

Chapter 2

God's Order: Government

Section 1: Visible Representatives

A child is born for us. To us, a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulder.

Isaiah 9:6a

Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities, for there is no authority but of God;
the authorities that exist are ordained by God.

Therefore, he who opposes the authority is resisting the ordinance of God,
and they who resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

Romans 13:1–2

The Hidden Order

The term “government” is an appropriate term for the kind of relationship enjoyed by the Father and the Son. The Son humbly confessed, “My Father is greater than I” (Jn. 14:28), and in living out that confession, he spoke only what God gave him to speak (Jn. 8:28; 12:49) and did only what God gave him to do (Jn. 5:19–20, 26). And without question, where one is greater than another and has authority to give directives to another, there is government. But the order of the Father and the Son was unique because of the extraordinary love between them (cf. Jn. 3:35; 14:31). That love did not exist between God and the angels or any other of heaven’s creatures; the order they knew was entirely different. Theirs was, and still is, strictly an order of servant and Master. The Father’s spiritual kinship with His Son made it a hidden order that was unknown and unimagined by anyone else.

I explained in Book 1 of this Series that to aid us in understanding the unique relationship between God and His Son, we humans were created with the capacity to procreate. Having children prepares us to comprehend the revelation of God as a Father, a revelation offered only to us humans. But even if we have no children, we all, from the earliest stages of life, must have had a higher authority, a parent or a guardian, watching over and caring for us. Otherwise, none of us would have survived infancy. So, by God’s design, and though we could not realize it at the time, our experience of being born and cared for laid a foundation in our spirits to understand the Father and the Son’s unique order: government by love in the Spirit instead of by rules. Jesus prayed earnestly for us, that God would admit us into their hidden order so that we might know that love:

John 17

11b. Holy Father, keep them in your name which you have given to me, that they may be one,
just as we are.

. . . .

20. And I am not asking for these alone, but also for those who believe in me through their word,
21. that they all might be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be
one in us, so that the world might believe that you sent me.

22. And the glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they might be one, just as
we are one:

23. I in them, and you in me, that they might be perfected in unity, and so that the world might
know that you sent me and have loved them just as you loved me.

Paul's great desire also was for us to experience the blessing of unity that had for so long a time been known only by the Father and the Son:

1Corinthians 1

10. I urge you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there not be divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Philippians 2

1. If there be any comfort in Christ, if any solace of love, if any fellowship in spirit, if any tender affections and mercies,
2. make my joy complete, that you think the same thing, having the same love, as united souls, thinking one thing.

John's hope for the saints was the same as Paul's, but he called God's hidden order by a different name: fellowship:

1John 1

3. That which we have seen and heard we are showing you, so that you may also have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

It was the fellowship of a shared kind of life which made the order of God and His Son a secret from all creatures. Except for the Son, no one in heaven or earth ever had fellowship with God or even knew that such fellowship existed until the Son was revealed, and even then, it was revealed only to those who believed in the Son and had received God's kind of life:

Colossians 1

25. I was made a minister by the commission of God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,
26. the mystery that was hidden from the Aeons [heavenly beings] and from generations of men, but now is revealed to His saints.

A Who, Not a What

The world fails in its pursuit of truth because people seek the wrong thing—or to state it more correctly, they seek a thing. They seek a *what* instead of a *who*. God is so completely a God of relationships that even His truth is a *who*, not a *what*. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “*What* is truth?” (Jn. 18:38) because he did not imagine that the truth could be a *who*, especially the pathetic-looking *who* standing before him at that moment. When Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me”, it should be noted that he said, “by *me*”, not “by *it*”.

In this covenant, nobody comes to the living God by means of a dead thing, a *what*. Under the law of Moses, dead things were of use in the worship of God, but after the Son was revealed, those works of the law were stripped of their glory (2Cor. 3:7–10) and became useless “dead works” (Heb. 6:1; 9:14; Gal. 2:16). No “thing” is sanctified now, only people, and we have access to God only when we receive His life, which sanctifies us (cf. Eph. 2:18). In God's kingdom, nothing dead is allowed, and everything that is of God is hidden in His Son.

John said that the Word of God is a *who* (Jn. 1:1). Paul said the power of God, the wisdom of God, and the Spirit of God are all a *who*, the Lord Jesus (1Cor. 1:24; 2Cor. 3:17). The aged prophet Simeon

called Jesus the salvation of God (Lk. 2:30), and ancient prophets sometimes referred to the hidden Son as the Name of God (e.g., Isa. 30:27; 60:9). They did not suspect that the Name of God of which they spoke was a living Being whom God would someday reveal. The government of God is also a *who*, for Jesus was the living expression of God's order. When he said, "He who believes in me is not believing in me, but in Him who sent me" (Jn. 12:44), Jesus was only confessing his place in the order that God created.

Even the gospel is a *who*. Paul magnified God for revealing His Son to him "so that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (Gal. 1:15–16). Paul's phrase, "preach Christ" (1Cor. 1:23; 2Cor. 4:5; Phip. 1:15–16) tells us that for Paul, the gospel *is* Christ and to preach Christ is to preach the gospel. Before the Son was revealed, no one could preach the gospel, except in veiled language (cf. Heb. 4:2), because no one knew who the gospel was.

