

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT

A study of how God governs
according to His perfect law of love



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according to His perfect law of love

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Printed in the United States of America

Scriptures in this publication are quoted from
the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Cover illustration: [istock.com/artisteer](https://www.istock.com/artisteer)

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ONE

HOW DOES GOD GOVERN TODAY?

LOOK AROUND YOU. THIS WORLD IS FULL OF DISASTERS, injustice and suffering. Many people never receive real relief, vindication or peace. This misery exists in spite of—and often because of—the governments that are supposed to protect and enhance the lives of human beings.

As God’s Word puts it, mankind has not known “the way of peace” (Isaiah 59:8; Romans 3:17).

Nearly 6,000 years of human history attest to man’s failure to form upright governments. Beginning with ancient Babylon, we have seen one example after another of corruption, tyranny and outright preying on human beings committed by human governments. Throughout this history, mankind has tried virtually every form of governance possible: monarchy, autocracy,

oligarchy and combinations of these. Nations like China and Russia have embraced communism. Others have turned to fascism. Northern European nations are famous for various forms of modern socialism. None has brought lasting peace or happiness. Following World War II, the leading nations set up the United Nations to lead the way toward international government. It too is an utter failure.

What is the alternative to these governments except chaos and anarchy?

About 250 years ago, the Founding Fathers of the United States were in a unique position in history: They had the opportunity to begin a government afresh. Protected and enriched by favorable geography, and informed by centuries of history, they could build this new form of government on some of the world's highest principles to protect their citizens from some of the world's lowest vices.

The American Declaration of Independence states that "governments are instituted among men" to secure human beings' inalienable rights, including "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

But the founders knew human nature! They recognized that they were trying to escape an unjust government and avoid establishing an unjust government of their own. They questioned whether it was even possible for human beings to rightly govern human beings. Nevertheless, they gave it their noblest effort.

Arguing for the Constitution, James Madison wrote in *The Federalist* No. 51: "It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If

men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”

The Declaration of Independence references God four times. Some historians assert that these references point to Him as the Founder, Legislator, Judge and Executive.

That categorization is reflected in the manifold separations of powers—the checks and balances of the Constitution of the United States. In this new form of government, the American founders were saying, *No human being should possess all or even most of the powers of government.*

In fact, only God with His perfect love and wisdom can properly wield such powers!

America, however, did not have the government of God, so its founders tried to establish what they conceived to be the next best thing. It appointed sovereignty to the people and not to the government. The goal was to thereby preserve individuals’ God-given rights.

Less than 250 years later, this most hopeful of experiments in human governments is melting down; it largely rejects its own founding.

Given human history, the American founders were right to speculate whether righteous human government is even possible. And although *they drew on the example we are about to examine*, they should have drawn on it more deeply—because *this* is a perfect government. It is a national government not of men or angels, but of God Himself!

A COVENANT AND A GOVERNMENT

The government of God HAS existed on this Earth! *In fact, it still exists!*

Nearly 3,500 years ago, God led the slave people of Israel on an exodus from Egypt. Soon after their liberation, they arrived at Mount Sinai. Something special and unprecedented was about to happen at this mountain in the wilderness (Exodus 19:1-2).

First, Moses climbed Mount Sinai alone. God, the ultimate authority and governor of mankind, spoke directly to him: “Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (verses 3-6).

God was introducing a covenant and a government unlike any other in the world. According to its terms, He Himself would govern this physical nation. If the Israelite people would accept and uphold the covenant, they would become His treasured physical kingdom. Israel would become *God’s* nation. It would be an *exemplary nation* to every other around the world.

When Moses presented God’s terms to Israel, “all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (verse 8). Moses conveyed Israel’s reply to God. The form of government was agreed upon.

Now came the epic inauguration! After God had given Israel three days to prepare for this incredible event, God Himself descended. “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and

the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly” (verse 18).

This was no ordinary founding! This was a mountain roaring with flames, billowing black smoke, and quaking like an erupting volcano because *God was coming to Earth to establish a government—HIS government!*

THE FOUNDATION OF GOVERNMENT

This government was utterly unique on Earth and in history. The head of state was God Himself: He actively and directly served as the legislative, judicial and executive power.

For eternity, God’s way of life has been the only way that works—and it works beautifully. His way of life is the way of love. God spelled out that way of life in His law. God legislated this as the foundational law of His nation, beginning in Exodus 20 with the Ten Commandments. All subsequent legislation traced back to these 10 points that define God’s love in action.

