

WHAT FORM OF GOVERNMENT IS MOST BIBLICAL IN LIGHT OF GOD’S MEDIATORIAL PLAN?

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The question, “Is there a form of government (monarchy, democracy, democratic republicanism, etc.) that is more biblical than other forms of government?” raises numerous additional questions and thoughts attending those questions. This paper will attempt to introduce some of those questions and provide introductory answers that will surely raise some more questions among thinking people.

An initial question that comes to mind is, “What makes a particular form of government biblical?” Does its biblicality change over time and/or with the introduction of new human circumstances? If God determines the form of government, is it therefore biblical? Are there other factors beyond the “form of government” that enhance or detract from its biblicality?

THE UNIFYING CENTER OF GOD’S ACTIVITY¹

One additional question: “Does God have anything to say about mankind’s governing of itself? Does He have a plan or goal for mankind in which some sort of human government is to play a role? Or, are there many plans with many ways of achieving those plans?” To answer these and other related questions, it may be well to determine the central theme or, as Merrill would suggest, find the complete theological sentence. He explains, “. . . theology must make a statement about God (the subject) who acts (the verb) to achieve a comprehensive purpose (the object)”²

McCune asks, “Is there a unifying principle to all of God’s activity? That is, is there some kind of rubric that can comprehend all of God’s activity external to Himself (i.e., with reference to the universe)?”³ Then he answers, “This unifying center of all of God’s activity—with reference to the universe—will also be the unifying theme of the Bible.”⁴

¹ McCune, Rolland, Blog, (06-21-2016), found at www.dispensationalpublishing.com. Accessed 07-07-2020. This is the title of a seven-blog series, “The Unifying Center of God’s Activity.” Dates and individual titles are as follows: 06-21-2016, “The Difficulty of Finding a Unifying Center;” 06-28-2016, “A Proposed Unifying Center;” 09-13-2016, “The Implementation of the Unifying Principle: The Dispensations (Innocence and Conscience);” 09-26-2016, “The Implementation of the Unifying Principle: The Dispensations (Government and Promise);” 09-27-2016, “The Implementation of the Unifying Principle: The Dispensations (Law);” 10-04-2016, “The Implementation of the Unifying Principle: The Dispensations (Grace);” 10-11-2016, “The Implementation of the Unifying Principle: The Dispensations (Kingdom)”. Subsequent references will be indicated by: McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (date written).

² Merrill, Eugene H., “Daniel as a Contribution to Kingdom Theology,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer, Eds., Moody Press: Chicago, 1986, 211-212.

³ McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (06-21-2016).

⁴ *Ibid.*

In an effort to find the unifying center, he then lists five criteria for a method of determining the central theme of the Bible. He mentions, "Patterns of God's stated purpose; Historical epochs; Major revelation at the epochs." The key and overriding criteria is that the unifying center must start at day six of creation week, not at Genesis 3:15.⁵

In the next blog, he lists some possible options, then proposes a unifying principle.

God's ultimate purpose of getting glory to Himself would seem to entail a *goal* to His activity. This goal is that which unifies His activity or becomes the fundamental rationale for what He does in glorifying Himself. The most primitive purpose of God is His activity to glorify Himself, but that purpose should be connected to some less remote, penultimate end on the historical level.

This goal, or unifying center, should also carry the *means* of attaining it. This involves the expending of God's power and influences in order to accomplish this goal on the historical level. In other words, this goal, which becomes the principle of unification, entails a plan of achievement.⁶

Based on the above, if there can be found in the first two and one-half chapters of Genesis a theme or practice of God's that can also be found, at least in similar forms, throughout the Scriptures and in each dispensation, we may conclude that we have found the ultimate purpose of God and how mankind is to act to bring Him the glory He deserves.

To find the unifying center, consider these foundational building blocks:

GOD'S ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO BRING GLORY TO HIMSELF

At the end of the third and fourth days of the creation week, "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:12, 18). After He had created the man and the woman in His own image, He pronounced that it all was "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Having created man in His own image would indicate that God had something special in mind for them above and beyond the rest of the creation. Kidner comments:

In both the opening chapters of Genesis man is portrayed as *in* regular nature and *over* it, continuous with it and discontinuous. He shares the sixth day with other creatures, is made of dust as they are (2:7, 19), feeds as they feed (1:29, 30) and reproduces with a blessing similar to theirs (1:22, 28a); so he can well be studied partly through the study of them: they are half his context. But the stress falls on his distinctness. *Let us make* stands in tacit contrast with 'Let the earth bring forth' (24); the note of self-communing and the impressive plural proclaim it a momentous step; and this done, the whole creation is complete. *Vis-à-vis* the animals man is set apart by his office (1:26b, 28b; 2:19; cf. Ps. 8:4-8; Jas. 3:7) and still more by his nature (2:20); but his crowning glory is his relation to God.⁷

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (06-28-2016).

⁷ Kidner, Derek, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, D. J. Wiseman, General Editor, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967, 50. [emphasis by Kidner]

One unique aspect is that man is able to receive and comprehend communication from God. In creating man in His own image, God, at least, must have had in mind that there would be some sort of communicating relationship between Himself and mankind. In the first 27 verses of Genesis, God speaks within the tri-unity about what He planned to do. Then in verse 28, He speaks to Adam and Eve, likewise in 1:29-30 and 2:16-18. Subsequent to the fall, He continues interaction with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:9-19 and again with Cain in Genesis 4:9-15 where God and Cain discuss Cain's murder and his consequences. God continues to communicate with mankind throughout the remainder of the Old Testament period, culminating with the incarnated Son on earth, teaching face to face throughout Israel.⁸

Today in the church age, God communicates to mankind through His written Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17, 4:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). During the Millennium, God the Son will be on earth communicating face-to-face with mankind. That God communicates with mankind strongly indicates His desire to have an intimate relationship with them even to the point of dwelling with them.

The primary and overriding responsibility is to glorify God. The communicating of God's will to man gives man both the opportunity and responsibility to obey, and in turn, bring God glory. Ryrie writes,

God does have various ways to manifest His glory, redemption being one—a principal one, but not the only one. The various economies with their stewardship responsibilities are not so many compartments completely separated from each other but are steps in the progress of revelation of the various ways in which God is glorified. And further, dispensationalism not only sees the various dispensations as *successive* manifestations of God's purpose but also as *progressive* manifestations of it.⁹

In 1 Chronicles 15:10-13, David praises the Lord and is recorded to have said, "Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth: Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all, and in Your hand is power to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name." (NASB)

Paul wrote in Romans 11:36, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." (NASB). Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14 all have the phrase, ". . .to the praise of His glory." Throughout the passage the wonders of our redemption are enumerated—all to the praise of His glory.

⁸ The next mention of God-to-man conversation is in Genesis 4:26 ("Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord") and with Enoch specifically in Genesis 5:21-24 ("Enoch walked with God.") God speaks to Noah in Genesis 6:13-21 and again in Genesis 7:1-4 as well as 8:15-17. After the flood, God instructs Noah in Genesis 9:8-17. Abram hears from God in Genesis 12:1-3; Isaac in Genesis 26:2-5; Jacob in Genesis 35:9-12. In Exodus 3:4, God begins a conversation with Moses that continues for the next 40 years until Moses' death on Mount Nebo recorded in Deuteronomy 34:4. Various conversations between Joshua and God are recorded in the book of Joshua (1:2-9; 3:7-8; 4:2-3; 4:16; 5:2; 6:2-5; 7:7-15; 8:1-2; 8:18; 10:12-13; 11:6; 13:1-7; 20:1-6; 24:1-13). Elijah hears from God in 1 Kings 17:9 and again in 1 Kings 19:4-10, 13-18. David tells of conversation with God in 1 Chronicles 28:1-8. Beginning in Job 38:1 through 42:6, Job has an extended conversation with God. In the writings of the prophets, often we read, "Then the Lord said to me." (ex. Isaiah 8:1). "Thus says the Lord God" (Isaiah 10:24); "The word of the Lord came to me" (Jeremiah 2:1, 16:1, 18:1; Ezekiel 28:1; 32:1; 35:1; Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1; Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1); and "Thus says the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:23, 11:21, 14:10; Ezekiel 46:1; Amos 1:3, 2:1; Obadiah 1:1).

⁹ Ryrie, Charles C. *Dispensationalism Today*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1965, 104. [emphasis by Ryrie]

GOD'S RULE OVER THE EARTH AND HIS DELEGATION TO MAN

Genesis 1:26-28 gives us an interesting look into God's desired relationship with mankind. It reads: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:26-28 NASB)

Also, in Genesis 2:15, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it." (NASB)

In Genesis 2:5, "Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground." (NASB)

While it is clear that Adam was to rule over the newly created animals and also to till the soil, plant, cultivate, and harvest crops, it is not so clear what God had in mind for Adam's relationship with other mankind. But we do know, based on Genesis 2:24 and 1:28, that God's plan for Adam involved more people than himself and Eve. A society would arise to which there would need to be the exercise of leadership (or government) and role playing. For the society to operate efficiently, delegation of responsibilities would naturally occur, even in a sinless yet finite world.¹⁰ To manage the human activities of tilling the soil, ruling over the fish, the birds of the air, and the creeping animals would require men to work together in coordination and harmony. Evidently, Adam was to be God's representative on the earth to oversee what would have become a vast enterprise.

God, however, would remain the owner (based on the fact He is Creator) and sovereign; Adam would be the mediator between mankind and God. Merrill writes commenting on Genesis 1:26-28, "The theme that emerges here is that of the sovereignty of God over all His creation, mediated through man, His

¹⁰ Some may wonder at the need for organization and leadership in an innocent world. In the creation of Eve, she is described as a helper (Genesis 2:20). In chapter 3:16, God said to Eve, "Yet [meaning still, as in continuance from the past] your desire will be for your husband."