The Higher Power

While acknowledging God as the higher power over him (Jn. 14:28), Jesus pleaded with skeptical fellow Jews to acknowledge that he was the higher power over them before it was too late:

John 8

23. He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.
24. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am the one, you will die in your sins."

Jesus' disciples and others in Israel acknowledged him as the higher power, and after Jesus ascended into heaven, many acknowledged his disciples as the higher power over them. Since that time, through the millennia, wise souls have likewise acknowledged the ones sent by Christ as the higher power. Foolish souls do not acknowledge the order of God; consequently, they live in spiritual darkness, even if they think they are in the light, as did the Foolish Virgins of the following parable.

The Wise and the Foolish

The necessity of knowing the Son, the most important *who* in creation, is the basic point of Jesus' parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.

Matthew 25

1. The kingdom of heaven at that time will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.
2. Five of them were wise, and the other five, foolish.
3. Those who were foolish took their lamps without taking oil with them,
4. but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.
5. When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.
6. But in the middle of the night, a loud cry was made: "Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet him!"
7. At that, all those virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.
8. Then the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out!"
9. But the wise answered, saying, "No, lest there not be enough for us and you. Go instead to those who sell, and buy some for yourselves."

10. And while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut.
11. Later, the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord! Lord! Open up for us!"
12. But he answered and said, "Truly, I tell you, I do not know you."

The most important question concerning this parable is, "What was the difference between the Wise and Foolish Virgins?" The difference lies in what having those extra vessels of oil represented, for other than that one difference, the Virgins were all very much alike:

- They all were invited to meet the Bridegroom.
- They all knew the time that the Bridegroom was expected.
- They all knew where to go to meet the Bridegroom, and they all went there.
- They all expected to be allowed into the wedding feast with the Bridegroom.
- They all knew to bring lamps.
- They all grew tired and fell asleep as they waited for the Bridegroom.
- They all were awakened by the midnight cry, and arose to go meet the Bridegroom.
- They all trimmed their lamps so that they could see their way to him.

If you had been looking on at this scene, you would not have seen two groups of five virgins. You would have seen one group of ten, and you might not have even noticed that some were carrying extra oil. They were all no doubt dressed alike, ready for a wedding reception, and were all doing the same things. Jesus called five of them wise because their extra oil meant that they knew the Bridegroom would do what he was pleased to do—even if that meant he would do other than what he had said he would do. So, they brought extra oil in case the Bridegroom decided to delay his coming. In doing that, they were saying, "We do only what pleases the Bridegroom, and he does only what pleases himself."

Everything the Foolish Virgins *did* was right. They were foolish because of what they did *not* do, to wit, they did not bring extra oil. And they did not bring extra oil because they did not really know the Bridegroom. They acknowledged his authority to give commandments, and obeyed them; they did what he told them to do, when and where he told them to do it. However, they did nothing else because they viewed him, not as free to do as he pleased but as obligated to do what he said. They thought that if the Bridegroom said it, then he had to do it.

The Foolish are those in Israel who thought that God lived by the law which He gave Israel to live by. The lesson for us is that the Bible as a whole was written for us (Rom. 15:4; 1Cor. 10:11), not for God. He does as He pleases, no matter what the Bible says. His great desire—His very purpose for sending His Son—is that we learn to be led by His Spirit so that we are as free to do His will as He is. This is why Paul said that those who are led by the Spirit are the true children of God (Rom. 8:14) and that to be led by the Bible instead of the Spirit will only lead to death (2Cor. 3:6). Jesus warned the leaders of Israel to trust him, not the Bible, to save them:

John 5

39. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, but they are they which testify of me,
40. and you don't want to come to me, that you might have life.

That is how the Foolish thought of God. They would have described the Bridegroom as faithful to them, but the Wise would have described him as faithful to himself. The Foolish pinned their hope on what the Bridegroom said, but the Wise pinned their hope on who he was. The Foolish trusted his words

completely; they would have claimed, as a popular phrase goes, that they were “standing on the word”. But the Wise trusted *him* completely; they were standing on knowledge of the Word himself. The Foolish knew only what he had said, but the Wise knew him who said it.

While the Foolish trusted the Bridegroom to do whatever he *said* he would do, the Wise trusted him to do whatever he *wanted* to do, and if on the way to meet them, the Bridegroom was pleased to stop and do good for someone, which they all must have known he was wont to do, it was none of their business. Their business was to be ready whenever he came. The Foolish knew his words, trusted his words, and staked their lives on his words, but the Wise knew him, trusted him, and staked their lives on him. The Foolish knew and trusted the *what*, but the Wise knew and trusted the *who*.

This critical difference between the Wise and the Foolish means that, in reality, the Wise Virgins were going out to meet a Bridegroom different from the one that the Foolish were going out to meet. The Foolish were going out to meet the Bridegroom as they imagined him to be, a Bridegroom made after their own image and “altogether such a one as themselves”. The Wise were going out to meet the Bridegroom who really was.

