakes just like everybody else does. A job of the ministry is to facilitate reconciliation.

There is another very important job of the ministry, and that is to go after those who have gone astray. Jesus Christ taught it. We cannot say, "It doesn't work; once they have a mind to run they will run." God says to leave the ninety-nine that are secure, and to go after the one that has gone astray. Lay your life down bringing them back, or die trying. We need the ministry for these things and we need the ministry for the laying on of hands and baptizing those who God calls. Then there is the administration for the Feasts and weekly Sabbath services. The ministry does this; but everybody knows that the minister works a two hour week – and has the rest of the week off! 😊 There is a need for the ministry!

The apostle Peter warned the ministers not to use coercion or constraint in their teaching and care of the flock. Here are some very good instructions to the ministry:

1 Peter 5:2a Feed the flock of God which is among you,

What do you feed them? Good food. What God said. Not our own words. Not coming out from under the authority of God's protection.

1 Peter 5:2b taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

1 Peter 5:3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

A minister is to be an example. If the brethren are not supposed to lie, cheat and steal, the minister should not lie, cheat and steal!

We are to follow a minister's faith only as it complements and corresponds with the teachings of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). This is where Paul says, "Follow me... not when I am gripped or when I am having an off day; No. Follow me when I am following Jesus Christ. Follow me as I follow Jesus Christ. If you see me laying my life down as Jesus Christ did, you emulate that!"

But, the minister is *not* the Government of God. We, the people of God, live by and are bound by the rules of the Kingdom of God – even right now as church-goers, as brethren, as converted members of the Body of Christ. We are to be building an intimate relationship with God. There is nothing more important.

Jesus Christ has made it possible by His death. We have been reconciled to the Father. We needed to be reconciled, because we too at one time had been out from under **that umbrella of authority**, being sinners of this world. Our sins had separated us from God. But Jesus Christ, by His death, has reconciled us and made us one with the Father. The door is always open for His children and we can always go to the Father now because Jesus Christ has reconciled us to the Father. We just saw where Paul says that this is the job of the ministry also. Reconciliation between brethren, and not saying, “They can go their way! They are looking for something that is flashy or for something that is fun.” When a minister drives people away, he cannot blame it on them, saying that they are looking for something else. No, he had better examine his own conscience, or he will find himself in a place where there is gnashing of teeth. There is no excuse for not reconciling the brethren. That is a minister’s job, and it goes with the territory.

Our loyalty is to Jesus Christ and His Father. Anything less constitutes idolatry. It is tough being a Christian. It is not an easy thing.

A request was made of Jesus by a couple of His disciples. They were carnal and they were not yet led by God’s Holy Spirit when this happened. The disciples did not have God’s Holy Spirit until after Christ died. The request was from one of the mothers: “Grant that the two sons of Zebedee may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left, in Thy Kingdom.” Here is what happens:

Luke 22:24-25 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. [*Men seek the power and the Rule*] And [*Jesus*] said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them [*Rule over them*]; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

All those who claim to represent the Government of God and claim to be acting with God’s authority, make this same mistake.

“We speak for God,” is the attitude they have, “I am between you and God. I know a lot more than you. Listen to me as I speak eloquently and I write eloquently. I have been around for a long time and I have a lot of people looking up to me.” Jesus said that was wrong. That is not how a minister is to be, not a Disciples of Christ, or anybody.

Luke 22:26 But ye *shall* not *be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

That goes against human nature doesn’t it? The Church of God is a small flock, and God compares us to sheep:

Psalms 95:6-7 O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today if ye will hear his voice,

You may recognize the Musical version:

O come and let us worship Him; Let us bow down withal;
And on our knees before the Lord our Maker let us fall.
Because He only is our God and we His people are...
And of His pasture we are sheep in His almighty care."

God speaks of us as sheep, and we need God's authority in our lives. We need His guidance and we need Him to pastor us. A minister, instead of usurping the authority of God, should serve as a servant, a slave, a waiter, a nurse, a janitor, an attendant, a minion or subordinate – not seeking the glory.

Matthew 23:10-11 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, *even* Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

If you want to be the great one, then be the servant!

Did Jesus practice what He taught? Was Jesus the greatest among them? Absolutely, Yes! Was He their servant? Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and the Chief Shepherd. The greatest among us became the servant of all. He became the Lamb of God who lay down His life. He was one of the sheep; He was the Lamb of God. He lay down His life for every one of us. He was a perfect servant.

Any time that anyone deviates one iota from God's true and clear teachings, he has removed himself from **God's Umbrella of Authority**.

Ministers are sheep too. Ministers especially are to lay their lives down for the brethren.

Our submission to the will of God places us under His Government. That is where we want to be.

So the questions come up, and I am going to allow each and every one of you to answer them:

Should church organizations be administered by "one man rule?"

Should church organizations be administered by collegiate agreement?

Should church organizations be administered by a hierarchy of men?

Which is God's preferred or chosen way?

The answer is that there is no formula or structure or organizational model that can guarantee or dictate godliness, morality, or righteousness. We are human beings. No corporate church organizational system will long endure that does not recognize **God's umbrella of authority** and His supremacy in the realm of men. When we remain under God's umbrella of authority – demanded by His Law and commands – we can be sure that we are acting on His behalf.

However, Let us close with this thought....

Every time man violates any of God's laws, statutes, judgments or perfect way, he has stepped out from beneath **God's umbrella of authority**, out from underneath His protection, and out from underneath God's approval and His godly government.

WD/pp/sl