

# The God Family, the Gospel and Church Governance

## Introduction

A discussion of God and the God family, the gospel and Church governance provides clarity as to what God has, is and will accomplish in the affairs of human beings in this age. It provides an overview of the interplay between these three subjects, how they interact and how the role of each can be properly understood. It also provides a perspective by which we can begin to understand the current scattering of the spiritual body of Christ, the limitations of physical Church structure, the impact of the gospel message and the process of transformation of humans into the spiritual family of God.

The God family provides an appropriate basis to begin the discussion. The Bible shows us that the God family currently consists of God the Father and Jesus Christ and that the family of God will expand to include spiritually begotten sons of God. The gospel conveys God's intent and plan for bringing many sons to glory. The timing of this process is revealed through the Holy Days and the resurrections – Christ first, the Church (spiritual body of Christ) second, then the rest of mankind in their order.

The gospel can be seen to have a narrow and a broad application. The narrow application is focused on the Church now, to prepare a people to have a spiritual connection to God the Father through Jesus Christ and thereby function within the family model of governance. The broader application is focused on mankind in general, in a manner and at a time determined by God. There will have been a preaching of the gospel to all the world as a witness by the time Jesus Christ returns. Though we don't know all the specifics of that proclamation, it is clear that the individual members of the body of Christ (the spiritual organism) must be living examples of the gospel message. Hence our emphasis on the more personal, narrow application, which involves the hard work of individual change and conversion, thereby providing a crucial foundation for the broader application.

Judging from some of the negative results, it seems apparent that Church governance, in terms of physical structure and organization, has been very often overemphasized and misunderstood. The unbalanced focus on physical Church structure has in some ways hindered the spiritual development of individual members of the body. There certainly is a proper physical structure to the Church, the *spiritual organism*, and that is to facilitate physical administration of temporal affairs and provide leadership. But the *physical organization* is inherently limited because it is physical. While the organization fundamentally exists to be a spiritual incubator, providing spiritual food for growth, the decision to purposely pursue that spiritual growth and the hard work involved in doing so sits squarely on the shoulders of the individual members.

The Church's physical organization cannot accomplish this process, although it can guide members in their spiritual growth. The overemphasis and overreliance on the Church's physical organization has contributed to the current schisms, the varieties of governance structures and the scattering of the flock. Some of the results have been that members have alternated between available organizational options or they have "retired" and checked out of the system. We should be honest and admit that the physical organizations of the Church have often failed to consistently provide for and encourage the spiritual growth of the *spiritual organism* - the Church of God.

The conference in Avila, California in January 2014, which saw the beginning of the *Church of God, the Father's Call*, was an attempt to address some of these failures. We have been striving to repent of mistakes and commit to changing the organizational structure of the Church so that it would represent the God family model of governance. The aim is to lead to oneness of mind and to assist in the work of the Church.

## **God and the God Family**

### Summary

The God family embodies the nature of and relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ, thereby providing the ideal model for governance within the spiritual organism. The family model explains how God's governance should function in the affairs of man at this time and is by definition spiritual. Fellowship emanates from an individual's relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ and extends outward to other members of the spiritual organism. The Church functions as a nursery and maternal training ground for its children to grow to full spiritual maturity<sup>1</sup>. This is a goal which God's people should be working toward for the entirety of their natural lives.

### Discussion

Scripture reveals that God is a family and this understanding has grown over time. What previous eras of the Church knew about the God family is not clear, but it would seem that greater understanding has been provided to those now living in the "end time". We now have a better understanding of the nature of the God family, how God the Father and Jesus Christ interact and govern as one<sup>2</sup> and the process by which human beings can develop a spiritual relationship with their Father and become part of the God family<sup>3</sup>.

The nature of God the Father is expressed in His desire to reconcile the entire world to Himself. Christ's death, and the justification coming from His perfect sacrifice, healed

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-23

<sup>2</sup> John 17:11, 21-23; Galatians 3:28-29

<sup>3</sup> John 3:13, 15-16; 1 John 3:1-2

the separation between mankind and God, providing the opportunity for humans to become a new creation and take on the very nature of God the Father<sup>4</sup>. The relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father is recorded in the gospel accounts of Christ's physical life. Governance in the heavenly realm is clearly referenced through the words Christ spoke<sup>5</sup> and the fact that He came to do the will of His Father<sup>6</sup>. This is a spiritual model of governance available to those called now to be part of the spiritual organism – the body of Christ. John characterizes this relationship as fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, extending outward to other members of the spiritual organism<sup>7</sup>.