The Governor of Israel did not force His subjects to obey. But those who chose to subject themselves to His covenant and His law received abundant blessings, including miraculous protection, abundant food, plentiful wealth, healing from disease, incredible victory and deep purpose.

Although God based this government on His law of love, it was not a government of weakness or compromise. From the beginning, God spelled out certain laws that, if broken, would carry the heaviest punishment: the death penalty. These were part of the civil laws established for this physical nation. They were essentially criminal justice laws.

Exodus 21:12-17 record some of these laws. “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee. But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die. And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death. And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death. And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.”

This was not the first time God instituted an administration of death. He had done so immediately after the Flood (Genesis 9:6). Prior to that time, there was no death penalty for perpetrators. For instance, although Cain killed his brother Abel, God did not execute him. However, after the Flood, God legislated that those who commit murder should be put to death. This law was reaffirmed under the Old Covenant.

After receiving the civil law (Exodus 21-23), the people of Israel agreed to their part of the covenant. “And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the

blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words” (Exodus 24:4-8).

This is how Israel entered into a binding, legal agreement with God. Not only was God now governing Israel, the nation was now officially married to Him! (Jeremiah 3:14).

ADMINISTRATION OF THE OLD COVENANT

It is critical to notice that God also established a ministry, or administration, that went along with the Old Covenant. “And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons” (Exodus 28:1). The administration of Aaron and his sons became known as the Levitical priesthood since they were descendants of Levi.

These priests were clothed beautifully (verse 4). The high priest, in this case Aaron, was dressed in the finest attire. “And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre. Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him. And thou shalt bring his sons, and put coats upon them. And thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them: and the priest’s office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons” (Exodus 29:6-9). Aaron’s miter, or turban, signified his office. The office of high priest was passed on to each succeeding generation.

Exodus records that after God gave the laws of the covenant, Moses climbed Mount Sinai once again

(Exodus 34:27-28). God reiterated the covenant and the promises to Moses: “Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD: for it is a terrible [or astonishing] thing that I will do with thee” (verse 10).

This time, while fasting on the mountain for 40 days, Moses, in full communication with God, wrote out the entire covenant. “And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses’ hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist [knew] not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him” (verse 29).

Moses’s face was so bright that Aaron and the people were afraid to come close to him. Moses told them to come closer so he could tell them what God had given him on the mountain, but he had to place a veil over his face so it wasn’t so bright! This brilliant, beautiful miracle was part of the glorious establishment of the Old Covenant.

This covenant was the greatest form of government ever created. Established by the Creator Himself, it was perfect.

A GLORIOUS COVENANT

In fact, the Apostle Paul called God’s government and law in the Old Testament “glorious”! Many who call themselves Christians think of the Old Testament administration as harsh, unloving, even evil. We need to learn to view it the way Paul did.

Paul wrote about this to the saints in Corinth: “[T]he MINISTRATION OF DEATH, written and engraven *in stones*, was GLORIOUS, so that the children of Israel could not sted-

fastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away” (2 Corinthians 3:7). Many people think the *stones* mentioned in this verse are the same as the *tables* of stone in verse 3, which contained the Ten Commandments. However, that is not true. Verse 7 refers to the script engraved upon another set of stones, which contained the civil law of Israel (Deuteronomy 27:1-8). This civil law contained physical laws and punishments, many of which ended in death.

God founded that civil law on the *principles* of the Ten Commandments. And the *administration of death* was contained within the civil laws of Moses. Murder, kidnapping and adultery, for example, were all punishable by death. The administration of death was the civil execution of the punishment for such violations.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7, Paul extols that civil law as *glorious*. We must realize, however, that this law was not what God had in mind from the beginning. God established it only for a temporary purpose—just as Moses’s face shone for only a little while.

If this administration was only temporary, and it resulted in death, why did Paul describe it as “glorious”? Here are a few reasons:

- It was based on the glorious principles of the Ten Commandments.
- It showed the need for God’s Holy Spirit. A human being’s power, will and strength are pathetically weak and always unsuccessful without the Holy Spirit!
- It meted out appropriate punishments to lawbreakers. The punishment was necessary in the carnal society of Israel and prevented a lot of lawlessness and crime.
- The civil law recorded on those stones served its purpose for the carnal nation of Israel. Had the

Israelites kept it, the nation would have been glorious (Deuteronomy 4:8). More of God's purpose would have been accomplished.