Perfectly United

Just as God did not create the Son equal with Himself, so the Son did not create others equal with himself, or equal in all respects to one another. Within the body of Christ, among heavenly beings, earthly nations, and even among animal groups, the Son has created levels of abilities and authority. Paul pointed out that even the stars were created with various degrees of glory (1Cor. 15:41). In setting up creation this way, the Son was duplicating the order into which he himself was created, and it is a hallmark of righteous people that they acknowledge and faithfully occupy their place in the order into which they are created, just as the Son did.

Jesus was “the way, and the truth, and the life” for his followers (Jn. 14:6), and the apostles were the same for those to whom they were sent. Every minister of Christ is anointed and sent to *be* the way that others should follow, to *be* the truth they should believe, and to *be* the life they should be living. We are blessed if God grants us the grace to know who in our time is the way, the truth, and the life, for in the kingdom of God, it is not what you know but who you know that matters.

God cannot be separated from His messengers any more than His messengers can be separated from their message. God’s kingdom is perfectly united in a way that the world cannot comprehend. During the Old Testament, even though the Son of God was still hidden, he declared through the prophet David that “he who sins against me wrongs his own soul. All they that hate me love death” (Prov. 8:35–36). Paul, John, Peter, and others sent by God could have said the same thing, for the Son sent them just as the Father had sent the Son (Jn. 17:18; 20:21). Anyone who sinned against the apostles wronged their own soul, and anyone who hated them loved death. Just so, anyone today who sins against a messenger of God wrongs his own soul, and anyone who hates God’s messenger loves death.

Immanuel

Whenever God’s order is present among men, it is in the form of a person, and because a person is visible, visible responses will follow. A true representative of God is a light from which no one can hide because his visible presence forces a visible response. As long as men think of the Almighty as being far away, in heaven or somewhere like the top of Mount Olympus, they can boast of their devotion to God without being devoted to God at all. When God makes Himself real by sending a real person as His visible representative, it forces the issue and brings to light the spiritual condition of people’s hearts.

The religious leaders who conspired to kill Jesus claimed to be good and faithful stewards of God and insisted that others should love and serve God, too. When the Son came, his presence gave those leaders the opportunity to prove their love for God by loving him, but they were not able. They were committed to God only as a distant Being. As long as they tended the vineyard of God within the confines of their traditions and ceremonies, they could continue to maintain an appearance of devotion. But a messenger from God trumps every element of institutionalized religion. In God's kingdom, a *who* always trumps a *what* because in His kingdom, life takes precedence over form. In His kingdom, we humble ourselves to God in heaven by humbling ourselves to a god on earth, that is, a fellow creature anointed by God to exercise authority among His people (e.g., Ex. 7:1; 22:8–9, 28).¹

It is the presence of God, not His absence, that most frightens people. Fallen mankind fears God's life more than they fear death; that is why most people die in their sins rather than repent and receive His life. Only the wise fear the absence of God's presence, for they know that without God's presence, the human condition becomes miserable (Jer. 23:33–40; Hos. 5:15; Amos 8:11–14). When God's life is near, it convicts people of sin (Jn. 16:8), and people feel that conviction in the presence of visible representatives of God because God's life is in them. People may not like it, and may not admit it, but they do feel that conviction.

The fundamental reason that people rejected the Son of God is that he was here, with God's life in him (Jn. 1:4). If the Son had remained hidden or if he had just been a theological idea, something to be discussed in the parlor after supper, he would not have been rejected. But he “was made flesh and dwelt among us,” and fallen man does not want God that close to him. Christ Jesus was hated because “God was in Christ” (2Cor. 5:19), and humans' fear and hatred of God was exposed in the way they responded to Jesus. This is what the hidden Son was foretelling when, through David, he said to the Father, “The reproaches of those who reproach you fell on me” (Ps. 69:9). And those same reproaches fall on every messenger whom Christ sends.

Because God's kind of life was in Jesus, he was the Immanuel (“God is with us”) of whom Isaiah prophesied (Isa. 7:14). When Jesus left earth and ascended to the Father, that would have been the end of “God is with us” if God had not sent back His life, the life that was in Jesus. Through the men and women who received God's kind of life on the day of Pentecost, God began again to be with us. On that day, the body of Christ was created as another Immanuel, another visible representative of the invisible God, as Christ was (cf. Acts 1:8). And God continues to be with mankind today through those who have received His life. God will not receive into his kingdom anyone who rejects the body of Christ, for they are “God with us” just as Jesus was “God with us”. Men can no more get to God by going around the body of Christ than they can get to God by going around Christ himself (Jn. 10:36).

Persecution

From almost the foundation of the world, those whom God has sent to represent Him have found themselves in difficult, if not dangerous positions because their clean spirits exposed man's sinfulness. Jesus' parable from Matthew 21 sums up the nation of Israel's maltreatment of God's visible representatives, but it does more than that. It captures the typical attitude of all humanity toward those who are God's visible representatives:

¹ Since the term “god” may slo apply to all of God's people (Ps. 82:6; Jn. 10:34–36), believers are exhorted to humble themselves to one other (Phip. 2:3; 1Pet. 5:5).