The understanding of the family model of governance provides insight into not only how the God family functions in the heavenly realm, but more importantly how the family nature of God can be replicated in the minds and hearts of human beings. This includes how God's governance should function in the temporal affairs of man at this time<sup>8</sup>.

Physical families should model the form of governance already in place in the God family. It describes how the God family thinks, how the Father and the Son relate to one another<sup>9</sup> and how God governs in the Kingdom of God and in His spiritual body, the Church<sup>10</sup>. It also conveys His will and purpose in preparing spiritually begotten children to one day inherit eternal life as spirit beings<sup>11</sup>. The spiritual organism, the Church, is the mother of those so begotten – to teach, instruct, and correct those under its care such that they grow in grace and knowledge toward spiritual maturity<sup>12</sup> and present the members of the body in the image of Jesus Christ<sup>13</sup>. Functioning at this level prepares a person to rule with Jesus Christ as a member of the God family. For this to occur, a person must individually choose to engage in a spiritual development process that is a difficult, life-long endeavor requiring the death of the old man and the continual emergence of the new man, thereby taking on the mind of God. This will lead to complete agreement and oneness of mind as shared by God the Father and Jesus Christ.

It is only at this level that meaningful spiritual fellowship occurs, as clearly stated in 1 John<sup>14</sup>. Fellowship involves the meeting of spiritual minds and communing at a level that emanates from an individual's personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. From that basis there is unity, mutual understanding and agreement at the spiritual level. This is *not* a physical organizational role, although those at this level are

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

<sup>5</sup> John 8:28-29; John 12:49-50; John 14:10

<sup>6</sup> Luke 22:42; John 5:30-31; John 6:39-40; Hebrews 10:7-9

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 1:3

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 13:13-15; Matthew 18:2-5; Mark 10:14-15; Luke 18:16-17; Luke 22:24-27; Acts 15:1-29

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 40:7-8

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2

<sup>11</sup> 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 4:11-13

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 5:27

<sup>14</sup> 1 John 1:3

always organized. Operating at this level provides insight and spiritual discernment not available to the natural human mind<sup>15</sup>. The ministry can help lead the spiritually minded to greater understanding and maturity in preparation for their future responsibilities in the family of God<sup>16</sup>.

This level of spiritual maturity is an individual pursuit, occurring within the Church through instruction from those ordained for the task and based on the doctrines established by Christ through the apostles<sup>17</sup>. The Church functions as a nursery and maternal training ground for its children to grow to full spiritual maturity. The maturation process varies with each child, as all parents know. The outcome of this process rests upon the child, although the family and instruction aid greatly in the child's success. A child must experience setbacks, failure and a "testing of their mettle", so to speak. The point of this is that each child is to develop a personal reliance upon, and relationship with, its parents while it navigates life's turbulence and accepts accountability to change, grow and meet the standard set for them. The spiritual analogy is not hard to grasp. The Church provides instruction, training and direction, but always with the intent to focus the membership on their personal responsibilities toward God and develop the personal, intimate family relationship He desires.

This is an important way in which God's people can and should be growing. However, it is important to understand that the audience is mixed and realize that members of the body are in different places, or stages, in their personal spiritual journeys. There *should* be a constant movement from the physical to the spiritual level. This occurs with certain individuals, with some partially making the transition and others never making the move, being content to remain "members" of a physical organization(s) and not engage in the arduous journey required for spiritual maturity and developing an abiding relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ<sup>18</sup>.

## **The Gospel**

### Summary

The gospel is a broad, compelling message of hope for mankind. It is "good news" because of its impact on the lives of every human being throughout history, separated from God at the Garden of Eden. The gospel message, established "before the foundation of the world"<sup>19</sup> and "before time began"<sup>20</sup>, has its foundation in Jesus Christ, through whom only the separation could be healed, allowing mankind to be reconciled to the Father. The gospel message is fulfilled in stages, or time periods, pictured by the

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:14

<sup>16</sup> Ephesians 4:11-13

<sup>17</sup> Acts 2:42

<sup>18</sup> John 15:4-5,10; 1 John 2:6,24; 1 John 3:24

<sup>19</sup> 1 Peter 1:18-25

<sup>20</sup> 2 Timothy 1:9

Holy Days and established by God in His plan for all mankind. Initially, the gospel is fulfilled in a narrow sense through those God the Father calls in the current age, with its most broad application being fulfilled in the latter stage of God's plan of salvation. The gospel reveals God's will for mankind and conveys His great love for His creation. It also illuminates God's governance in His spiritual body, in the present age and in the age to come, when Jesus Christ establishes His Kingdom on the earth to rule all nations. The gospel carries with it the responsibility for those hearing and accepting it, to also obey it and live by its requirements.