But did the civil law bring lasting repentance, change of heart, or conversion? Not at all! That was *not* its purpose.

God upheld this government perfectly. Israel did not. Before God had even finished giving the nation this spectacular gift, the people had already fallen into debauchery and began worshipping a golden calf. This was a disappointing sign of what was to come in the generations and the centuries that would follow.

That covenant was glorious, but something was completely missing from it. That element would be part of a different, future covenant—a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6).

JEREMIAH PROPHECIES OF THE NEW COVENANT

God revealed to the Prophet Jeremiah that He has much more in His plan beyond the glory of the Old Covenant. “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The nation of Israel had promised to obey God. However, in breaking that law, it broke its marriage agreement with God. So God prophesied through

Jeremiah that He would institute a new marriage covenant. The new covenant would be an agreement based on the *same law*, except that it would be written not on tables of stone, but in the hearts and minds of men!

Unlike the world's version of Christianity, the New Covenant is not based on doing away with God's law, but on *magnifying* that very same law!

It was based on the same Ten Commandments, the same way of love and outgoing concern—the way of love toward God and love toward neighbor. It was to be a new *covenant* because the *administration* of that law was new; the law itself was not new.

Evidence of this new covenant cannot be found on tables of physical stone. It is found inside the minds of God's people. It is evident in the way we act and think. The law is a principle that covers virtually every possible human circumstance and situation. It governs everything from worshiping God and interacting with your family, all the way down to smaller details such as choosing to mow your grass, for example. Most people wouldn't think God's law says anything about grass-cutting, but it does. If you have a neighbor who doesn't mow his lawn, you will start thinking about that. God's law covers everything because it is a matter of outgoing, loving concern for God and for everyone else.

ADMINISTRATION OF SPIRIT MORE GLORIOUS

“How shall not the ministration of the spirit be further [more] glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory” (2 Corinthians 3:8-9). It

was obvious to Paul that the new administration Jesus Christ introduced would be far more glorious than the old. Both administered the same law. Under the old administration, however, human judges could not impart eternal life; they could only administer death. But now, this new administration, led by Jesus Christ, *imparts eternal life!* Jesus Christ works through His New Covenant ministry to help His people learn how to repent and how to stop sinning—how to use the Holy Spirit and to exercise the love of God—which eventually leads to being born into God’s Family! This is FAR MORE GLORIOUS than anything the Old Covenant could ever offer!

“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ” (verses 12-14). Do you see what a miracle the New Covenant is? Understand the magnitude of what God is doing! God’s ministers *can plainly speak* the truth out of God’s Word, and God’s people *can* understand. Both the speaking and the hearing are inspired by the power of God’s Spirit.

This is completely different from how it was in ancient Israel when Moses’s face had to be covered. This is why most people’s minds are still blinded today. They may read the truth in the Bible, but they do not have the mind to understand it. Only the Holy Spirit can give that ability.

“Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where

the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (verses 15-17; Revised Standard Version). Far from being blinded, God’s people experience freedom because of the indwelling of God’s Spirit.

God’s true ministers endeavor to bring God’s Spirit into their judgments, their counseling and their preaching. As they do, wonderful things happen: lives change, marriages change, families change, congregations change. Eventually the *whole world* will change because of this administration of the Spirit.

“But we all, with open [unveiled] face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed ...” (verse 18). Those of us without a veil over our faces are being changed! Into what? “[I]nto the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” THIS ADMINISTRATION LEADS TO PEOPLE DEVELOPING THE VERY SAME CHARACTER GOD HAS!

Yes, the old administration had a certain glory, but next to the New Covenant, it pales by comparison.

God planned to replace the administration of death with a new administration: the administration of the Spirit. God’s ministers today have been made able ministers of the New Covenant. They teach people the way to receive God’s awesome gift of eternal life. The administrators of the Old Covenant simply could not do that.

The spiritual changes taking place in the minds of the members are tantamount to massive spiritual earthquakes, thunder and lightning. This is far more awe-inspiring than anything God did in the Old Testament or any miracle He performed on Mount Sinai.