In the Trinity, there is order, leadership, and an hierarchy. In John 3:17, it reads, "For *God* did not *send* the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." Later, in John 14:31, Jesus said, "*I do exactly as the Father commanded Me.*" In John 17:4, Jesus, talking to the Father, said, "*I glorified You* on earth, having accomplished the work which *You have given Me* to do." This is a quick glimpse at leadership, authority, and accountability within the Trinity, between the Father and the Son.

In John 14:16-17, Jesus said, "I will *ask* the *Father*, and *He will give* you another Helper, that He may be with you forever, that is the Spirit of truth."

In giving the eleven disciples the Great Commission, Jesus explained to them, "All *authority has been given to Me* in heaven and on earth." That authority came from the Father.

This has been a brief look at the economic Trinity in which there is order and cooperative purpose with roles played out perfectly and in precise harmony. And yet the Three are equal in being and essence and worth.

A similar situation would have developed in the innocent world of mankind as they, all equally human, strove to function in an orderly and highly productive manner.

vice-regent and image.”¹¹ Collins adds, “. . .that the kingdom theme in Scripture is not simply about God’s sovereignty over all of his creation. It is about God’s sovereignty mediated through man.”¹²

Kidner sums up, “There is a hint of the *cultural* development intended for man when the narrative momentarily (10-14) breaks out of Eden to open up a vista into a world of diverse countries and resources. The digression. . .discloses that there is more than primitive simplicity in store for the race: a complexity of unequally distributed skills and peoples.”¹³

GOD HAS ESTABLISHED DISTINGUISHABLE STEWARDSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES THROUGHOUT HUMAN HISTORY

In Genesis 1-2, we find that God gave Adam a number of responsibilities. In 1:28, Adam and Eve are instructed to be “. . .fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” In verse 29, God tells the couple the source of their food. In chapter 2, verse 19, God has Adam name the animals.

The above mentioned duties are commonly called secular. They entail day-to-day living and the maintenance of physical life.

In Genesis 2:9, 15-17, God gives a command to Adam and Eve that has to do with their moral standing before God. They are expressly forbidden to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As long as they abstained, their relationship with God was good. As we find in Genesis 3:8-19, once they partook, their entire relationship with God changed and the ability to fulfill their assignments was greatly hindered.

But the fact remains that man has always had delegated responsibilities from the Sovereign of the Universe. McCune comments succinctly:

This plan structures God’s activities in accomplishing the goal within earth history. This plan of achievement is the *dispensational program* of God, the progressive unfolding of Divine revelation and the resultant responsibilities that devolve on mankind.¹⁴

A significant part of the plan involves the concept of mediatorialship. Edwards wrote, “Our inquiry will have shown how central and prominent is the idea of mediation throughout the Scriptures. We might even say it supplies the key to the unity of the Bible”¹⁵

McClain gives a three-part description of the concept and avers that there are three different functions. His definition includes the idea that the rule of God is through a divinely chosen representative who

¹¹ Merrill, Eugene H., “Daniel as a Contribution to Kingdom Theology,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer, Eds., Chicago: Moody Press, 1986, 212.

¹² Collins, Brian, “Genesis 1:26-28: Significance and Challenges,” BJU Press, 21, footnote 87.

¹³ Kidner, Derek, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, D. J. Wiseman, General Editor, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967, 61. [emphasis by Kidner]

¹⁴ McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (06-28-2016).

¹⁵ Edwards, D. Miall, “Mediation,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume III, James Orr, ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956, 2025.

speaks and acts for God as well as represents the people before God. The mediatorial rule has special reference to human activity on earth, and the mediator is always a member of the human race. The functions of the human mediator are that of prophet, priest, and ruler (or king).¹⁶

Wallace describes the functions of a prophet: "The prophet's task was to 'stand in the counsel' of God to cause His people to hear His words (cf. Jer. 23:18, 22)"¹⁷

The priest's duty, after the fall, was to mediate between the people and God within the cultic (religious) activity.¹⁸ Before the fall, the priestly activity would also have had to do with man's relationship with God, primarily worship and fellowship. So, the prophet heard from God and spoke about Him to the people; the priest heard from the people and spoke to God about them. Most likely, it seems, this is what Adam and Eve were used to doing when God met them in the "cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8 NASB). McCune writes, "This relationship began when God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, apparently on a daily basis (Gen 3:8). This must have been in the form of a Christophany (a temporary, preincarnate manifestation of the Son in human appearance)."¹⁹

In Adam's mandate from God, he would have fulfilled the kingly function of ruling over the earth and over the secular affairs of the population. McClain makes an interesting point:

This original dominion over the earth and the animal creation was undoubtedly bestowed on man regarded generically as a race, not merely upon the first man Adam. However, if due consideration be given to the New Testament typical comparison between Adam and Christ as the respective heads of the old and new creations, there must have been some sense in which the first Adam was given dominion not only over the animal world but also over the race of men which would in the process of time issue from him by natural generation. This view of the matter harmonizes with the doctrine of Adamic headship as set forth in the Word of God. (cf. Rom. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:21-28, 45-49; Heb. 2:5-9). The plural "let them have dominion," on this view, could have some reference to Adam and his wife Eve; for in the antitype the Last Adam also has a "wife" who, though subject to her divine Head, will nevertheless sit regally with Him in His Mediatorial Kingdom (Rev. 19:7; 20:6).²⁰

Following, in chart form, is how God has been glorified and how He has delegated rule to mankind through the dispensations: (The chart footnotes are on the page following the chart designated by the letters A-G at the top of that following page).

¹⁶ McClain, Alva J. *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974, 41).

¹⁷ Wallace, Ronald S. "Mediation," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. III, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986, 300.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (06-28-2016).

²⁰ McClain, 43.

FIGURE 1

DISPENSATION	GLORY TO GOD VIA FELLOWSHIP	
Innocence	Psalm 8:3-9: the regal language of v. 5 (“crown him”) and v. 6 (“rule over the works”) all to bring glory to God in v. 9 (“How Majestic is Your name”) (A)	Gen. 1:26-28: man was given dominion over the earth. Adam was to exercise God-given lordship over the rest of creation, including the woman. (A)
Conscience	God’s provision of reconciliation and fellowship was in the promises of Genesis 3:15. In this, God receives glory. (A)	“In all of this the original dominion mandate was still in force. Man is still the vice-regent of God.” (A)
Human Government	The restraints of civil government allow Noah and his sons to multiply and fill the earth so that in this they would glorify God. (B)	“Collective man—man in the governmental sense—was now vice-regent of God in fulfilling the dominion mandate.” This added to the previous family arrangement. (B)
Promise	Genesis 17:1-14, especially verse 7, “. . .to be God to you and to your descendants after you” and verse 8, “I will be their God.”	“God narrowed His dealings to one man, Abram. God’s role took on a more visible, concrete, theocratic, king-priest, civil spiritual form with the patriarchal class.” (C)
Law	Fellowship with God was by obeying the Mosaic law with its three aspects: civil, ceremonial, and moral. Atonement was possible through the proper sacrifices. (D)	“The theocratic kingdom established at Sinai had a unique, civil-spiritual or civil-ecclesiastical relationship. The kingdom had an internal political system headed by a Divinely chosen mediator (Moses) along with elders, judges, and officers. Also included were priests and the high priest.” (D)
Church	To walk with the sovereign God in loving fellowship in this economy is predicated on personal faith in Jesus Christ. (E)	“The chief instrumentality of God’s work and witness in the . . .dispensation of grace. . .is the New Testament church. The church mediates the will and rule of God on earth principally in its proclamation of the truth of God, and in the <i>salt</i> and <i>light</i> of its individual people in civil society.” “Human government still has the obligation to restrain sin, punish evildoers and cause the righteous to prevail in an orderly society.”(E)
Kingdom	“Fellowship with God will be on the basis of the New Covenant, as instituted through the atonement of Jesus Christ.” (F)	“The Messianic King, Jesus of Nazareth, God in the flesh, will take up His royal residence in the millennial Jerusalem.” (F) “No legitimate aspect of human life will be left without the regal saving activity.” (G)

(A)²¹ (B)²² (C)²³ (D)²⁴ (E)²⁵ (F)²⁶ (G)²⁷

SUMMARY

Having established that the Sovereign Creator gave Adam (and likely Eve) the responsibility to act as mediator between mankind and God, and that God’s ultimate purpose is to bring glory to Himself, and that God regularly has communicated with mankind in many various ways and means, and that these principles, even after the fall, are evident in each of the subsequent dispensations, it can be said with McCune that, “God’s ultimate purpose and the unifying principle of His activity is **to glorify Himself by establishing a rule of loving sovereignty and fellowship with human beings in His image and dwelling with them forever.**”²⁸

McCune states further that this principle involves a two-fold relationship: 1) Based on Ezekiel 37:27, “I will be their God, and they will be My people” (NASB); 2) “I will dwell among them” (Ezekiel 43:9 NASB).²⁹

So, to answer the question, “Which form of government is most biblical?” we have considered God’s purpose for His creation and for those created in His image. He has determined various forms of government throughout the centuries for each purpose He decreed in each dispensation. For the first

²¹ McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (09-13-2016).

²² McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (09-20-2016).

²³ *Ibid.* Some would contend that Job lived during the dispensation of Promise, possibly after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had passed away. This is based on the fact of his lifespan, that his wealth was measured in cattle, and that he acted as priest for his family, and that there is no mention of the Mosaic Law in the book of Job. See Elmer B. Smick, *Job*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988, 583; John E. Hartley, *Job* in ISBE, Vol. 2, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982, 1065; John F. Genung, *Job, Book of* in ISBE, Vol. 3, James Orr, ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1938, 1680; William LaSor, David Hubbard, and Frederic Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982, 561. Also see C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 4, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982, 25, in which they write commenting on Ezekiel 14:4, “. . .and last of all Job, a righteous man beyond the line of promise.” Even so, it is still true that God’s long-term redemptive plan for His Son’s incarnation was started by the one man, Abram, through his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. While Job was most likely outside this long-range plan, he was still able to be involved in God’s personal and familial redemptive provision, possibly on the basis of continuing principles from earlier dispensations. Another example of an individual not in the line of Abraham but that worshiped God properly is Melchizedek.