### Discussion

Understanding the comprehensiveness of the gospel can clarify many things. It is the vehicle by which God is conveying His nature, purpose and plan for mankind. The gospel also explains how the transition occurs between the Church and the God family. As a person incorporates many facets of the gospel in his or her life, that person grows in their relationship with the God family because the gospel conveys who the God Family is. It explains what the Father and the Son are doing and reveals Their minds.

In the current age of the Church, the gospel message leads those called now into a spiritual relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ<sup>21</sup>. The gospel, in addition to its proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God, speaks also to the natural, intended progression from a primarily physical mind to a spiritually led mind, so that a person can have a spiritual relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ.

The gospel also conveys the spiritual family model of governance currently in place between God the Father and Jesus Christ. God shows through His gospel that He intends to replicate this model on the earth with human beings as conveyed by the imagery of the Tree of Life<sup>22</sup>. The gospel message explains how God will restore the original relationship in effect between God and man in the Garden of Eden prior to Satan's deception and man's deliberate choice to reject God's sovereignty and authority<sup>23</sup>. This can only occur as those called make the continual transition toward the God family by developing God's mind and heart. This is a spiritual process that can only be understood by those who are spiritually minded. The physically minded have no comprehension of this and may even bristle at the thought of putting the old man (physical, carnal man) to death and putting on the new man created in the image of God. The gospel makes this abundantly clear, but the physically minded cannot and do not receive it<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> John 17:11, 21-23; Galatians 3:28-29; John 3:13, 15-16; 1 John 3:1-2

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 2:9

<sup>23</sup> Genesis 3:1-24

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:11-14

The gospel also points to the process of the redemption, reconciliation and restoration of mankind to a relationship with God intended from the beginning. It shows all will have that opportunity in their appointed time. Thus those called in this age understand where they fit into God's plan for mankind and the purpose of being chosen now. Without a clear vision of God's plan being worked out in the affairs of men, it is difficult to live faithfully in this age. This is the concept of faith contained in the gospel by which the just must live<sup>25</sup>. Without faith, life is a brief human existence without a reason for being.

The majestic plan of God, revealed by God to those having His Holy Spirit and those striving to enter a spiritual relationship, provides illumination and understanding into the mind of God and His great love for His creation. It explains how God is healing the separation that occurred in the Garden of Eden through Satan's deception. The physically minded man does not comprehend this state of separation due to his darkened mind and cannot comprehend the source of light that can heal the separation and reveal His will, His plan and His gospel. This is now a mystery to all but a few called at this time<sup>26</sup>.

The gospel, in its entirety, contains the information which explains how a person called by God the Father can begin to understand God's governance, His nature and His will through the continual use of His Holy Spirit. This is achieved through personal overcoming of this world, the carnal mind and the nature of man and then continually developing an abiding, personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. This is a life-long journey. Each individual member of the body of Christ grows during this journey which leads to an understanding of the God family and the family model of governance.

An understanding of the full breadth of the gospel message carries with it the responsibility for those hearing and accepting it to also obey the underlying principles upon which it is based. Hearing alone is not enough<sup>27</sup>. Responsibility and accountability for the gospel drills down to the individual members of the body in terms of support and personal conduct<sup>28</sup>.

In its final stage in this current world, the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations just prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Romans 1:16-17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38

<sup>26</sup> Ephesians 3:5-6; 1 Peter 1:20-21; Colossians 1:26-27

<sup>27</sup> James 1:22

<sup>28</sup> Philippians 1:27; 1 Peter 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:8

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 24:14

## **Governance**

### **Physical Organization**

#### Summary

Human civilization and the governmental structures over it have evolved over time from the relatively simple to the highly complex systems of today. Government in the national sense, from the perspective of the Bible, began with the children of Israel. The landscape changed fundamentally as it relates to the body of Christ with the establishment of the Church on Pentecost 31 CE and the introduction of the spiritual organism composed of physical, spirit-led human beings. Although the Church is a spiritual body, it must be organized. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is the need to function within current society. The structure of the physical organization of the Church is important. Because the organization is physical, it is not the government of God – which is spiritual. However, the physical organization can and should be governed by spiritual principles.

#### Discussion

One of the hallmarks of civilization and a civilized society is its varied governmental structures. Government can be traced back to the dawn of civilization with the kingdom of the Sumerians, established in Sumer in Mesopotamia. Thereafter, civilization has been characterized by various forms of government operated by a rule of law and some form of authority and administration. Jesus Christ referred to man's form of government (kingdoms of this world) in terms of hierarchy and the authority exercised by those in positions of power over those under their rule. God is involved in the sense that He sets up kings and removes them at His pleasure and according to His purpose, but otherwise humans have created various forms of government to suit their needs, which have evolved into the complex governmental structures of today.

