

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren,

Looking back at the many troubling experiences we have faced over the years as ones called by the living God, it is a wonder that anyone at all has held onto that way of life through recent decades. It is a way that is hated by a powerful archenemy seeking our destruction, and even more so by the greatest adversary of all, our own natural natures that recoil at being harnessed by any of the spiritual laws of God. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3:10–12). To say that we naturally desire the goodness of God's will is to reveal ourselves to be liars. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8). With so much against us, what is the real difference between those thousands who have allowed deception to sweep them away, and the very small remnant who are still clinging to those spiritual tenets?

The difference is a legitimate love for God, and a proper fear and respect for the Supreme Architect and Ruler of this universe. It is the wholehearted belief that a dynamic living God really rules His created Kingdom from a throne of power and glory, and that His promise to make us heirs to that Kingdom as sons is actually true. Those who truly accept the authority of a Heavenly Father and believe Him, are those who continue and persist in fighting those enemies, refusing to defy that Almighty God. But those who have turned, regardless of the specific reason, are guilty of unbelief—a rejection of spiritual and eternal authority.

Even now we are faced with the aftermath of departure, as some of our beloved friends and brethren have separated themselves. And what is the primary basis of their contention, but a dispute over the proper use of the authority of God. Very few will admit it, but most of the personal decisions they make, including their choice of fellowship, are rooted in individualized beliefs about the proper use of authority. This ministry has been accused of harping on the very subject, and it is asserted by one recently departed that any ministry properly teaching and fulfilling its responsibilities need not emphasize authority, because the people will willingly

follow good leadership. But is that what our Bibles tell us? We know that Moses was a faithful servant and exercised good leadership (Hebrews 3:2, 5). Did the Israelites automatically appreciate and respect that example? Notice Numbers 14:2. Note also the outright rebellion he faced.

"And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" (Numbers 16:2–3).

We also know that the apostles were faithful servants and conscientiously fulfilled their offices of responsibility. Did all members within the churches accept that example at face value? What did Paul say? "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved" (2 Corinthians 12:15). Note also Peter's statements. "But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities" (2 Peter 2:10). Jude recorded the same spirit of defiance. "Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities" (Jude 8). It actually appears a significant portion of the holy scripture is a chronicle of the natural defiance and rebellion exhibited by chosen people, with or without good leadership. Otherwise, we would also have to accuse Jesus Christ of using defective leadership, since he was reviled and rebuffed more than any other being.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 13:34–35).

And of greater significance was the example of Lucifer and God. Was God's leadership defective?

Based upon these profound examples, it appears a proper understanding of God-ordained authority really is important, if a chosen people are going to make sound personal decisions in these times of trial before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But with all that has been written and said by so many different people about

different aspects of authority, especially church government, it can become confusing to understand how it all fits together, and to know what God really intends. So many have perverted the context of Scripture to achieve their own selfish end that we easily become jaded when anyone attempts to address it at all. And how do we reconcile so many scriptures that *seem* to be contradictory? In one place we read we are to work out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12); but they also say ministers are to rebuke with all authority (Titus 2:15). The ministers of God are not to rule as the Gentiles do (Matthew 20:25–27), but at the same time it says we are to be subject to principalities and powers, and to those in the church who have the rule over us (Titus 3:1; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24). We are instructed to respect and obey authority within the family (Ephesians 5:22; 6:1), but we are also told we cannot cater to family members if we want to have a true relationship with Christ (Luke 14:26). We read that Christ Himself is the direct Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22), but at the same time certain men are said to have power and authority as well (Matthew 16:18–19; Luke 9:1; 2 Corinthians 10:8). Ministers are not to act as lords over God’s heritage (I Peter 5:3), but fulfilling the command to assemble on Sabbaths requires organization and clear accountability by someone. We are told that the true sheep hear and recognize the shepherd’s voice (John 10:2–5) and that we need not be taught (I John 2:27), but we are also told that God has chosen to teach us through a human ministry (Romans 10:14–15).

How then do we reconcile all these commands? First, if we really believe that all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is the direct revelation of a perfect Creator God, there must be a way that all these difficult concepts join together into a perfect and harmonious mosaic. If we seek only to pick and choose the scriptures that seem to support our own personal views, we miss that perfect picture and accuse Christ of contradicting Himself—of being divided. But for those who truly desire to understand, there is an explanation which reconciles all of these principles into a glorious and inspiring tapestry, testifying of the perfect wisdom of our Heavenly Father. What is that correct explanation?