²⁴ McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (09-27-2016).

²⁵ McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (10-04-2016).

²⁶ McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (10-11-2016).

²⁷ McClain, 217.

²⁸ McCune, Blog, TUCoGA, (06-28-2016). [bold emphasis by McCune]

²⁹ *Ibid.*

four (Innocence, Conscience, Human Government, and Promise³⁰), His specified government included the entire population and had both secular and religious provisions. For the dispensation of Law, the constituency was limited to the Israelites (and any proselytes) and still included both the secular and religious aspects of human activity. Mankind was instructed to have dominion, to subdue, to govern the affairs of mankind. These were all finite men, and except for Adam, the mediatorial function of prophet, priest, or king was usually delegated to different individuals. Occasionally, two functions were performed by one man, an example being Melchizedek who was the “king of Salem” and “a priest of God Most High” (Gen. 14:18 NASB).

For the Millennial Kingdom, one Man, the God-Man, will rule and reign over the entire earth and perform all three functions of prophet, priest, and king and His rule will include both the secular as well as the religious activities of mankind. His reign will also usher in unprecedented agricultural production, peace in the animal kingdom, and the cessation of war. He will completely fulfill the Genesis 1:26-28 mandate to subdue and rule and have dominion over the entire earth and its inhabitants. God’s purpose and His glory will be fulfilled to the maximum.

In all of these six dispensations, God has called out a people that would be His and that He would be their God and that He would dwell with them.

THE DISPENSATION OF THE CHURCH

The church age dispensation is both unique and similar to the other dispensations in a number of ways concerning the idea of a mediatorial rule and the three aspects of prophet, priest, and king functions, as well as to whom may be included in God’s program.

THE UNIQUENESS

There were two major changes in God’s program as the Church Age began. The first major change has to do with the availability of God’s redemptive plan. While there was a proselyte provision during the time of the Mosaic Law, the primary participants were the Jewish people, and according to Romans 9:1-8, not all of them participated fully. For the new dispensation, God’s salvation was made available to all mankind. Paul, speaking to the leading Jews of Rome, said: “Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen” (Acts 28:28 NASB).

Secondly, as the Mosaic Law was done away with, rather than including all aspects of life, the new economy called for a dual citizenship for God’s people. While the overall mediatorial concept remained intact, there is a clear division between the governance of man’s religious affairs and the governance of his secular affairs. McCune makes the point using the time of the Mosaic Law as the point of contrast. He writes:

In ancient Israel the civil and religious arenas of life were combined in the theocratic polity, in effect a *union* of church and state. The Law governed every aspect of the people’s lives. . . .A church saint lives in two separate spheres, the church and the state. . . .The New Testament teaches the *separation* of the organized church and the civil state. . . with the ideal being a free church and a free state.³¹

³⁰ See Footnote 23.

³¹ McCune, Rolland, *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism*, Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2004, 262 [emphasis McCune]. This is especially true in the United States of America. See Kevin

GOVERNMENT IN THE CHURCH AGE

There are two facets of government during this dispensation. One is the government of the local church, often called local church polity. The second is the civil government that is found in the national, regional, and local areas. For the remainder of this paper, these two facets will be considered. The basis of what follows is summed up in the following statement. “The government that is most biblical is that government that allows (or causes) the governed entity to best accomplish God’s goal or plan for that entity.” That goal or plan is found in the Bible.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

For this dispensation, God has determined that the local church will be His agent for fulfilling His desired two-fold relationship, “I will be their God, and they will be My people” and “I will dwell among them.” Matthew 28:18-20 gives the means by which this is to be accomplished. Matthew quotes Jesus’ instruction to the disciples and His all-encompassing goal and purpose for the church, “Make disciples” (verse 18). He included a briefly outlined methodology (“baptize” and “teach”), the scope (“all nations”), and the duration (“to the end of the age”). Jesus’ support (“I am with you”), and our authority to make disciples (“all authority has been given to Me”) was mediated to the Apostles and, in turn, to their successors.

There are a myriad of ways in which this Great Commission is attempted. Some would claim that much has been left for us to determine. That is most likely true, but this author contends that the core ideas of local church government are well stated and can be understood with extended study.

Bauder writes:

For Baptists, congregational polity is not merely a matter of practicality, as if they were trying to fit themselves to Western democratic sensibilities. Rather, Baptists believe that congregational government does the most justice to the pattern and teaching of the New Testament. Some other denominations believe that the Bible is largely silent on matters of polity so that churches are free to adopt whatever form of organization seems to work best. Baptists disagree: they believe that the New Testament does teach a form of church government, and they aim to implement that government in their congregation.³²

In this case, according to Matthew 16:18, the owner, Jesus Christ, via the Holy Spirit, has given instruction. There are three groups of people mentioned in the New Testament

Bauder in *Baptist Distinctives and New Testament Church Order*, Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012, 129-153 for historical and biblical support. He writes on page 138, “First, God has appointed civil authority, to which Christians must submit in civil affairs. Second, in matters of conscience, the state possesses no authority; and Christians must obey God. Third, Christians may participate in civil affairs, swearing oaths when required to do so, holding office when called, and even waging war when necessary.”

³² Bauder, Kevin, *Baptist Distinctives and New Testament Church Order*, Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012, 91. See Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1988. In the third chapter (“The Product,” 50-73), Hull explains the biblical foundation for the duty of “making disciples” and gives a detailed description of a disciple.

that are to be involved in the mediation responsibilities of an established³³ New Testament local church. They are pastors, teachers and the congregation. The Bible also mentions the office of deacon and gives an extensive list of qualifications for the men that would fill the office. As to their leadership and decision-making powers, as well as the act of teaching, the emphasis of their responsibilities seems to be focused elsewhere.³⁴

The Priestly Role

As mentioned earlier, the function of the priest during the church age, is done by Jesus Christ as He sits at the right hand of God (Hebrews 12:2; 1 Timothy 2:5). Bauder explains:

The basic duty of a priest is to represent humans before God. . .Consequently, the first responsibility of a priest is to secure forgiveness on behalf of those whom he represents (Heb. 5:1-3). To gain forgiveness, the priest offers a sacrifice that propitiates (satisfies) God's justice and expiates (wipes away) the guilt of the sinner. Once the guilt of sin has been dealt with, the priest may also offer other kinds of sacrifices representing devotion, thankfulness, or praise.³⁵

The Prophet's Role

The function of prophet, that is, the telling of the message of God to the local church, is delegated to the pastor(s)^{36 37} and teachers. First Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus have many references to the teaching ministry of the pastor, starting at 1 Timothy 3:2, where

³³ In a startup situation, often times the church planter (i.e. evangelists of Ephesians 4:11) serves as both prophet and king. As the church grows, what I will describe gradually becomes the reality. See William W. Combs, "The Biblical Role of the Evangelist," *Detroit Baptist Theological Journal*, Vol. 7, Fall 2002, 23-48 in which he concludes, ". . .the evidence seems to strongly suggest that he [i.e. the evangelist] functioned not as an itinerant revivalist preacher, but as a missionary church planter," 48.

³⁴ Bauder notes ". . .that deacons are not officially leaders so much as helpers," 92. Then later he writes, "Biblical deacons are not rulers or governors over the church," 120. For further discussion, see Bauder, 118-123. See also W. B. Johnson, "The Gospel Developed Through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ," *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, Mark Dever, ed., Nine Marks Ministries, 2001, 196-198. See also John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2005, 193-197.

³⁵ Bauder, 75-76.

³⁶ There has been great debate concerning the issue of the number of elders in each church. I recommend Bauder's even-handed treatment in *Baptist Distinctives*, 102-105. Manfred E. Kober writes in "The Case for the Singularity of Pastors," *Baptist Bulletin*, June 1982, "Mary came into my office in tears. A girlfriend with whom she had spent the weekend had told her how wrong she was to be a Baptist. Baptists, her friend insisted, are unbiblical because they have one pastor per church, whereas the New Testament clearly stipulates a plurality of pastors for each church. Mary was confused. She thought her church was right but her friend's arguments seemed so convincing."

³⁷ Based on Acts 20:17, combined with Acts 20:28, this paper is written on the premise that the terms "elder," "bishop," and "pastor" refer to the same office. See also 1 Peter 5:1-4.

one of the stated requirements is, “able to teach” (NASB). Note also in 1 Timothy 1:3; 1:5; 4:6; 4:11; 4:13; 4:16; 5:7; 5:17; 6:2; 6:17; and 6:18. In 2 Timothy note 2:2; 2:14; 2:15; 2:24; 2:25; 3:16-17; and 4:2. Also in Titus, see 1:9; 1:13; 2:1; 2:6; 2:9; 2:15 and 3:8.