Matthew 21

33. There was a man, a landowner [God], who planted a vineyard, and he hedged it all around, and dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower, and leased it to vinedressers [Israel's leaders], and then went on a journey.
34. Now, when the season for the fruit was at hand, he sent his servants to the tenants to receive his fruit.
35. And the vine-dressers seized his servants; one they beat, and one they killed, and one they stoned.
36. Again, he sent other servants, more than the first, and they treated them the same way.
37. Then, finally, he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son."
38. But the vine-dressers, seeing the son, said among themselves, "This is the heir. Come on! Let's kill him and seize his inheritance!"
39. And they seized him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

As long as the owner of the vineyard was far away, the husbandmen could boast without fear of contradiction that they were good and faithful stewards. But there were no visible representatives of the owner with them to put their assessment of themselves to the test. Only when those husbandmen came face to face with the owner's visible representatives were they exposed for who they really were. The husbandmen hated the owner's son more than they hated the owner's other representatives because the owner's son more perfectly represented his father. The murderous envy hidden in their hearts was fully exposed when the son came because he fully reflected his father's authority and will.

Those who sincerely desire a right relationship with God will receive a messenger that God sends, and in receiving the messenger, they honor the One who sent him. Jesus repeatedly made this point, as he did in this scene:

John 8

42. Jesus said to them, "If God was your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here, and I have not come on my own, but He sent me."
- ...
48. The [rulers of the] Jews answered and said to him, "Don't we rightly say that you're a Samaritan, and you have a demon!"
49. Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon! No! I honor my Father, and you dishonor me!"

When "the love of God is poured out within our hearts by the holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5), what is poured into our hearts is the kind of love that is in God's heart, and His great love is His Son. No one filled with the Spirit can say, think, or feel anything derogatory about God's Son (cf. 1Cor. 12:3) because God never does. Everyone filled with the Spirit happily confesses Jesus as Lord because that is who God made him (Acts 2:36). That is the order of God. The love created in us by the Spirit loves whoever and whatever God loves, and it hates whoever and whatever He hates.

Suffering

It is not submission to God that fallen man resists so much as it is submission to God's representatives. In the main, the world does not despise the concept of a distant, invisible God, but it has always despised and persecuted the visible fellow creatures whom God has sent to represent Him. Historically, men's response to God's representatives has been to denounce them as false, and to invent gods more to their liking and hire men to represent them instead. It is doubtful that any of God's

representatives have ever been fully prepared for the hatred they faced from those to whom they were sent. Jesus labored constantly to prepare his disciples for that harsh reality:

John 15

19. If you were of the world, the world would befriend its own; but since you're not of the world—on the contrary, I've chosen you out of the world—the world hates you.
20. Remember the statement that I made to you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they obeyed my word, they'll also obey yours.

John 16

1. I have spoken these things to you so that you won't be offended.
2. They will put you out of the synagogues. In fact, the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he's offering a service to God.
. . . .
- 4a. I have spoken these things to you so that when the hour comes, you might remember them, that I told you.

Matthew 24

9. They will turn you over to persecution, and they will kill you; you will be hated by all nations because of my name.

When Jesus told his disciples, "He who hates me hates my Father also" (Jn. 15:23), he could just as well have told them, "He who hates you hates my Father also."²

Shortly after Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus, he warned him of the persecutions he would face if he became one of his visible representatives (Acts 9:16). Paul probably understood well the warning Jesus gave him, for he had himself once hated anyone who was a visible representative of Christ. Later, as a seasoned apostle, Paul passed along that warning to others:

Philippians 1

29. It is given to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him.

2Timothy 3

12. All who are willing to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

At the same time, Paul encouraged the saints to endure the suffering that they would certainly face so that they might obtain the prize of eternal life:

Romans 8

18. I consider the sufferings of this present time to be unworthy of comparison with the glory that shall be revealed to us.

Peter also labored to encourage God's children to persevere through the world's hatred:

² Jesus was not speaking about religious leaders hired by or voted into office by men. Such ministers are as much a part of the world as are the sinners to whom they minister.

1Peter 4

12. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which is coming to try you, as though a strange thing is happening to you.
13. On the contrary, rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, so that you may also rejoice and be glad at the revelation of his glory.
14. If you are being reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part, he is blasphemed, but on your part, he is glorified.

When Peter said that some in the family of God would go astray and “despise government” (2Pet. 2:10), his phrase, “despise government”, meant more than to despise being governed. It meant to despise those whom God sent to govern them, for the government of God is always a *who*. To despise government always means to despise somebody.

The Only Credentials for Ministry

Just as in ancient time, many claimed to speak for God without being sent by God to do so, many in this covenant have claimed to speak for Jesus even though Jesus has not sent them. The essential question for ancient Israelites was, “Whom has God sent to speak in His name?” And the essential question for God's people now is, “Whom has Jesus sent to speak in his name?” We must know who the Son's representatives are! We must find them because those whom Christ sends are the door to the him, just as Christ Jesus is the door to God. It is true that Paul said, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men—the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim. 2:5), but he also said, “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us” (2Cor. 5:20a).³ Paul could truthfully say he was an ambassador for Christ only because he had been sent by Christ. God accepts no volunteers for the ministry. Paul went on to say, “We beseech you in Christ's stead” (2Cor. 5:20b), but he could not have truly besought anyone in Christ's stead if Christ had not sent him. In order to be a genuine representative of Christ, one must be chosen by God to be one, as the author of Hebrews said:

Hebrews 5

4. No one takes this honor upon himself, but one called of God, as in the case of Aaron.
5. Likewise, Christ also did not glorify himself to be made High Priest, but He who said to him, “You are my Son; today, I have begotten you.”