We first need some background as a beginning point.

What Form of Government Does God Like?

First, we need to determine how God thinks about organization, and understand what He prefers. Men have generated all manner of government structures to suit their own personal preferences. We have human monarchies, dictatorships, republics, communist states, oligarchies, socialist regimes, democracies, plutocracies, and

variations of the like. Because many of us have grown up within democratic human governments, most of us have a natural affinity for this particular structure and might also assume it is God's preferred organization. But is this really true? How can we know for sure what form of government God considers the best? This can be answered by noting the relationships He has ordained within His own spiritual realm, and the structure that He has promised to establish in the World Tomorrow.

When Jesus Christ returns, how will His perfect government be structured? Is Christ going to be the president of a democracy, or a prime minister working with a parliament?

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:11–16).

Notice next what this mighty King has been commissioned to accomplish. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15:24–25). This does not sound like the activity of a democratic president. On the contrary, it appears God prefers to delegate responsibility to a chosen instrument who bears authority to complete the mission.

But some will argue that God and Christ are unique because they are perfect, and that since men are defective in character, God does not organize His work through them the same way. They will claim in essence that God likes a democratic system of checks and balances among men to help prevent corruption. But is such a concept really of God, or is it one more reflection of an enemy who sought himself to be equal with God? "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;

I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13–14). Remember that one of the key traits of the reprobate chosen of God in the last days would be a hatred of any form of government, dominion, and rule (2 Peter 2:10; Jude 8). For the moment, resist jumping to any conclusions based on personalized thinking.

At this point, let us at least recognize that the ultimate form of government which God has ordained, and to which we are each striving to become a part, is a totalitarian monarchy, not a democracy (Psalms 1:6–9). Accepting then that this form of government cannot be inherently evil, but is in fact the creation of a perfect God, let us proceed to evaluate how God has established this earthly training ground for men—the training ground for the express purpose of preparing us to rule with Christ in that perfect monarchy. And please resist the urge to assume that the point of this writing is to justify stifling control by a human ministry in the lives of the chosen. You will soon see this is not God's intent at all, and neither is it ours! "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

Authority is Not a Dirty Word

Because of the rancid behavior of men in the past, even the most innocuous use of the word *authority* today congers up thoughts and feelings of resentment within many of us. But to see the complete and perfect beauty of God's plan, we must be able to set aside these conditioned responses and objectively consider what God has delivered. Authority is nothing more than the power to accomplish a given assignment. Men have abused it, but God created it for a purpose. It is not a dirty word.

One of the greatest frustrations anyone can face, and many of you can probably relate, is being charged with a job but then not being given the tools needed to complete the task. How many of us have experienced this very frustration while working for an employer, or pursuing another endeavor? Have you ever been made personally accountable to accomplish something, but then found your hands tied and unable to perform it? This situation highlights a classic spiritual principle—the contiguous relationship between responsibility and authority. Responsibility is the job or the task to be accomplished. Authority is simply the means to bring that result to fruition. Almost every renowned business and organizational handbook speaks of this principle in some way. Any delegated responsibility *must* be accompanied by the necessary tools and authorization to complete the task, or the entire process is flawed

from its inception and destined for failure. Many organizations have been guilty of violating this principle. If a man is commissioned to build a house, and the owner makes it this man's full responsibility to complete the project by a certain date, that man will need the flexibility to make decisions to carry out the mission. If he is not then allowed to hire the workers, buy the building materials, and make day to day decisions, he will not be able to meet the target. If the owner is the kind of person who cannot really give up control of the details to someone else, then he should not hold anyone else accountable but himself.

What about the relationship of Jesus Christ and the Father? Does this principle apply? First, is the relationship between the Father and Son one of equal partnership? "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). Jesus Christ is not equal to the Father, and He recognizes His position in that family. Next, has Christ been given a responsibility—a mission to accomplish?

"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:38–40).

This summarizes the entire mission of the Son, as commissioned by the Father. But did the Father hold back the authority for himself, tying the hands of the Son, or did He give Christ the necessary authority to actually carry out that very mission?

"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:34–36).

Notice further how Jesus Christ is described, and how extensive that delegated authority from the Father really is.

"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:3–4).

So we see that between the Father and the Son, there is not equality of position, but that Christ was commissioned to accomplish a grand responsibility, and likewise given the full authority needed to execute that mission to the full.