It would seem obvious that the teachers are to teach. That is the indication of Ephesians 4:11-12, as they are included as a part of the gifts to the local church. Some teach that “the pastors and teachers” of Ephesians 4:11 both refer to the same person.³⁸ But there are other views. In the author’s younger years, when Ephesians 4:11 was taught, he would at least occasionally hear the Granville Sharp Rule being invoked. The conclusion was similar to the aforementioned —“the pastors and teachers” refer to the same person. Then in 1983, Daniel Wallace presented a contrasting view.³⁹ Granville Sharp’s rule is as follows:

When the copulative **kai** connects two nouns of the same case, [viz. nouns (either substantive or adjective, or participles) of personal description, respecting office, dignity, affinity, or connexion, and attributes, properties, or qualities, good or ill,] if the article **ο**, or any of its cases, precedes the first of the said nouns or participles, and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle: i.e. it denotes a farther description of the first-named person.⁴⁰

³⁸ Note the following: (1) H. C. G Moule, *Ephesian Studies*, Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publishers, 2002, 134. He writes, “**Some as shepherds and teachers**—two sides of one work; men who were set over the local ‘flocks’ of believers to be their leaders and instructors in the Lord.” (2) Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, R.V. G. Tasker, ed., Vol. 10, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1956, 119. “Pastors and teachers were gifted to be responsible for the day-to-day building up of the Church. There is no hard and fast line to be drawn between the two.” (3) R.C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961, 528. “The third ‘*tousde*’ makes one class of ‘shepherds and teachers.’ (4) T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, The International Critical Commentary, Samuel Driver, Alfred Plummer, Charles Briggs, eds., Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1887, 118. “The first question is whether the words express distinct offices or two characters of the same office. . . Many commentators—both ancient and modern—adopt the former view.” (5) William Hendricksen, *Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007 (fourth printing), 197. “*Pastors and teachers* are best considered *one* group. What we have here. . . is a designation of *ministers of local congregations*, “teaching elders (or overseers).” (6) A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, The Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 11, Frank E. Gabelein, ed., Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library—Zondervan Publishing House, 1978, 58. “Pastors and teachers’ are grouped together in such a way as to suggest that the two roles are regarded as complementary and often coordinated in the same person.”

³⁹ Wallace, Daniel B. “The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-Kai-Noun Plural Construction in the New Testament,” *Grace Theological Journal*, 4:1 (Spring 1983), 59-84.

⁴⁰ Sharp, Granville, *Remarks on the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament: Containing Many New Proofs of the Divinity of Christ, from Passages Which Are Wrongly Translated in the Common English Version*, First American Edition, Philadelphia, PA: B. B. Hopkins, 1807, 2. Cited in Wallace, “Sharp Redivivis?” (See Footnote 42.)

Wallace explained:

“. . .in the constructive article-noun-**kai**-noun, four requirements must be met if the two nouns refer to the same person: (1) both nouns must. . .be personal; (2) both nouns must be common nouns; i.e. not proper nouns; (3) both nouns must be in the same case; (4) both nouns must be singular in number.⁴¹

Sharp further explained, saying in effect that when the nouns are plural, they *may* refer to the same person, but not necessarily. In other words, as is often true, there may be, in the case of Ephesians 4:11, other possibilities and the need for further investigation.⁴² Whichever one is correct, based on the grammar and syntax of the preceding, there is to be some sort of connection between the two nouns in the phrase“. . .the pastors and teachers.”⁴³

Consider the following possibilities, since the Granville Sharp Rule does not necessarily apply to Ephesians 4:11 (because the nouns are plural):⁴⁴ There are five:

- (1) “The pastors and teachers” are distinct; two facets, two persons, no intermixture.
- (2) “The pastors and teachers;” some commonality; but not all of either have both facets.
- (3) “The pastors and teachers” in which the second is a subset of the first; all teachers are pastors, not all pastors are teachers.
- (4) “The pastors and teachers” are identical; two facets, one person.
- (5) “The pastors and teachers” in which the first is a subset of the second; all pastors are teachers, not all teachers are pastors. (See Figure 2)

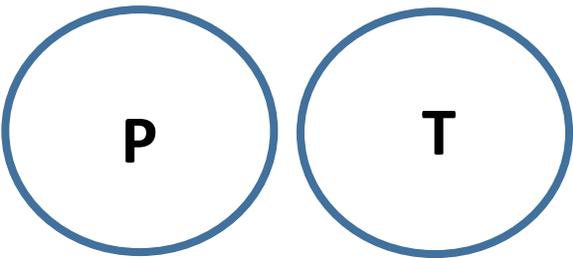
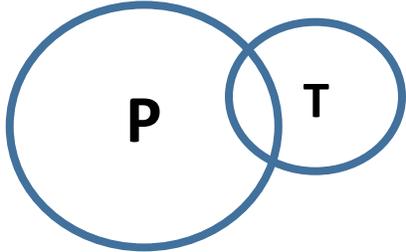
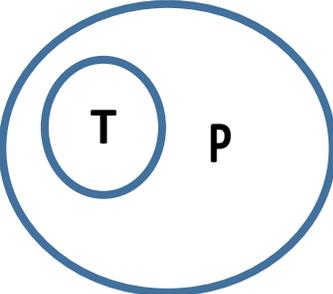
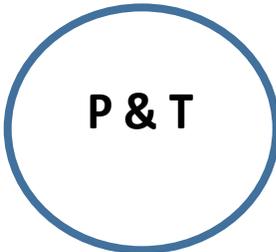
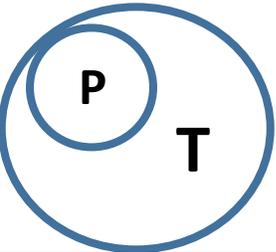
⁴¹ Wallace, Daniel B. *Grace Theological Journal*, 4:1 (Spring 1983), 62.

⁴² Sharp, Granville, 5-6. Cited in Wallace, “Sharp Redivivus?” One of the issues is that of the content (or lack of) of some Greek grammars. See Bruce A Baker, *Journal of Ministry and Theology*, 01:2 (Fall 1993), 38ff, in which Baker shows three grammars that state Sharp’s rule, but do not mention the restrictions that required the nouns to be personal, common, of the same case, and singular. For a more extensive treatment, see Daniel B. Wallace, “Sharp Redivivus?—A Reexamination of the Grenville Sharp Rule” found at bible.org, accessed 3/13/2013 in the section titled, “Nearly Two Centuries of Abuse,” and see accompanying footnotes 25-52 (There seems to be different formats at various times, so this method of identifying the source was used, rather than page numbers.)

⁴³ Wallace, Daniel. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 278.

⁴⁴ This concept is adapted from Wallace in *Grace Theological Journal*, 67-70 and Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, 278-283.

FIGURE 2

Semantic Range (Possibilities) of the Greek Plural Construction Definite article–noun–kai (and)-noun	
	DISTINCT The pastors and teachers (Two facets, two persons)
	SOME COMMON The pastors and teachers P T (Some are both pastors and teachers, but not all of either are both)
	SECOND SUBSET of FIRST The pastors and teachers P T (All teachers are pastors; not all pastors are teachers)
	IDENTICAL The pastors and teachers (Two facets, one person)
	FIRST SUBSET of SECOND The pastors and teachers P T (All pastors are teachers; not all teachers are pastors)

According to McCune⁴⁵ and Fee and Stuart,⁴⁶ only one of the five possibilities can be correct. The semantic range allows for any of them. So, the next step is to consider the context, in this case, the wider context of the writings of Paul and New Testament books.

The first passage is 1 Timothy 3:2 in which Paul lists as a requirement for an overseer (pastor or elder) that he be “able to teach” (NASB). It seems a stretch that Paul would use the term(s) (either pastor, overseer or elder) in other passages without the inherent idea that the individual needed to be able to teach the Word of God. As shown earlier, the function of teaching is proscribed throughout the three Pastoral Epistles.

Based on the above reasoning, possibilities 1, 2 and 3 would be eliminated because in these cases, there would be pastors that are not “able to teach.”

That leaves scenario 4 or 5 as the correct interpretation. Second Timothy 2:1-19⁴⁷ provides an interesting insight. Pastor Timothy is instructed in verse 2 to entrust the things he has heard from Paul “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Verses 3-7, by way of illustration, give Timothy a sense of the intensity and effort that will be required to prepare these faithful men for their task. In verses 8-11, Timothy is reminded of the hardship that Paul had faced in fulfilling his responsibilities and the Savior that motivated him, as well as what for Timothy, as well as us, the real future will be like, based on our performance in this life.

In verses 14-18 Paul goes back with further instruction concerning Timothy’s training of the teachers and gives a couple of examples of those that were not faithful.

Verse 19 finishes with a final and climactic promise of the permanency of God’s work, the church, and the mediatorial seal, “the Lord knows who are his” (NASB). One is reminded of what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “. . . I **will** build **my** church: and the gates of hades will **not** overpower it” (NASB) [emphasis DgM].

Ward, commenting on verse 2 writes: [This is] “a deliberate policy, not to restrict but to safeguard the spontaneous expansion of the church. . . There must be some standard of Christian truth to check extravagances and to be an authority to which to appeal.” He continues, “Timothy was to *entrust* the gospel that is, to ‘deposit’ it in the care of *faithful men*.” Summing up, he writes, “Timothy was to look upon the whole body of believing men and choose among them those who would be capable of teaching.”⁴⁸

MacArthur brings out the seriousness of the process. Paul’s instruction

⁴⁵ Dr. McCune was often heard to say, “Language is univocal—it speaks with one voice.”

⁴⁶ Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Fourth Edition, 2014, 34. “A text cannot mean what it could never have meant for its original readers/hearers.”

⁴⁷ For an excellent exposition of this passage, see William Hendricksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Thessalonians, The Pastorals, and Hebrews*, The New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 4th printing 2007, 245-270.

⁴⁸ Ward, Ronald A. *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus*, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974, 160-161.

“*Paratithemi* (entrust) is here an imperative and carries the idea of depositing something valuable for safekeeping. . . Timothy’s assignment was to run the second lap, as it were, of this spiritual relay, in which he was to **entrust the things** he had been taught by Paul. . . **to faithful men** under his care. That which he was to carefully guard. . . he also was to carefully teach. . . It is reserved for **faithful men, who will be able to teach others also**. He is directing Timothy to invest in the lives of spiritually devout men who are gifted to teach. . . .⁴⁹

Berry makes three excellent points:

1) Timothy’s responsibility was not to pass on new truth but to teach what he had learned from Paul; (2) Timothy was to invest his life in those who meant business for the Lord. He was to commit them [things he had heard from Paul] to faithful men; (3) Paul even qualified what faithful men Timothy was to pass these things on to—those ‘who shall be able to teach others also.’ It was not enough that the men be trustworthy; they had to be committed to teaching this information to others.⁵⁰

From a mediatorial standpoint, words like “entrust” and “faithful” leave a lasting impression. Paul, in verse 1, reminds Timothy to stand tall, to “be strong.” MacArthur renders the verb “be strong,” as “by *means* of the **grace that is in Christ Jesus.**”⁵¹ The entrustment was extremely important; it was a direct descendant of the original command from the Sovereign, “make disciples.” Paul understood for he also felt the weight of the directive. His testimony in Ephesians 6:19-20: “. . . and pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak” (NASB). Also in 1 Timothy 1:12, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service” (NASB).