TWO

A LIFESAVING MINISTRY

JUST AS HE HAD WITH THE OLD COVENANT, GOD ALSO established an administration for His New Covenant. This is not the same system of priests, judges and captains He had established in ancient Israel. It is a new administration: Christ's own ministry!

God's love is the same today as it was at Mount Sinai. His way of life is unchanged. His spiritual law is unchanged. But compared to the administration in ancient Israel, His New Covenant *administration* is different in many ways.

In ancient Israel, the physical details based on God's spiritual law were often very specific. Today, God's ministers usually don't have such specifics that outline courses of action.

In this priestly order, there isn't always just one way to handle a situation. The Bible is the manual God intends His ministers to use, and He expects His New

Covenant administration to draw close to Him and to *use His Holy Spirit* in applying the spiritual *principles* found in His Word.

A few years after God established the New Covenant administration, the Apostle Paul explained how it was different from the Old Covenant administration. “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?” (2 Corinthians 3:1). Paul was asking if ministers of Jesus Christ need letters or papers to prove their credentials. “Ye [brethren] are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (verses 2-3).

What is Paul communicating here? He is saying that the proof of a faithful minister is godly fruit in the lives of God’s people! This is not a “checklist ministry” written with ink, but rather a ministry where the Spirit of God is used to write God’s law on the members’ hearts and into their minds!

While the New Covenant is far superior to the Old, Paul is not belittling the Old. Again, the Old Covenant was a spectacular marriage agreement God entered into with Israel. But Israel did not have the *heart* to obey. The people could see the law on those tables of stone, but it was not a part of them; it wasn’t written in their hearts and minds. They lacked the *spirit* of obedience.

It is completely different with spiritual Israel. Under the terms and conditions of the New Covenant (which is also a marriage covenant), God uses His Spirit to internalize His law within our minds and hearts. Rather

than obeying for carnal reasons, God's Church today obeys because we love God and want to live as He lives. We love God because He took the initiative in our lives, called us and brought us out of spiritual Egypt. The Spirit dwelling in us enables us to have fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. The spiritual miracle that God is performing today far surpasses any of the physical miracles the nation of Israel experienced at Mount Sinai.

God's ministers are instructed to consider God's people in this light. God is writing His laws in their hearts and in their minds—by the Holy Spirit. That is whom the ministry serves! That fact should cause God's ministers to tremble with godly fear. Ministers bear a heavy responsibility to serve and administer with joy—but also with godly fear.

Paul continued: “And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God” (verses 4-5). Paul gives all the credit to Christ and to God the Father. Ministers *must not* allow themselves to get puffed up about the positions into which they have been placed. They are the ministers of Jesus Christ.

But notice verse 6: “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament [or covenant]; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” God's ministers are ministers of the Spirit, not of the letter. While the Old Covenant was both glorious and good, it did not allow for repentance. It did not lead to a change of heart. It could not lead to salvation—the end result was still death!

But as verse 6 reveals, the Spirit gives life! Within the New Covenant, there is room for repentance. A true change of heart is possible. The power of God's Spirit

working within God's people leads to eternal life. This is so far above the promises of the Old Covenant. Abundant food, shelter, wealth and power simply do not compare with God's Spirit and eternal life!

Herbert W. Armstrong elaborated on this in his book *The Incredible Human Potential*: "The Old Testament sacrificial laws and ceremonial rituals were a mere *temporary substitute* for Christ and the Holy Spirit. When the reality came, the substitute was ended—but the basic SPIRITUAL LAW—the law of LOVE, codified in the Ten Commandments—continued. But the CHURCH was required, having the Holy Spirit, to obey them not merely according to the strictness of the letter but according to the spirit ..., or obvious intent, of the law"

God's people are to obey God, not just according to the strict letter of the law, but by the *spiritual intent* of the law. Furthermore, God's ministers are to teach His people the spiritual principle behind God's law, which is the way of love.

MINISTERS OF JESUS CHRIST

You may often hear the term "ministers of Jesus Christ," but have you thought about what that really means?

In the same way that Aaron and his sons were part of the Levitical priesthood, true ministers today are part of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Just as Aaron was the high priest in ancient Israel and there were priests under him, Jesus Christ is, in actuality, our High Priest. He is the literal and living Head of the ministry. God's ministers serve under Him as part of His administration.

A passage in the book of Hebrews explains this thoroughly.