No one legitimately rules over God's saints unless God anoints him to do so; God is the source of all genuine authority (Rom. 13:1), especially among His saints. No title bestowed by human institutions, including religious ones, is relevant to God's kingdom. Some years ago as I was praying, God rather indignantly demanded of me, “What difference does it make, what men say about anything? If men call a man a prophet, does *that* make him a prophet? Or if men call a man a pastor, does *that* make him a pastor?” After several such questions, He concluded by saying, “Am *I* confused by *your* delusions?” The obvious answer was no.

We may confuse one another with talk, but never God. One great benefit of possessing God's kind of life is that we may have His strength to be unmoved by human claims and unimpressed with the grand titles which men bestow upon one another. The only credentials for ministry in the kingdom of God, the only credentials wise saints acknowledge, is the anointing of God. Human wisdom is

³ Those without an anointed minister, or with an unfaithful one, may nevertheless have a direct relationship with Jesus (cf. Rev. 2:18ff; 3:1ff; cf. 1Cor. 3:22–23). At the same time, we all came to the true God by hearing a man anointed by Him (Rom. 10:14–15). We could not have ignored that man and come to God.

foolishness to God, and human abilities can never accomplish His righteousness. There is nothing humans can add to the gospel because humans can add nothing to Christ.

At least twice when Jesus was alone with his disciples, he told them of the powerful position which God had chosen for them within His order, the first time being when Jesus sent them out in pairs to preach in the villages of Israel: “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the One who sent me” (Mt. 10:40). The second time was at the Last Supper, and in this case, Jesus did not limit that authority to those disciples: “He who receives anyone I send receives me, and he who receives me receives the One who sent me” (Jn. 13:20). That truth applies to anyone God sends; to honor God’s messenger is to honor God, and to reject God’s messenger is to reject God. God’s ministers are God’s order, His government, in visible form, and to honor His ministers is critical to our spiritual wellbeing because it is critical to our spiritual wellbeing to honor God.

This was emphasized by Jesus when he told the elders of Israel that on Judgment Day, his disciples would be their judges (Mt. 12:27; Lk. 11:19). Jesus was revealing God’s government to those elders, and he was doing so by pointing to his disciples. He was warning them that his disciples stood between them and God. Unfortunately, they refused to believe him and dishonored his disciples, taking shelter instead behind the whitewashed walls of their religious institution, that is, behind men not chosen by God.

The Right *Who*

The only way to grow in the knowledge of God is to follow the right *who*, for God has chosen from the beginning to reveal Himself through a *who*. Solomon saw that God conceals wisdom deep in the hearts of certain people, like water in a deep well, but prudent individuals will find a way to draw up that wisdom so they may share in it (Prov. 20:5). Wisdom is something that is acquired (Prov. 1:5), and one acquires it by searching for it in the right place, that is, by mining the hearts of the right people. The Ethiopian eunuch’s question when Philip approached his chariot shows that he knew the importance of finding the right *who*:

Acts 8

30. Philip heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and he said, “Well now, do you understand what you are reading?”

31. And he said, “How can I, unless someone guide me?” Then he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Whatever truth about God and His Son that you know, you know it only because you heard someone who was sent by God for you. Every bit of godly wisdom you have gained and every experience you have ever had in Christ is the result of being influenced by the right *who*, someone who had himself been influenced by the Son, the first and only *who* that God Himself ever created.

Paul told God’s children, “The things you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things put into practice, and the God of peace shall be with you” (Phip. 4:9). That statement forced the saints in Philippi to make a decision. Was Paul boasting of his own greatness, or was he confessing, for their good, the *who* that God had made him, the *who* that he truly was? They had to decide whether Paul was a spiritual wolf or a genuine man of God. Paul was exhorting them to follow him as Christ’s representative (1Cor. 11:1), but the believers in Philippi had to decide if that was really the case. Merely hearing Paul say so would not benefit them, not if they merely assented that it was true. They had to follow the man.

God's children are happiest when they occupy their appointed place in the order of God and acknowledge the places occupied by others. When you are in the place that you were created to be, you feel contentment, for your place is not an *it*. Your place is a *who*—you! The “place” God has for you is your life as the person God intended you to be from the foundation of the world. Only in that place, only in being yourself in Christ, will you ever experience perfect peace and joy. That is why envy is compared with cancer (Prov. 14:30); it eats away at a person's gratitude for the *who* that God has made him. Envy is a tacit way of grumbling about God's order, and it stirs up strife (Rom. 13:13; Phip. 1:15). To avoid envy and strife, we need only be thankful for *who* God's order is and for where we belong in that order, for as we follow the right *who* into the knowledge of God, we stay content with our portion from God.

Who Is Your *Who*?