Government was central to the nation of Israel through the system of the priesthood pointing people to the Eternal as being ruler over His people at the time of the Exodus. All too quickly the people of Israel rebelled and sought a human king, a form of government like the nations around them<sup>30</sup>, thus beginning the trend of God's people copying, or replicating, the forms of government around them. In a national sense, this has worked reasonably well, at least in regard to the modern-day descendants of Israel. Modern nations require organized government, a legal structure based on common law and constitutional law, a military, rules of trade and so on.

With the establishment of the Church in 31 CE, the landscape regarding government as it relates to the body of Christ changed fundamentally. Firstly, the new covenant people

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<sup>30</sup> 1 Samuel 8:5-22

of God have become citizens of the Kingdom of God<sup>31</sup> and the future government of Jesus Christ yet to be established. Secondly, the people of God still must function in the world and be subject to the powers and authority over them and be striving to be model citizens of society<sup>32</sup>. Thirdly, God's people must exercise a degree of separation from the world to avoid adopting its philosophies, tenets, behavior and moral structure. However, there remains the *tendency* for God's people to look to the forms of government around them and apply them to the Church, which of course is not physical, but is a spiritual body or organism. This last aspect has caused innumerable problems for the Church in recent times.

When we discuss organizing a group of people who God has called and with whom He is working, we must address the concept of an orderly structure under which they may operate. Organization is natural to the human mind and necessary for any group of people who wish to accomplish a set of goals, produce a product or service, function in a cohesive, agreed upon manner and fulfill a mandate, directive or purpose for being. Organizational structure runs the gamut from a loosely structured association and cooperative (co-op) to the rigid, highly structured corporation. These forms are based on rules of law. The rules of law are not God's law, but man's legal structure and they are designed to allow organizations to function in this world's legal, economic and political systems. This is not a problem for physical organizations in this the world, but it *can* become problematic for a spiritual organism, the Church. Physical organizations and the spiritual organism are, by their very nature, different. It is not that the spiritual organism is not organized; it is, should be and always has been. A problem arises in the administration of a physical organization over the spiritual organism, which is composed of normal human beings called by God and at different levels, or stages, of spiritual maturity.

A fundamental mistake often made when discussing government within the Church of God is the assumption that the *physical organization* is the *spiritual organism*. Some assume that everyone attending services as a member of a physical organization is also a member of the spiritual organism. It is important that we not confuse the spiritual organism with the physical organization.

With that said, the reality is that the spiritual organism must be organized, and the structure of the organization is important. Everyone would accept that no physical organization is perfect, but this should not keep the Church from being organized and attempting to construct and function within an appropriate physical organizational structure.

*The Church of God, the Father's Call* has attempted to address some of the weaknesses of physical organization, while recognizing the need for legal protection, adhering to

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<sup>31</sup> Ephesians 2:19

<sup>32</sup> Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-4



certain legal requirements of state and federal governments and taking care of the physical administrative duties of any organized group of people. This was accomplished by purposefully separating the required corporate offices and officers and their administrative responsibilities, from the ecclesiastical (spiritual) responsibilities of the Church. The intent was to establish a Council of Elders who would function through spiritual consensus to appropriately care for the spiritual needs of the flock and do what the Church should do – teach, train, instruct and correct the individual, thus enabling them to individually grow in spiritual maturity to the stature of Jesus Christ. The physical administrative duties, under the guidance of the Council of Elders, were assigned to corporate officers possessing the requisite skills, training and track record to serve in those roles, but who are not also members of the Council of Elders.

Since the organization is physical, it is not the government of God, which is spiritual. But the organization should function under spiritual principles. The goal is to lead the members of the Church into a sound, active relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. It should also foster the application of the family model of governance within the lives, families and relationships of the members of the spiritual organism. A properly structured physical organization will flourish through the application of spiritual principles. So, in a sense, the government of God is functioning within the organization, but only within those comprising the spiritual organism, the body of Christ.

## **Spiritual Governance**

### Summary

The God family is the model of spiritual governance and is the source of the family model of governance in the human realm. The government of God in the human realm is active and functioning, operating within the lives of those who have a spiritual connection and relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. A common misconception is that the government of God is contained within the physical organization. While on a physical level this is not necessarily a problem, on the spiritual level this approach is problematic. The fact that the Church is spiritual can also cause confusion to those who – for whatever reason – have come to view the Church as simply a physical organization. The focus should be re-directed to the nature of the spiritual organism, the responsibilities each member of the body has to its head Jesus Christ and the fact that we should be taking on the nature, heart and mind of our heavenly Father.