Based on the above, it seems that in Ephesus, where Paul had sent Timothy to be at least the acting pastor, one of his tasks was to be that of training a plurality of teachers. We have no exact idea of what these teachers’ end goal may have been, except that they were to be faithful in teaching others as well. It is logical to assume, however, that not all of them would be pastors, or overseers. No doubt, most would be lifelong students and teachers, faithfully making disciples of Jesus Christ that were also faithful and able to teach on down the line. Possibly some, maybe even many, could trace their learning legacy back through the centuries to young Timothy and one of those he personally taught in Ephesus some nearly 2000 years ago.

It is my conclusion that box #5 best illustrates the meaning of the Ephesians 4:11 phrase, “the pastors and teachers.” All pastors must be able to teach; not all teachers are to be a pastor.

⁴⁹ MacArthur, John. *2 Timothy*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Chicago: Moody Press, 1995, 41 [emphasis MacArthur].

⁵⁰ Barry, Harold J. *Gems from the Original, Vol. II: Studies in II Timothy*, Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1975, 46.

⁵¹ MacArthur, John, 38 [emphasis MacArthur].

But, there is more than mere learning and teaching of doctrine. Marshall and Payne write:

. . . Sound doctrine is vital. In the pastorals, a baton is being passed as in a relay—and that baton is the gospel itself. God entrusts the gospel to Paul (1 Tim. 1:11-12), who in turn passes it on to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:18-19; 6:11-14; 20-21). Paul now wants Timothy to do the same: to entrust what Paul has delivered to him to faithful people who will also be able to teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). The heart of training is not to impart a skill, but to impart sound doctrine. Paul uses the language of ‘training’ to refer to a lifelong process whereby Timothy and his congregation are taught by Scripture to reject false religion, and to conform their hearts and their lives to sound doctrine. Good biblical training results in a godly life based on sound, health-giving teaching. . . [The] transfer of the “good deposit” of the gospel is not a barren, educational exercise. It’s deeply and inescapably relational.⁵²

The life-long goal, then, as a pastor, is to train others so that they in concert may equip the saints so that the saints can do ministry in the local church, so that the body of Christ can be built up into a unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God (Ephesians 4:12-13a, DgM paraphrase).⁵³

The prophet aspect of the mediatorial responsibility in the local church is centered on the pastor and those faithful men that are also willing and able to teach others.

The Kingly Role

The ruling aspect of a local church is a shared responsibility divided, not necessarily equally, between the pastor and the congregation. Bauder introduces the concept:

One misconception concerning congregational polity should be corrected at the outset. Congregational church government is not the same thing as democracy—especially not as it is practiced in secular politics. Democracy is the brute rule of majorities. In a democracy, all voices are equal, and a bare 51 percent majority has the power to enforce its will upon the minority. For a Baptist church to behave in such a way, however, would dishonor Scripture and bring reproach upon the name of the Lord.

⁵² Marshall, Colin and Tony Payne. *The Trellis and the Vine*, Kingsford, NSW, Australia, Matthias Media, 2009, 71-72.

⁵³ See Michael Dellaperute, “Theology is for Everyone,” *Baptist Bulletin*, July/Aug 2020, 8-11 or find article at baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/theology-is-for-everyone (accessed 9/23/2020) for an example of how good theology is needed so that the Christian can be an effective minister in his everyday life. See also Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013, for five major new values that many (even most?) pastors and churches need to make to accomplish what Paul is writing about in 2 Timothy 2:2ff. and Ephesians 4:11-16. See also Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 90-91 for his concept of the pastoral role being explained by the term “coach.” In the remainder of the book, he expands on that concept. See also John C. Maxwell, *5 Levels of Leadership*, New York: Center Street, 2011, in which he contends that the pinnacle of leadership is developing other leaders to their highest possible level. See especially sections entitled, “Level 4: People Development” and “Level 5: The Pinnacle” on pages 179-270.

Granted, in congregational polity a vote still needs to be taken. At the end of the day, some proportion of the membership must be sufficient to make a decision that binds the entire congregation. A unanimous decision is not always necessary for a church to move forward. The factor that distinguishes this procedure from pure democracy is that before a church begins to count votes, it must weigh counsel. Some counsel weighs more than other counsel. The church's weightiest counselors can rightly be called its leaders. Most churches have both unofficial and official leaders. Legitimately, unofficial leaders are those who have won a hearing by virtue of their Biblical understanding, spiritual maturity, and service for the Lord. The New Testament also assigns official leadership to specific individuals within the congregation. When these officers speak authoritatively, the church ignores their counsel at the peril of God's displeasure.

Congregational polity includes several elements. The first is the competence and authority of the congregation to make its own decisions under Christ. The next element involves the church's official leadership, the office of pastor-bishop-elder. The next element requires a discussion of the office of deacon. This discussion will indicate that New Testament deacons are not officially leaders so much as helpers, though they must exercise a kind of leadership to fulfill the responsibilities of their office. Finally, the explanation of Baptist congregational polity will close with a reaffirmation of the importance of church unity.⁵⁴

He then has two main headings in the chapter "Congregational Government."⁵⁵ They are "Pastors Lead" and "Congregations Decide."

PASTORS LEAD

There is the saying found in many places, "Everything rises or falls on leadership." For the pastor, leadership is to be done by influence, and that influence is best utilized by a man of high moral and ethical character. "Christian leaders, above all, must demonstrate moral character if they expect to exact lasting influence upon their followers."⁵⁶

Bauder lists four considerations that will affect a pastor's authority: (1) "The New Testament shows that churches, not simply pastors, making the most important decisions." He demonstrates this fact in pages 92-99. (2) ". . . fiat, decision-making authority is explicitly forbidden to the pastor. Writing to elders, the apostle Peter said that they must not act as lords over God's heritage (1 Pet. 5:3). The verb for 'act as lords' means 'to be master' or 'to rule' in the sense of making and enforcing decisions by fiat. The word does not refer to the elders' attitudes as they make decisions but to the kind of authority that they must not exercise." (3) ". . . the pastor's authority is regularly

⁵⁴ Bauder, 91-92.

⁵⁵ Bauder, 91-128.

⁵⁶ Michael, Larry J. *Spurgeon on Leadership*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2003, 83.

associated with his preaching and teaching ministry.” (4) The pastor’s example is also connected to his authority.”⁵⁷

Bauder continues:

The New Testament epistles draw a fairly clear picture of pastoral leadership. Pastors are expected to lead, but their authority is moral rather than fiat in nature. They do not make decisions for the church, but they teach the Scriptures in such a way as to prepare the church to make wise decisions for itself. They live out their faith so transparently that their congregations can see by their example how biblical principles come to bear upon life. They do this all in a spirit of gentleness, patience, and meekness that resists becoming embroiled in quarrels (2 Tim. 2:23, 24).

In other words, a pastor has no authority of his own. He operates strictly with the authority of Jesus Christ—an authority mediated only through the Word of God. A pastor’s private opinions are no more authoritative than the opinions of any other person. His authority consists in the proclamation of the Scriptures as he rightly explains their meaning, brings them to bear upon life, and illustrates their truth through personal example. When he has done these things, God’s people are morally obligated to submit to him and obey him. Their submission is not personally directed to him as a man, nor is it even directed toward the pastoral office per se. Their submission is directed to the Word of God that he has proclaimed, explained, applied, and lived. If they fail to obey him under these circumstances, they will find themselves in a less-than-advantageous position when their pastor gives account for their souls (Heb. 13:17). Jesus Christ will hold them responsible for their disobedience.⁵⁸

Hammett offers a similar thought: “. . .while elder or pastoral leadership is crucial, . . . elder leadership does not negate the case for congregational *government*. . .The motivations behind elder rule. . .do not lead in a healthy direction. . .Elder rule cuts off the wisdom available for decision making from the whole body of God’s people.”⁵⁹

Bauder does, however, mention a critical caveat. “If the pastor’s authority consists in teaching, he must be able to teach the congregation. He must be able to teach without constantly having his teaching subverted or contradicted within the church’s ministry. . .By calling a pastor, a congregation, in principle, recognizes this delegation of authority.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Bauder, 106.

⁵⁸ Bauder, 107-108.

⁵⁹ Hammett, John S. *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2005, 157.

⁶⁰ Bauder, 109.

CONGREGATIONS DECIDE

A key factor for endorsing the idea that the congregation of a local church is to be the decider is the fact of “soul liberty.” Bauder describes soul liberty as, “. . .The responsibility that all believes share to understand and obey God’s requirements for themselves. This duty cannot be delegated or assigned to another believer.”⁶¹ In conjunction, as noted above, it is the pastor’s and the teachers’ responsibility to provide instruction for the “equipping of the saints.” And it was the church’s decision as to whom their pastor would be.