God alone is God and His Son alone is Lord and Savior. God has made Jesus King of kings and Lord of all, but that does not mean that no one but the Son is to be honored. It is because the Father and Son are who they are that their choices are to be honored. God's servants, then, are to be honored, not because they are servants but because of whose servants they are.

Jesus said that many whom he would damn in the Final Judgment would greet him that day as “Lord” (Mt. 7:21–22), but the Lord they believed in will not have been the right one; it will have been one of the Jesuses that the wrong *whos* taught. They never knew the real Jesus because they trusted the wrong *whos* and refused to believe the *whos* that God sent. Jesus' response to those poor people on that day will be harsh: “I never knew you. Get away from me, you who work lawlessness!” (Mt. 7:23).

In every generation, the children of God are called upon to answer the question, “*Who* is the order of God?” The short answer is Jesus, of course, but if that is all that is said, problems arise because Jesus is no longer here. Jesus was the Father's *who* while he was here on earth representing the Father, but since then, Jesus has sent other *whos* to represent him. Those *whos* are God's order, His government, and we all need them.

But who are they? Who we believe is God's government on earth in our time may prove to be more important to our souls than believing that God is real and that Jesus is the Christ. Even demons believe that God is real and that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 19:13–15; Jas. 2:19). In fact, they know it (Mk. 1:23–24; 3:11). But who influenced them so that they erred and became the damned creatures they are? Who was their *who* when it came to the things of God? It was Satan, who also knew that God was real and Jesus was the Christ. He influenced their judgment and their conduct most; therefore, Satan was the *who* of God to the angels in heaven that fell, and Paul said he is the *who* of God to those on earth who claim to speak for Christ but do not (cf. 2Cor. 11:13–15):

2Corinthians 11

13. For such men are false-apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.
14. And no wonder, for Satan transforms himself into a messenger of light.
15. So, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves *to be* like ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works.

Shadows of the Rock

At crucial times in biblical history, God is found searching for a man to use, not a religious institution. Sometimes, He found a man willing to be a light for the people (e.g., Isa. 6); at other times,

He did not: “I searched among them for a man who would build a wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it. But I found none” (Ezek. 22:30).

Whenever God wanted to provide the righteous with a place of safety, He did not look for a cave in the mountains; he looked for a man willing to stand up and be the truth, the standard, for his generation. Foreseeing the time when He would send His Son as His representative, and His Son would then send others to represent him, the Father promised this:

Isaiah 32

1. A King [the Son] will reign in righteousness, and princes [the Son’s ministers] will rule justly.
2. And a man will be like a shelter from the wind, and a covert from the storm, like streams of water in parched ground, like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

The “great rock” is Christ (1Cor. 10:4), and the shadows of that great Rock are the men he sends to represent him. By God’s design, the representatives of Christ, not Christ himself, are now the earthly shelter for God’s people and a covert from spirits of this world. Like Jesus, they are “a spring of water” and are “like a watered garden” (Isa. 58:11) because from them, souls who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness may eat the living bread of Christ (cf. Jn. 6:51, 58) and drink the living water of the Spirit (Jn. 4:10). God’s ministers are not “wells without water”, boasting of a gift they do not possess (Prov. 25:14; 2Pet. 2:17). They truly possess the gift of God.

In a measure, this is true concerning all of God’s people. They all are His righteousness and His light for this world to see (2Cor. 5:21; Mt. 5:14; Jn. 8:12), and Jesus warned his disciples not to be ashamed to be the light of God for others:

Matthew 5

14. You are the light of the world; a city set on a hill can’t be hidden.
15. Nor do people light a candle and then place it under a bushel, but on a lampstand, and then it gives light to all who are in the house.
16. Let your light shine like that before men so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

No Way around John

No one can get to God by going around those whom He sends, for God always stands behind them. He stood behind Moses, the judges, the prophets, the Son, and now, He stands behind His Son’s representatives. None of God’s messengers are optional for the people to whom God sends them, and in thus standing behind them, God is only honoring Himself and His authority to ordain whom He chooses to rule in His kingdom. Indeed, if He did not stand behind them, what point would there be in sending them? Moses was sent with God’s law, the judges were sent with God’s power, and wise men and prophets were sent with God’s wisdom and word. Jesus was sent as the sum of them all; he is God’s law, God’s Word, and “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1Cor. 1:24). God stands behind the ones He anoints and sends to declare the gospel of His Son.

Once John the Baptist was anointed and sent to the Jews, the Jews’ path to eternal life went through John, not around him. John became the way for the Jews to obtain eternal life because *his message* was the way for them to obtain eternal life. It is as impossible for a Jew who rejected John to escape damnation as it is if he refused Christ. Submitting to John was the way for Jews to submit to God. Even if a Jew diligently observed the law’s rites and diligently kept the rules, if he did not believe in and

humbly submit to John, he was guilty before God. He was like the rich young ruler, who in but one thing fell short of obtaining eternal life (cf. Mk. 10:17–22; Lk. 18:17–23).

John’s message and baptism with water were not optional for the Jews because submission to John himself was not optional for them. Likewise, Jesus’ baptism with the Spirit is not optional for anyone because submission to Jesus himself is not optional for anyone. John and his baptism prefigured Jesus and his baptism (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16). Those who truly believed John repented and then received his baptism with water; likewise, those who truly believe in Jesus repent and then receive his baptism with the Spirit.