### Discussion

The God family is the model of spiritual governance and is the source of the family model of governance in the human realm to individuals who are connected to that source. The government of God in this age is composed of individual members of the body yielding to God's governance in their lives as a foundation for a *building up* of

Godly governance within the spiritual organism, of which Jesus Christ is the spiritual head<sup>33</sup>. The governance of God is active and functioning, operating within the lives of those who have a spiritual connection and relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. That is its source and it is also inexorably connected to the Kingdom of God.

After John prepared the way, Jesus appeared and began proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God by saying, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel”<sup>34</sup>. Jesus Christ referred to Himself when He announced to the Pharisees, “The kingdom of God is among you” (*New RSV*) or “in the midst of you” (*RSV*)<sup>35</sup>. There can be no spiritual governance apart from Jesus Christ, to whom the Father has given all authority over the Church.

It is at this level that the family model of governance applies, not on the physical organizational level. This is a spiritual model God uses to call, teach, discipline and lead His people to spiritual maturity. It is a system of loving authority designed to work with spiritually minded members of the body, albeit all at different stages of development, to assist them in progressing to where God the Father wants them to be. It results in mutual submission, forbearance, patient endurance, loving kindness, being responsive to authority in the Church and faithfulness to the Father.

The physical organization plays a supportive and nurturing role through instruction, training and direction, but always with the intent of focusing the membership on their personal responsibilities toward God. Therefore, it will be the spiritually minded who receive the message – those who compare spiritual things to spiritual, as Paul discussed with the Church in Corinth. It is always important to realize that all members are at different places, or stages, in their understanding.

A common misconception is that God’s governance is contained within the corporate structure of the organization.

On the spiritual level, this approach is problematic. It can lead to members of any given Church group’s physical organization to merely submit, comply and attend. It can also lead a member to choose a physical organization that provides the best fit for them.

It is generally accepted and understood that the spiritual body has been scattered into many physical organizations. The Church is spiritual and is not defined organizationally. Christ is the head of His spiritual body and He is at one with the Father. His spiritual body is one body, although composed of members individually<sup>36</sup>, and therefore cannot

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<sup>33</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27

<sup>34</sup> Mark 1:15

<sup>35</sup> Luke 17:21

<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27

be divided. Individual members of the spiritual organism are connected spiritually to their head, Jesus Christ. This is not a human, organizational concept, but a spiritual one.

## Concluding Comments

The God family, the gospel and spiritual governance are connected. They should work together seamlessly to accomplish God's will on earth as it is in heaven. God is creating a family in His image and the gospel explains God's will for mankind in great detail. It is the good news of God's plan as to how God the Father will reconcile all men to Himself and restore a relationship between God and man intended from the beginning.

God's governance is the model for spiritual governance in the spiritual organism – the Church. God's people are a family and the Church is the spiritually begotten family of God. The model for governance in the Church is the family model. This is consistent with God's plan from before the earth and man were created. The nation of Israel was a family created on the God family model. The Church is the spiritual extension of that family, just as those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

The Church has known that a corporation is not the same as the spiritual organism, but we have not always acted on that knowledge. Many may not remember that Mr. Herbert Armstrong wrote in an article published in 1970, entitled *Just What is the Church?*:

*“Now I have shown that the true Church of God is NOT a human organization or corporation, but a spiritual organism, composed of all who have and are being led by the Holy Spirit of God abiding in them. Yet the Church is ORGANIZED.”*

*“But is the corporation the Church? IT IS NOT! The Church existed as a spiritual organism, organized as CHRIST organized it (NOT organized on any human plan), and it carried on the SAME Work of God, with the SAME divinely directed organization BEFORE it incorporated as it does today. It is organized according to GOD'S pattern, not man's legal corporate pattern.”*

When we confuse the physical organization with the spiritual organism, we inject unnecessary complexity into the picture. The physical administration or organization of a spiritual organism is a challenge, particularly at the end of the age of man. The spiritual organism is always organized, and the structure of that organization is important. However, when the physical organization takes precedence over the spiritual organism, immense problems arise. The family nature of God's plan becomes entangled in human ideas of government and governance.

Men have repeatedly inserted themselves between the spiritual body and the head of the Church, Jesus Christ, by exerting their will and ideas as to governance over God's will, to the harm of the body of Christ. The result of this is evident to all. The current organizational landscape has separated and made life difficult for the spiritual organism. We can be encouraged that when Christ returns, the bride will have been prepared for the marriage. The spiritual organism will have been made ready as a single spiritual family unit. We all have the opportunity to participate in that preparation. ♦