Bauder explains:

For churches, as for all organizations, two of the most important concerns that must be addressed are boundaries (who is out and who is in) and leadership (who is in charge). Within the local church of the New Testament, both of these areas are subject to the congregation as a whole. These are the most important decisions that a church must make. While other kinds of decisions are left unaddressed in the New Testament, we can certainly reason from the greater to the lesser. If the most important decisions are placed in the hands of the whole congregation, then the less important decisions must not be held from them. Consequently. . . local churches must be governed by the congregation and not by bishops, councils, colleges, committees, boards, elders, synods, district superintendents, general assemblies, conferences, associations, presbyteries, or popes. In the decisions of the local church, the congregation is answerable only to Christ.⁶²

This is borne out by a number of examples recorded in the New Testament. There is a congregational decision in the choosing of the seven men to care for the Greek-speaking widows of Jerusalem in Acts 6:1-6. This procedure was suggested by the Twelve as they acted out their leadership role. Bauder lists three additional instances of congregational decision making with the coordinated leadership of the Apostles.

He notes: The church at Jerusalem heard reports of conversions in Antioch. The Jerusalem church (the congregation) sent Barnabus to Antioch to encourage the brethren (Acts 11:19-24). During a theological dispute, the congregation at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabus to the church at Jerusalem to investigate the doctrinal deviation of some of Jerusalem’s members. In turn, the congregation at Jerusalem selected Silas and Judas Barsabbas to return with the church’s reply (Acts 15:1-3, 22) In another instance, when Paul was traveling with a financial offering intended for the Jerusalem church, the congregations in Macedonia selected a companion to travel with him for the sake of accountability (2 Cor. 8:18-21).⁶³

⁶¹ Bauder, 93.

⁶² Bauder, 99.

⁶³ Bauder, 94, adapted. For Bauder’s full treatment of congregational government, see 91-128; see also John S. Hammett, 135-215.

Congregations are also responsible for making new members decisions, decisions of local church discipline and restoration of repentant members.⁶⁴

SUMMARY

God's instrument for the advancement of His goal of making disciples in this dispensation is the church, made up of a host of local churches. While some may claim that the church is an organism, it must, at the local level, be an organized organism. Obedience to God's Word in local church polity is important. Dagg wrote over 150 years ago, "Church order and the ceremonials of religion are less important than a new heart; and in the view of some, any laborious investigation of questions respecting them may appear to be needless and unprofitable. But we know, from the Holy Scriptures, that Christ gave commands on these subjects, and we cannot refuse to obey."⁶⁵

During the current dispensation, the mediatorial responsibilities of providing a people for God so that He could be their God and dwell with them rests on the local churches around the world.

SECULAR GOVERNMENT

Since God has designated the church to be His mediatorial agent for accomplishing His "religious" purposes for this dispensation, how is man to govern his affairs outside of the local church? The local church deals primarily with what we commonly call the spiritual aspect of man. How is he to govern himself in the civil aspects of human life and activity? What is the purpose of human government during this dispensation?

The Purpose of Civil Government in Relationship to God's People

First Timothy 2:1-4 is a call to prayer for all men, including especially kings and those in high positions. These prayers are to be made so that the people in the civil government provide an environment of tranquility and quietness for God's people as they endeavor to live godly and serious Christian lives. When God's people can grow and develop and mature uninhibited, their testimony to the unsaved is enhanced and they are more readily able to spread the gospel. Paul urged the Ephesians to pray for him that he would be able to ". . . make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Ephesians 6:19 NASB). God is pleased when His people can share the gospel message of Jesus Christ with friends and neighbors, and do so peaceably.

Romans 13 :1-7 provides additional information on the purpose of our civil government. God has given them the responsibility to put fear into those that do evil. Again, it is God's desire that His people be able to do good works without fear from their government, and that those who would do evil be punished accordingly.

Paul also makes it clear that God is the One Who places or allows those that are in governmental positions of authority to be there; they get there by being sent by God. He has assigned to them, then, the responsibility to govern well, and as is noted, to resist His chosen leaders is to, in effect, resist God Himself.

⁶⁴ Bauder, 98-99.

⁶⁵ Dagg, J. L. *Manual of Theology: Second Part, A Treatise on Church Order*, Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858 reprint, Harrisonburg, VA, Gana Books, 1982, 12.

First Peter 2:13-16 also conveys the idea of God's assigning responsibility to governmental leaders. In this passage as well, they are charged with the responsibility to punish evildoers and also to praise the doers of good.

In all three passages, the concept of God being the sender and assigner of responsibility is apparent. The Sovereign Creator and Owner of the world has delegated to certain of mankind to have authority and rule over the human race, and in so doing will also be involved in much of the rest of creation by enacting laws and codes and ordinances by which men conduct themselves as they go about the business of life on this earth. In all of this, God desires that His redeemed people be physically and emotionally safe, that they may be able to effectively spread the gospel message and fulfill the assignment of "making disciples."

The Purpose of Civil Government in Relationship to the General Public (Saved and Unsaved)

The Declaration of Independence states that men are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. From the earliest days of earth history, human life has been considered sacred in the eyes of God. Cain suffered serious consequences for his murder of Abel. In Genesis 9:6, God, reminding Noah that man was created in His own image, said to him, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By men his blood shall be shed." One of the responsibilities of government, then, is to protect the lives of its citizens and to exact life-ending punishment upon those that commit murder, no matter how it may be euphemistically disguised.

God created man responsible to Himself on an individual basis. We will all stand before God and give an account of our lives and of our own personal relationship with Him. Since we all stand individually responsible before God (2 Cor. 5:9-10 and Rev. 20:11-15), it is only logical that we should have the liberty to freely make our own determinations in this matter.⁶⁶ In the Bible, liberty is not the right to do whatever a finite and sinful person may want to do; liberty gives one the opportunity to do right. He is free from unnecessary restraints to accomplish God's good, acceptable, and perfect will. There are to be proper boundaries established for the protection of individuals so that in an environment of quietness and civility man may pursue his aspirations using his God-given talents to the full.

Being created in the image of God, man is a thinking, emotional, and volitional being. He has plans and goals, aspirations of improvement—of finding, as it were, that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Man has an innate desire to be satisfied, to be able to have a sense of significant accomplishment. Jesus said that He had come, "that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 NASB).

⁶⁶ Bauder provides the following thoughts concerning believers. I believe the principle includes everyone: ". . . soul liberty is the responsibility that all believers share to understand and obey God's requirements for themselves. This duty cannot be delegated or assigned to another believer. Each individual believer is personally responsible for understanding and obeying God," 83. For his full discussion, see Bauder 75-90.

The Mediatorial Aspect of Civil Government

That there is a mediatorial aspect to civil government is apparent from the phraseology in Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-16 “. . .there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Romans 13:1 NASB). Verse 6 reads, “for rulers are servants of God” and verse 4 reads, “a minister of God” twice. Peter (2:13-14) uses the phrase “. . .or to governors as sent by him” (referring to the Lord in verse 13).

THE PRIESTLY FUNCTION

In 1 Timothy 2:5, it is made very clear that the priestly function is handled by the one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus. John 14:6 explicitly states that Jesus Christ is “the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me” (NASB).

THE PROPHET FUNCTION

The prophet aspect of civil government is on a big-picture-applicable-to-all-men level. There is a moral dimension to a number of laws such as those having to do with murder, rape, incest, theft, embezzlement, marriage and divorce, and property rights, etc. These seem to be natural to man and many are covered by the Ten Commandments, especially the last six commandments. The source of the laws that impact these behaviors is God Himself through His written Word.

THE KINGLY FUNCTION

The kingly, or ruling, function of the civil government is the most prominent role and usually takes up the most energy and resources of the people. It involves everything from building codes to intricate tax law. We have hunting and fishing licenses, driver's licenses, license plates, licenses to practice medicine or law, licenses to spray farm crops. We have a president, a vice-president, senators, representatives, judges, governors, assemblymen, mayors, boards of supervisors, attorneys general, secretaries (of state, agriculture, etc.). There is ecological law, commerce law, civil law, criminal law, building codes, labor law, traffic laws, and aviation regulations. All these, and more, much more, are promulgated and regulated by some level of national, state, or local government. The mandate to rule the earth and to subdue it—to rule over the fish, the birds, and every living thing—is being carried out to various levels of competence and success by governments all around the world. Some are doing well, and their people thrive; some are not, and the populace suffers.

The Best Form of Government to Accomplish These God-given Goals

While the biblical passages cited above (1 Timothy 2:1-4; Romans 13:1-7; and 1 Peter 2:13-16) do not stipulate a form of government, they do indicate a set of results that the government is to provide for its citizens, especially its regenerate ones. Therefore, the most biblical form of government is that which will provide an environment in which the above parameters can be attained. In addition to that, the form of government needs to be designed considering such issues as the depravity of man, the need for limits and fences, the necessity to be a government of laws (giving permanency) rather than of men (leaving open to fluctuation). There is no doubt that some forms of government can never meet the demands of a free and vibrant society. The book of Judges ends, “in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes”

(21:25 NASB). So anarchy is eliminated. Communism, with its godless philosophy, must also be eliminated. Pure democracy, which is akin to anarchy, can be very unwieldy and is also eliminated.

There are various forms of monarchy, from lifetime hierarchy to periodically elected kings, from a highly constitutional government to one in which the ruler decrees the laws of the land as he sees fit. When Israel's first king, Saul, died, David, a non-relative and not even the eldest son, was chosen as king. From that point on, an heir of David has been king of Israel. During that time, there were both good and not so good days in the realm. The differentiation was based upon the nation's adherence to the laws of the land, as contained in the Mosaic Law. Based on the long-term experience of the nation Israel under various sinful and finite kings, it would seem prudent to consider a better way.⁶⁷

Closer to home, as George Washington was beginning his tenure as the first Constitutional President of the United States, there was considerable debate concerning how he should be addressed. A good part of the debate had to do with how certain titles would remind of the monarchy that had been defeated in the recent Revolutionary War. It was finally decided that his title should be, "The President of the United States," now often stated simply as, "POTUS."⁶⁸

The USA's republican form of representative government has worked well for some 230+ years (1787-2020). That is not necessarily the criteria for determining if a government is biblical, but it does indicate that our nation has been blessed by God in a unique way.