The next common misconception about authority is that in any relationship except full equality, there cannot be true and complete unity. But since we have already found that there is less than an equal relationship between the Father and Son, should we then assume that there is incomplete unity between them?

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:20–22).

This sounds like there is total and complete unity of mind between the Father and Son, which is not hampered one iota by the fact that there simultaneously exists a relationship of authority between the two of them.

Before we delve into the details to see how God has ordained specific relationships of authority among and for His chosen, let us summarize what we should understand to this point.

1) To make proper decisions when crises occur in the church, it is critical to understand God's intent related to responsibility and authority. Many of the most serious errors of men recorded in the Bible involve unknowingly opposing God by opposing His decrees related to specific delegated responsibilities.

2) God is not a democrat, and He is not the author of democracy. His ordained form of government is a perfect, spiritual monarchy. Regardless of what He may or may not have ordained among men today, we are each striving to be heirs to positions within a totalitarian, yet perfect, Kingdom, and our environment today is training us for that purpose.

3) The Father and the Son are not equal, yet even in this relationship, they have perfect love and unity of mind. The two concepts are not therefore automatically mutually exclusive.

4) God is the Author of the principle of delegation, and anytime a responsibility is assigned to another, the necessary authority to execute that task must also be given. There is no God-given responsibility without simultaneous and complimentary authority to carry it out.

A Blueprint for Human Responsibility

How then do we begin to reconcile all the Biblical commands concerning responsibility and authority, and come to understand how it all fits together? The key is recognizing that there are several very distinct responsibilities God has given, each to different individuals, and each with its own accountability and associated authority. These separate jurisdictions of responsibility, or *venues* of authority, work harmoniously together and encompass the beauty of God's intended structure for His chosen people. What are these specific venues?

- 1) Personal—accountability of each chosen individual before God.
- 2) Family—accountability of husbands, wives, parents, and children.
- 3) Civil government—accountability within this world's governments.
- 4) Church—accountability of ministers and laity, one with another; minister to lay member, minister to minister, and lay member to lay member.

Space does not allow each one of these venues to be addressed in detail within this letter. But we will begin a general analysis of each one of them and then in future letters complete the full picture of their interrelationships.

Personal Responsibility

Perhaps the most critical assignment God has given to us is personal accountability for our own spiritual outcome. There is no other human being we will ever be able to hold accountable for our own deficiencies. We cannot legitimately point to anyone else.

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12–13).

This text tells us God has given us each the opportunity for a direct and special relationship with Him. God is working within each one of us through His Holy Spirit. "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him"

(John 14:23). This is why we are accountable for our own results, because God has given us direct access to the power needed to succeed. By the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we have even the privilege of coming before His throne in heaven. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15–16).

In this way, God has given us each the tools we need to succeed—the authority to fulfill that delegated responsibility. Therefore, we are each wholly accountable for achieving the goal.

"Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour . . . For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (1 Corinthians 3:8, 11–14).

"But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden" (Galatians 6:4–5).

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12).

These texts show very plainly that by our call, we have each been given a commission—a responsibility. That commission is to overcome the natural natures with which we were born.

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:7–8).

These are the natural characteristics which define each one of us in the flesh. To deny that fact is to reject the delegated responsibility God has given us to

overcome. The task we have been assigned is to crucify that natural nature and learn to obey instead the perfect law of God.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

Every other venue of responsibility God has ordained—family, civil government, and church—is there to support us in fulfilling this very personal commission. As we address each one of these other areas, it should become very plain how perfectly God has structured a system to provide every needed tool for our eventual success.

Family Responsibility

God's instructions concerning family relationships are critically important for several reasons. First, they define how human beings can immediately achieve happy and prosperous lives. But more importantly, these commands are a window for observing and learning about the relationship between our Heavenly Father and His Son, and how chosen human beings are considered in their relation to these Eternal Beings. Every scriptural reference shows God to be a family, and our hope for eternal life is to be born into that eternal family as beloved sons.

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of [sonship], whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:15–17).

Therefore, every command related to family responsibility applies both in the flesh and in the spirit. What are these responsibilities? Notice the following:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the

church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself (Ephesians 5:22–28).

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1–4).

Within these simple commands we find that God gave a responsibility to husbands, wives, parents, and children. They each are accountable before God for living up to that responsibility.