The only way anyone could know who had truly believed John was whether or not he would baptize them when they came to be baptized. John knew it when someone came to him for baptism but had not repented: “When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he told them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?’” (Mt. 3:7). Likewise, the only way we can know who has truly believed Jesus is whether or not he has baptized them with the Spirit. This is what John meant when he said that “the Spirit is the witness” (1Jn. 5:6b), and “He who believes in the Son of God has the witness within him” (1Jn. 5:10a).

Jesus knows who has repented and who has not, just as John did. John granted his baptism to show that a person had believed in him, and Jesus grants his baptism to show that a person has believed in him. John was never moved by the claims of a man that he had repented, and neither is Jesus. Men claim much, but God knows the heart. The Spirit alone led John, and the Spirit alone leads Jesus now to know whom to baptize. Theirs are the only two baptisms God has ever ordained,⁴ and in both cases, the anointing to baptize came with the discernment to know who was worthy to receive baptism.

Whenever God’s Old Testament people followed the wrong *who*, they went astray from God’s law. And for them to forsake the law meant that they had forsaken Moses, who gave it to them, *even after Moses was dead* (Acts 21:21). Likewise, even after John was beheaded by Herod, John’s work still had to be done because God still required the Jews to believe John, that is, to repent and receive John’s baptism. That is why Jesus’ disciples took up John’s mantle after he was executed and continued baptizing Jews with water in Jesus’ name (Jn. 4:1–2; Acts 2:38). The Jews were not allowed to get around John though he was dead because the God who sent John was still alive and He still required it of them. It was the same with Moses. Even after he died, there was no way for the Jews to get around him. Just as God sent prophets to Israel over the centuries to forward the work of Moses, Jesus sent his disciples to continue the work of John after his death, preaching John’s message and baptizing Jews who repented.⁵

As with John and Moses in Israel, when Jesus died, God raised up men to continue Jesus’ work, and that holy work continues to this day through anointed men and women all over the world because the covenant Jesus initiated is an eternal covenant for all people. To teach, as many ministers do, that Jesus’ baptism is no longer in effect is to teach that he is no longer in effect, and to teach that his baptism is unnecessary, as many do, is to teach that Jesus himself is unnecessary.

False Teachers

As has been said, no one has authority to do anything in God’s kingdom unless God anoints him to do it, but if God does anoint someone, that person has real authority. He must be listened to, for to hear

⁴ The forms of baptism which come under the umbrella of “Christian baptism” are found nowhere in Scripture, except perhaps the baptism which Apollos practiced before Paul’s fellow-workers taught him better (Acts 18:24–26).

⁵ For more on this, see my tract, “Baptism”, available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

him is to hear God, as the beloved disciple John said, “He whom God has sent speaks the words of God” (Jn. 3:34). And it is sobering that John also said that “he who is not of God does not listen to us” (1Jn. 4:6a). May God grant us the grace to acknowledge His servants when we hear them!

You will never be deceived unless you honor the wrong *who*, and you will never come to know God unless you honor the right *who*. It is unwise to trust a minister who has not been sent by Christ, but it is equally foolish *not* to trust a minister who *has* been sent by Him, for that man is a light sent by Christ to reveal the way to life. Paul told the saints in Corinth that much of their suffering was the direct result of failing to discern who is who in the body of Christ (1Cor. 11:29–30), for they had begun to honor and submit to ministers whom Christ had not sent and to dishonor Paul (cf. 2Cor. 11:15). God’s children must be taught that ministers who claim to represent Christ, but do not, may speak some true facts about God and use the name of Jesus (Mt. 7:15; 24:5), but they have no authority from God to speak on His behalf.

The apostles warned the saints that false teachers proclaimed that Jesus is Lord (2Cor. 11:13; cf. 2Pet. 2:1–3); however, those men rejected the revelation Jesus had given to Paul. What exposed them as false was not that they did not believe in Jesus but that they did not believe in Paul. Paul was God’s order, His government, in human form, and no one could get past Paul to Jesus any more than someone can get past Jesus to God. Unfortunately, most believers of that time were eventually persuaded by false teachers to honor them instead of Paul, but in rejecting Paul, though they would not have believed so, they were rejecting Christ—the same Christ they thought they were serving.

Throughout history, multitudes of priests and prophets around the world have falsely claimed to speak for God, and they have destroyed countless souls. This happened even in ancient Israel:

Jeremiah 23

16. Thus says the LORD of Hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you! They are making you vain; they declare a vision from their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD.

....

21. I did not send these prophets, but they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.

....

31. Behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who use their tongues and say, “He has spoken!”

32. Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams, says the LORD, and tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their bravado, but I did not send them or give them a commandment. And they do not benefit this people at all, says the LORD.