In the early days of the USA Constitution, our country was often called or characterized as an "experiment."⁶⁹ As the founders were debating the details of the Constitution,

⁶⁷ See, for example, 1 Kings 14:22; 15:3; 15:11; 15:26; 16:30 for both good and bad results of a monarchy.

⁶⁸ Ketcham, Ralph, *James Madison: A Biography*, Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990, 284-6. See also Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004, 183-4 and 188-190. Both accounts convey the tension that existed over the issue of a monarchy for the United States. When Andrew Jackson was President, David Barton, then Senator of Missouri, feared "Executive encroachment." He stated on the Senate floor March 17, 1830, "The histories of all nations which have lost their liberties lay before them and they saw on their pages that arbitrary Executive discretion and will. . .had been the destroyers of natural liberty throughout the greater part of the world. . .and the fathers did intend. . .to establish a government of law and of checks and restraints upon Executive will, in which no case should exist in which the fate of the humblest citizen whether in private or in public life could depend upon the arbitrary will of a single man." (quoted from C. Perry Patterson, *Presidential Government in the United States: The Unwritten Constitution*, Chapel Hill, NC: 1947, 73 in Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*, New York: Random House, 2008, 120-121 and endnotes "120" on page 404. Jackson himself also held that, "In a country where offices are created solely for the benefit of the people, no one man has any more intrinsic right to official station than another. Offices were not established to give support to particular men at public expense." Also quoted in Jon Meacham, *American Lion*, 120 from Andrew Jackson's message to Capitol Hill on Thursday, December 8, 1829. (See Meacham, 119)

⁶⁹ In reading biographies of the first four constitutional Presidents, the term was used often. See Ron Chernow, (*Washington: A Life*, New York: Penguin Press, 2010, 569) quoting from Washington's first inaugural address: ". . .the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the republican model of government, are justly considered as *deeply*, perhaps as *finally* staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people." Also, David McCullough, (*John Adams*, New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2001, 398-99) describing people's thoughts,

many factors were playing on their minds. For example, Ketcham captures a part of Madison's thought process, and the many issues that were being considered as the Constitution was being written and debated. Following are excerpts showing what was on Madison's mind:

Madison rested his political thought on the moral standards of John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government*—primarily that reason requires all men be esteemed free and equal. . . . There was nothing about the "nature" of any men that could be grounds for depriving them of freedom or that could entitle one man to rule another.

In applying these moral imperatives, Madison. . . insisted. . . that the state existed to protect and expand freedom and equality of opportunity, and that. . . there had to be a powerful *portion* of the government responsive to the people, ordinarily through a legislative body composed of their elected representatives.

Madison asserted that the freedom least subject to social restraint was freedom of expression, including the rights to believe, speak, and write according to one's own lights. Without these rights. . . freedom meant very little. . . . Madison also considered certain personal immunities. . . to be natural rights—trial by jury, confrontation of witnesses, freedom from general warrants, seizures, excessive bail, and cruel punishments, a guarantee of habeas corpus, and subjugation of armies to civil control.

[In his extensive studies, Madison realized that the]. . . records was generally one of war, tyranny, violence, stupidity, and corruption, with distressingly few instances of peace, prosperity, and enlightenment. [He kept]. . . in mind human depravity. Unlike some. . . Madison sought always to recognize and take into account the limitations of human nature.

The real and difficult problems of government existed precisely because of the mixed character of mankind. There was sufficient reason, virtue, and charity among men to afford some prospect that good government might result from the principle of consent, but there was also sufficient greed, corruption, and ignorance to require the lawful restraints traditionally associated with government.

especially those of John Adams himself as he contemplated his new job as the first vice-president: "At the start of every new venture of importance in his life, John Adams was invariably assailed by grave doubts. . . Part of this was stage fright. . . Mainly it was the burden of an inordinate ability to perceive things as they were: he was apprehensive because he saw clearly how much there was to be apprehensive about. And so it was as he approached the untried office of Vice-President." Also, Jon Meacham, (*Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2013, 349) quoting from Jefferson's first inaugural address: "I know, indeed, that some honest men fear that a republican government cannot be strong, that this government is not strong enough; but would the honest patriot, in full tide of successful experiment, abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm on the theocratic and visionary fear that this government, the world's best hope, may by possibility want energy to preserve itself?" Also, Ralph Ketcham (*James Madison: A Biography*, Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990, 604-5) wrote, ". . . By 1816 Madison was far more certain than he could possibly have been twenty years earlier that the nature of American government was firmly free, united, and republican."

Madison had both reservations about democracy and confidence that republican government was far better suited to the nature of man than any other form. He wrote Jefferson in 1787 that:

Those who contend for a simple Democracy, or a pure republic, actuated by the sense of the majority. . . assume or suppose a case which is altogether fictitious. They found their reasoning on the idea, that the people composing the Society enjoy not only an equality of political rights; but that they have all precisely the same interests and the same feeling in every respect. . . . We know however that no Society even did or can consist of so homogeneous a mass of Citizens.⁷⁰

While Ketcham does not in the above accounts credit God or the Bible for any of Madison's thinking, it must be kept in mind that during his developing years, Madison had ample exposure to the Bible. He regularly attended Brick Church with his extended family as a youngster.⁷¹ Even before he was born, his father purchased a four-volume commentary set on the Epistles of the Apostle Paul.⁷² During his schooling at the College of New Jersey, there were classes in the Greek Testament and parts of the Hebrew Bible.⁷³ He also participated in religious debates on Sundays.⁷⁴ The College of New Jersey is described as “. . . the fruit of Presbyterian zeal and moral concern.”⁷⁵

Possibly the greatest influences were his teachers and other associates.

The other foundation stone of learning in Madison's day, and of his education, was the Christian tradition. Down through his graduation from college every one of Madison's teachers, as far as we know, was either a clergyman or a devoutly orthodox Christian layman. In fact, so pervasive was Christian influence, especially in rearing children, that an education under other than Christian auspices was virtually unknown. . . though much of the Christian aspect of Madison's schooling was relatively perfunctory and he seems never to have been an ardent believer himself, he nonetheless year after year undertook his studies from a Christian viewpoint. Furthermore, he never took an antireligious or even an anti-Christian stance, and he retained the respect and admiration of the devoutly orthodox young men with whom he studied at Princeton. It seems clear he neither embraced fervently nor rejected utterly the Christian base of his education. He accepted its tenets generally and formed his outlook on life within its world view.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Ketcham, Ralph, 293-298.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

That Madison and the other framers discussed and debated these kinds of issues, and were able to incorporate these concepts into the Constitution, demonstrates the biblicality of our form of representative republicanism.

Two issues, however, stand out as being biblically based and that have made our Constitution unique among all those of the world. The first is that the founders understood the biblical fact of human depravity and the depths to which governing men could go in their abuse of the governed. The second is that they understood that, even though they most likely did not understand the dispensational distinction, the need for a separation of church and state. These considerations, coupled together and blended in with the idea of representative government, make the US Constitution very much a document based upon biblical principles and concepts.

A brief look at each:

THE FACT OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

In their study and interaction the founders realized that, while man had the ability to do many good things, he also had the potential for evil. Therefore, within the construct of the republican form of government, they developed a number of safeguards to counteract the problem. These are commonly called checks and balances. The fact of three branches of government reduces the potential of one branch becoming all-powerful. In addition, there are provisions for cooperation between two branches that can affect the third branch. An example is that the President appoints a judge. The Senate gives advice and consent.⁷⁷ Another example is that it takes both houses of Congress to pass a new law, plus the President must sign it or veto it. If he vetoes, the Congress can override the veto with a super majority vote.⁷⁸

Term lengths are set so that those serving must face the voters every two,⁷⁹ four,⁸⁰ or six⁸¹ years. In the case of the President, he is allowed only two terms of four years each⁸² and is elected by an Electoral College.⁸³ The President can be impeached by the House of Representatives, with the Senate performing a trial to determine the President's fate.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ US Constitution, Article II, Section 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Article I, Sections 1 and 7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Article I, Section 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Article II, Section 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Article I, Section 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, Amendment XXII.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Article II, Section 1 and Amendment XII.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Article I, Section 3 and Article II, Section 4.

These and other provisions were included to attempt to prolong the good life of the Republic. One of the motivations of the founders is encapsulated in a letter written in 1834 shortly before President Madison died. He wrote for posthumous reading a letter entitled, "Advice to My Country":

The advice nearest my heart and deepest in my convictions is that the Union of the States be cherished and perpetuated. Let the open enemy to it be regarded as a Pandora with box opened; and the disguised one, as the Serpent creeping with his deadly wiles into Paradise."⁸⁵

RECOGNITION FOR UNINHIBITED RELIGION TO BE A PART OF THE NATION'S LIFE

With few exceptions, the separation of church and state was not a widely held concept in America at the time of the writing of the Constitution. Most of the thirteen states had a state-established or supported religious entity. Congregationalism (a.k.a. Puritanism) was the state-supported church in New England (except for Rhode Island). Except for Pennsylvania, New York and all the states to the south supported the Church of England (a.k.a. Anglicanism, known today as Episcopalianism).⁸⁶

Heyrman notes, "Laws in those colonies mandated attendance at the public worship services of one church, levied taxes on all citizens to pay ministers' salaries, and penalized religious dissenters who sought to practice or proselyte their faiths."⁸⁷

Two men are credited with initiating a change. Roger Williams, in the 1640's, established the Rhode Island Colony. Warren writes:

Williams' radical ideas on state and religious liberty. . .which ultimately formed the distinctive political foundation of the colony of Rhode Island, were that the church was an entirely separate entity from the state. It was a voluntary association of individuals, and one of the many civil corporations that the state was obliged to protect. The magistrates' authority was temporal, not spiritual, just as the authority of the church was spiritual, not temporal.⁸⁸

In 1681, King Charles II of England, in settling an old debt owed to Penn's father, granted William Penn a charter to create a Quaker settlement in North America. This eventually came to be the colony of Pennsylvania. By 1701, the final Charter of Privileges was granted.