First, wives are to obey husbands. It did not say they are to be equal with husbands in a democratic partnership. Quite the contrary, such is the philosophy of deceived human scholars who are separated from God. If we have become tainted with this ideology, what we are really saying is we believe the church is also equal with Christ, since the analogy is specific and direct. Go back to Ephesians, chapter five, and see what it says: "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). If we accept that Christ is the head of the church, then we must also accept that the husband is the head of the wife in exactly the same way.

But does this give the husband free reign to abuse and take advantage of the wife? Absolutely not! The husband is specifically commanded to carry out his assigned responsibility by loving and caring for the wife, being willing to sacrifice himself totally for her, just as Christ sacrificed Himself for the church. That spiritual analogy is just as compelling and cannot be broken. Does Christ abuse the church and use His position for personal gain and gratification? Does the fact that Christ has direct authority over the church mean that He cannot have perfect unity and oneness with that church? The rationale of human beings tells us there can be no harmony and unity in any relationship where one has authority over another. To them, marriage is a fifty-fifty partnership. Is that what we believe about Christ and the church? Just as

we saw earlier that a relationship of authority between the Father and the Son does not exclude perfect unity of heart and mind, neither does it exclude that same potential for unity between Christ and the church. Furthermore, that God ordained responsibility and authority for husbands does not preclude unity of mind and heart with the wife. The fact that many couples do not have that unity is not the fault of God's delegated authority. It means only that either the husband, or the wife, or both are not fulfilling their assignment—their delegated responsibilities before God. When a husband and wife are both obeying God's commands, it will almost appear to others as if they do have an equal partnership. Why? Because the husband is not flaunting his authority and demanding it, and the wife is not challenging her husband's role. What is seen is the same kind of voluntary unity and oneness that exists between the Father and Son, even though a direct relationship of authority actually exists. One of the reasons God commands us to marry in the faith (I Corinthians 7:39), is due to the fact such ideal fulfillment is not even possible except between a husband and wife who are both led by the Holy Spirit to fulfil their proper roles in the marriage. This is not to say a marriage cannot otherwise be good, as men view it, but it certainly cannot have the same potential for perfect unity that God desires for His chosen.

Likewise, children are commanded to obey their parents. This is an assignment from God. Breaking that law brings misery and heartache. But fathers are also instructed not to provoke children. To do so would be an abuse of parental authority. The flawed thinking of men would lead us to believe parents do not have authority over children, and again, that we cannot raise them in real love if we do not "partner" with them. This, too, is a perversion and an outright lie. Parents who exercise loving control over children, as our Heavenly Father exercises loving control over His children, can have the blessings and rewards that come with fulfilling those God-ordained responsibilities of parenthood.

The rampant problems we see in families today are a reflection of abuse, misuse, or abdication of God-ordained responsibilities for husbands, wives, parents, and children. These are spiritual laws and carry automatic penalties for disobedience.

In this letter we have looked independently at personal responsibility and family responsibility. But how do these two particular venues interact? This is where Jesus Christ gave specific commands to clarify the boundaries of each of these venues of authority and how they fit together. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Notice also: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). In both cases, obedience within

the family is limited by a condition. It must be in the Lord. We must never break one of God's laws, even to comply with family authority. In any case where a choice is unavoidable (like a choice between appeasing a husband or wife, or keeping the Sabbath), we must fulfill our primary obligation before God (that personal responsibility) and keep His commandments at any cost. This proves that in giving both personal and family authority, God simultaneously drew the boundary for their interrelationship. There is no confusion or contradiction. Instead, there is perfect harmony of principle. What a glorious and inspiring revelation!

This same harmonious relationship also applies between the other venues of authority, including civil government and church government. Many errors of the past have resulted when someone possessing authority in one particular venue assumes jurisdiction in another venue where no authority exists. For instance, a minister overreaching to usurp the authority of a husband and father in the family home. If God gave authority to the husband, He did not give contradictory authority to a minister to breach that responsibility. In a future letter, we will continue the examination of these other venues of authority, with specific emphasis on the proper placement of church government, and its interrelationship with each of the other God-ordained venues of authority. Since church government is usually most controversial and seems to solicit the most vehement reaction, our goal will be to objectively cover this topic in a way that clarifies both the scope and the boundaries of this God-given responsibility.

With heartfelt love and respect for the chosen people of God,



Jon W. Brisby



Raymond C. Cole