Men who claim to speak for God are a dime a dozen; seminaries around the world manufacture them by the thousands each year. In spite of any august titles they are given, without the anointing of God’s Spirit, they are frauds. Jesus told some self-righteous Pharisees who were offended by his preaching,

John 10

7. Truly, truly, I tell you that I am the gate [to God] for the sheep.

8. All who have ever come [claiming to be the gate] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

Paul reproved the saints in Corinth for believing in the Jesus that false teachers proclaimed (2Cor. 11:4); he knew that God had not sent them. Only those sent by the true God can preach the true Jesus,

as Paul said: “How shall they preach [the true Jesus] except they be sent [by the true God]?” (Rom. 10:15a). In this world, he wrote, “there are many gods and many lords” (1Cor. 8:5); so, the wise should examine themselves, asking the question, “Which God am I really serving and which Jesus is my Lord?” When people believed Paul, they believed in the right Jesus, and in believing in Paul's Jesus, they were believing in the right God.

When the Galatians began honoring false teachers instead of Paul, he pleaded with them to reconsider his testimony:

Galatians 1

11. I would have you to know, brothers, regarding the gospel preached by me, that it is not according to man.
12. For I neither received it from a man, nor was I taught it, but I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Every soul who really loved the true God rejoiced at Paul's testimony, but in the end, they were very few.

Paul repeatedly exhorted the saints to have a mind like Christ (Phip. 2:5), that is, to demonstrate respect for God's choices concerning who rules in His kingdom:⁶

1Thessalonians 5

12. We beseech you, brothers, to acknowledge those who labor among you, and who rule over you in the Lord and admonish you,
13. and to esteem them as highly as possible in love because of their work.

1Timothy 5

17. Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and in doctrine.
18. For the scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and “The worker is worthy of his pay.”

Hebrews 13

- 17a. Obey those who rule over you, and submit to them, for they watch over your souls.

Frustrated

Before Acts 2, when the Spirit came, the battle for the hearts of God's children centered on one issue: Who visibly represented God on earth? Was it Moses or was it Balaam? Was it the prophets of the Institution or was it Jeremiah? Was it Jesus or was it the elders? But not long after Christ returned to the Father, spiritual warfare changed from who visibly represented God to who visibly represented the Son, and so it has been since that time. There must be men alive now who are anointed to represent Christ and to govern among the saints. The love of God for His family assures us of that. Wherever they are, the greatest obstacle to their being heard is the influence of Christian ministers who claim that they represent Jesus, but do not.

Old Testament servants of God such as Jeremiah were frustrated by such men. In one instance, professional prophets persuaded God's people not to believe Jeremiah's claim that Nebuchadnezzar's

⁶ Paul also exhorted the saints to live within the order that God ordained for the home: “I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God” (1Cor. 11:3).

invading Babylonian army was the expression of God's wrath against them for their sins. Jeremiah knew that if Jerusalem's inhabitants would repent and surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar, God would let them live, but the professional prophets undermined Jeremiah's influence with false counter-promises. Heartbroken, persecuted, and lonely, Jeremiah wept and prayed:

Jeremiah 14

13. Ah, my Lord, Jehovah! Behold, the prophets are telling them, "You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place."

Jeremiah 23

9. My heart within me is broken because of the prophets!

In this New Testament, God's servants have to deal with the same problem. Paul grieved for his beloved Galatian converts who were being led astray by false teachers:

Galatians 1

6. I marvel that you are turning away so quickly from Him who called you by the grace of Christ to a another gospel,
7. which is not another, but there are certain men who trouble you, determined to alter the gospel of Christ.

And Peter warned the children of God,

2Peter 2

- 1a. False prophets were among the [Old Testament] people, just as there will also be false teachers among you who will introduce opinions that will lead to damnation.
2. And many will follow them in licentious ways, because of whom the way of truth will be spoken evil of.

Jesus, foreseeing this development, warned his followers to guard against such men:

Matthew 7

15. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 24

4. Take heed, lest someone deceive you.
5. Many will come, using my name, saying that I am the Messiah, and they will deceive many.

Were it not for ministers with titles and authority bestowed upon them by Christian Institutions, the true representatives of Christ would have a far greater impact in the earth. I say again, the greatest hindrance to God's work on earth has always been men of the Institution. Their appearance of authority is a snare that God's children have always had to overcome, and the only way they can overcome it is for them to recognize the order of God.

3John

3John 1

- ¶1. The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.
- ¶2. Beloved, I pray for you to prosper in all things and to be in good health, just as your soul is prospering.
3. I was overjoyed when brothers came and bore witness of you in the truth, how you are walking in truth.
4. I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in truth.
- ¶5. Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brothers and for strangers,
6. who testified of your love before the Assembly; whom you will do well to send on their way in a manner worthy of God,
7. for they went out on behalf of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.
8. We, therefore, ought to receive such men, that we might be laborers together in the truth.
- ¶9. I wrote to the Assembly, but Diotrephes, who likes to be chief among them, does not receive us.
10. For this reason, if I come, I will remember his deeds that he does, disparaging us with evil words; and not satisfied with these things, he does not receive the brothers, and he forbids those who would and expels *them* from the Assembly.
11. Beloved, do not follow what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not understood God.
12. Testimony has been given of Demetrius by everyone, and by the truth itself; we also ourselves bear *him* witness, and you know that our witness is true.
- ¶13. I had many things to write, but I do not want to write you with ink and pen,
14. but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face. Peace to you. The friends send you greeting. Greet the friends by name.