The first clause of the Charter of Privileges reiterated Pennsylvania's commitment to religious liberty—freedom of worship to all who "acknowledge one almighty God" without attending or belonging to a religious body, and the

⁸⁵ Ketcham, 671.

⁸⁶ Heyrman, Christine Leigh. *Church and State in British North America*, accessed from: nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/eigheten/ekeyinfo/chustate.htm on 8-5-2020, page 1/6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Warren, James A. *God, War, and Providence*, New York: Scribner, 2018, 70.

ability to serve in office by all who believed in Jesus Christ and were willing to affirm, if not swear, allegiance to the government. . . . Pennsylvania was a pioneer of the separation of religion and government in the American colonies.⁸⁹

By 1787, upon the completion of the Constitution and during the time it was being ratified by the states, there remained controversy concerning a “Bill of Rights.” In an introduction to *The Federalist No. 84*, Bernstein writes:

The Constitution’s lack of a bill of rights was a dominant issue during the ratification controversy. Including a declaration of rights in a written constitution began in 1776, with the Virginia Declaration of Rights, framed by George Mason. Mason attended the Federal Convention in 1787, and toward its close he proposed to add a bill of rights to the Constitution. He was defeated, decided not to sign the Constitution, and opposed the document’s adoption during ratification. The Constitution’s opponents cited the lack of a bill of rights as the Constitution’s worst defect; even some of its supporters, including Edmund Pendleton and John Adams, expressed concern about what they saw as an unaccountable omission.

Supporters of the Constitution criticized a bill of rights as unnecessary and dangerous—unnecessary because the Constitution gave the general government no power to endanger rights, dangerous because a bill of rights might omit some rights, leaving unprotected others deserving protection. In *No. 84*, Hamilton distilled these arguments and added an argument of his own, rooted in the New York constitution of 1777. He maintained that the Constitution itself was a bill of rights, with guarantees of liberty scattered throughout its text, like the New York constitution. (In 1789, Madison became convinced that it would be necessary, prudent, and wise to add a bill of rights to the Constitution; he led the effort in Congress to create the first ten amendments to the Constitution, known as the U.S. Bill of Rights.)⁹⁰

It is very difficult to know exactly what these and others understood from the Scriptures regarding religious liberty, or what their proof texts were. But they were cognizant of the fact that, as Bauder writes: “. . . Any devotion afforded to God must come from the heart to be acceptable. Merely formal religious exercises are an offense to God and merit only judgment for those who practice them”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Wolf, Stephanie. “Pennsylvania Founding,” accessed from: <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/pennsylvania-founding/> copyright 2016, Rutgers University. Accessed 8-6-2020, pages 1 and 5.

⁹⁰ R. B. Bernstein, ed. *The Federalist Papers*, London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2016, 108.

⁹¹ Bauder, 131.

No doubt the basic form on government that the founders chose would have provided for a better situation than what they had experienced under England's rule and under the Articles of Confederation. The idea of a representative form of government is good. Men should be able to choose their own governors. Even though they never used the word "God" in the entire document,⁹² they skillfully incorporated into a republican form of government biblical principles and ideas such as the individual responsibility of man before God, the fact of man's intellectual, emotional, and volitional nature combined with his depravity, the need to separate the church life from state rule, among others. They provided the new nation with an excellently conceived mediatorial workable document.

WARNING!

So the conclusion is that the Constitution of the United States as amended by the ten-part Bill of Rights is the most biblical form of government on earth during this Church Age dispensation.

As a young lad, I recall coming to the understanding that here in the United States it was "easy" to be a Christian and to live for God. It seemed to me that the government, my schools, my church, my neighbors, and my parents were on a similar page of right and wrong, of standards of decency, of patriotism, of the fact of God and the good of religious activity. I came to love and appreciate my country, and to study its founding and the principles upon which it has stood these nearly 250 years. That was in the 1950's and 1960's.

Today, we still have the same Constitution, the same Bill of Rights, and the same form of representative government. We vote every two or four or six years for our leaders. We pay our taxes and enjoy a relatively prosperous life. We have opportunities unheard of in other places.

Yet, in the last few years, and especially in these last few months, it seems that our country is at risk. The future seems unsure, murky, even scary.

While the form of government is very important, there is an even more vital issue. It is that of the goodness of the people and their leaders. Proverbs 29:2 says, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice; But when a wicked man rules, people groan" (NASB). Solomon also wrote in Proverbs 11:11, "By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted; But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down" (NASB). In Proverbs 28:12, "When the righteous triumph, there is great glory; But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves" (NASB) and 14:34, "Righteousness exalts a nation; But sin is a disgrace to any people" (NASB).

We read in the Old Testament of the cycle of God's blessing, the people's sin, God's judgment, and the people's repentance. This happened even though they had the Law of Moses directly from God.

Later, in 2 Kings 17:6-7, it reads, "In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. Now this came about **because the sons of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God**, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt" (NASB [emphasis Mains]).

⁹² Stallard, Mike, "The Biblical Basis of the United States Constitution," paper presented at the Council of Dispensational Hermeneutics, September 2020, 1.

Paul, writing to the Romans (1:18-32),⁹³ describes the folly of a society that rejects the revelation of a gracious God, that denies the creative work of God, that smugly disregards His beneficial goodness, and that substitutes worship of the true and living God by worshipping their own fallible creations. These sins provoke the wrath of God. Paul shows a three-step downward process in verses 24 to 25, 26 to 27, and 28 to 32. God actively gives the society over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity. Secondly, He actively gives them over to degrading passions. And finally, He actively gives them over to a depraved mind. There is a sexual revolution, then a further revolution of abominable practices, and finally, a revolution of degraded insanity.

Our United States society experienced a sexual revolution in the 1960s and following; later, we have seen a revolution of all kinds of perversions, now entirely uncloseted. And, we have seen our governments make laws advancing the perversions, not just to legitimize, but in actual praise of them. (Remember the rainbow-colored White House after a certain judicial decision?)⁹⁴

John MacArthur lists nine (9) requirements of a national leader, if that society is to have God's blessing. They are: **1) The worship of the true God** (Psalm 2:10-12; Psalm 72:11; Psalm 138:4-5; Psalm 47:1-2); **2) Righteousness** (2 Samuel 23:3-4; Proverbs 16:12-13; Proverbs 14:34; Proverbs 20:28; Proverbs 25:5; Proverbs 29:2); **3) Justice** (Psalm 82:1-8; Proverbs 29:4; Proverbs 8:15-16); **4) Wisdom** (Proverbs 8:12-14; Jeremiah 22:1-5; Daniel 2: 20-23; Proverbs 25:1-3); **5) Honesty** (Proverbs 17:7; Proverbs 20:28); **6) Morality** (Proverbs 31:1-9); **7) Humility** (2 Chronicles 33:1-25 [see especially verses 12 and 23]); **8) Protection** (Proverbs 31:8-9; Habakkuk 2:12; Psalm 94:20-23); and **9) Courage** (Joshua 1:6-9).⁹⁵

The lesson is simple. The principle seems clear; the ever-holy, righteous, and sovereign God owns this world and everything in it. When He is obeyed, worshipped properly, exalted, and honored as the Creator/Sustainer God that He is, He will bless those people on a national level. He has done that through the centuries through many forms of government. In the age to come, the Millennial Kingdom, the form of government will be basically a dictatorship. Our usual American mind would stand aghast at such a thing. Yet, we are told via the Scriptures that it will be a time of unprecedented prosperity, productivity, and peace. The reason is simple. The Leader during the ruling will be Jesus Christ, the God-

⁹³ For a detailed exposition of this passage, listen to John MacArthur's sermon, "When God Abandons a Nation," 10-6-2013 (1:07:49 long audio) found at sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=91120151914460 accessed 10/12/2020.

⁹⁴ This happened on June 26, 2015, following a Supreme Court ruling in favor of "same-sex marriage." For example, see <https://www.usatoday.com/story/theoval/2015/06/26/white-house-rainbow-gay-marriage/29374471/>. Internet article by Gregory Korte, *USA Today*, published 10:04 p.m.ET June 26, 2015/updated 11:15 p.m.ET June 26, 2015. Article entitled, "White House turns to rainbow after gay marriage ruling." The article reads as follows: "The White House was lit up in rainbow colors Friday night to celebrate the Supreme Court's ruling on gay marriage." "In a statement, the president's office said, 'The White House took on the symbolic colors of gay pride to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to progress and equality, here in America and around the world.'" "Shortly after 7 p.m., the north front of the White House was lit up in red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet as about a hundred people—both gay pride activists and tourists—looked on." "The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 Friday that states cannot prohibit marriages between two people of the same sex." "President Obama hailed the ruling earlier in the day, calling it, 'a big step in our march toward equality.'" (Accessed 10/19/2020)

⁹⁵ John MacArthur's sermon, "A Nation Under God," 9/13/2020 (1:08:03) long audio found at sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=92520405563. Nine characteristics are found between 24:52 and 59:52. Accessed 10/14/2020

Man, the holy, righteous, just, loving, impeccable Son of God. He will rule perfectly, even over a population of finite sinners. His righteousness will exalt the entire earth.

The United States may have the most biblically based form of government and a constitution that reflects many biblical and God-honoring principles. That is good. But that alone will not secure God's blessing. In a nation that is characterized by Abraham Lincoln's, ". . .a government of the people, by the people, and for the people," that blessing comes when His people live righteously and when the general population renders Him and His ideals proper respect and conformity, and when they elect leaders that will uphold the standards of God. In 1798, John Adams wrote, "Our Constitution was made for a moral and religious people. . . .It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other."⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Adams, John, letter to Massachusetts Militia, October 11, 1798, found at founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3102 accessed 8/29/2020.