“So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee” (Hebrews 5:5). Christ did not appoint Himself into the office of High Priest; God the Father did that.

“As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared” (verses 6-7). The realization that Christ is our High Priest should motivate every decision God’s ministers make as His administrators.

As our High Priest, Jesus Christ agonized in prayer throughout His physical life. Why? For the benefit of God’s people. His ministers today, to properly serve God’s people, strive to pray that same way. This is not just a matter of “putting in time” on our knees. This is a type of heartrending, energized prayer that allows God to lead us to make wise decisions in guiding the lives of His people.

Helping God’s people is not a matter of searching a manual to find out how to deal with a problem. The job of God’s ministers is more than just implementing and enforcing a list of do’s and don’ts. With that said, some decisions are indeed black and white. When applying God’s law, His administration must *never* compromise. If someone is creating division, for example, God’s course of action is clear! However, much of how the ministry must deal with God’s people is *not* black and white. Finding the right course of action requires *Spirit-led discernment!* Being ministers of Jesus Christ means using Christ’s own mind to determine the appropriate course of action. We

must pour our hearts out to God, to the one who is able to save His precious Family from death.

“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (verses 8-9). Jesus Christ never sinned, yet He was still learning. He always maintained a humble, teachable attitude. Then, when He was made perfect by the resurrection, He became the High Priest of all those God would call to receive the same precious and eternal promises!

The process of conversion is difficult. God’s people are fighting to overcome, to grow and to change so they can receive eternal salvation. Adding to this challenge, God calls the *weak of the world* into His Church (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). True ministers of Jesus Christ always strive to follow the example of our faithful, merciful High Priest and to maintain a positive, hope-filled view of every Church member. They work to see each person *as God does* and to work with them accordingly, with His unfailing love.

COMPARING TWO PRIESTHOODS

Hebrews 7 compares the priesthood of Aaron to the priesthood of Jesus Christ in detail. Verse 4 states: “Now consider how great this man [it should read ‘this One’ as it refers to Jesus Christ] was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.” The first few verses of this chapter prove that Melchizedek is the same Being as Jesus Christ. (For more proof of this truth, request a free copy of our reprint “Who Was Jesus Before His Human Birth?”)

Anciently, Abraham came up to Jerusalem and paid tithes to Melchizedek. Levi, after whom the Levitical priesthood was named, was a descendant from the lineage of Abraham (verse 5).

“But he [Melchizedek] whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him [Abraham] that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better” (verses 6-7).

There is no question about who is the greatest here! Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek! Paul is saying that since Levi’s great-grandfather, Abraham, paid tithes to Melchizedek (Jesus Christ), the Levitical priesthood is not as great as Jesus Christ’s priesthood.

Most people use these and the next few verses to try to do away with God’s command to tithe. However, rather than doing away with tithing, the passage is making clear *where* the tithes are to be directed. A different administration, with a different high priest, had replaced the Levitical priesthood. Paul was explaining who should rightfully *receive* the tithes.

Continuing in verse 11, Paul wrote, “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?” Paul is perfectly clear here! If perfection by the Levitical priesthood were possible, then there would be no reason for another priesthood. But perfection was *not* possible, so a greater priesthood under the leadership of Jesus Christ is necessary.

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is not of that carnal, or fleshly, commandment. His priesthood is different, and it leads to eternal life (verses 15-16).

“And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament [covenant]” (verses 20-22). Paul is emphasizing again that God the Father installed Jesus Christ into this office. He also reiterates that this New Covenant under Jesus Christ is sure and cannot falter.

“And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death” (verse 23). The Levitical priests were physical and would die, leaving their office to a successor. That is not the case with Jesus Christ’s priesthood. He is alive forever! “But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood” (verse 24).

A LIFESAVING MINISTRY

Because this new administration is permanent, look at what Jesus Christ is able to do! “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus Christ is able to *save* those who come to God by Him. This was not true of the Old Covenant—that was not its purpose. As the High Priest of the new administration, Jesus Christ is able to literally save people.

God’s ministers are part of the new administration. They actually have a part to play in saving people!

Human beings do not accomplish this by their own power, of course. It only happens by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, God uses His human instruments to help bring about that salvation. When a

minister visits people, he is there to strengthen and to help save them! Peter, the first-century chief apostle, was personally instructed by the High Priest, Jesus Christ, to feed His “sheep” (John 21:16-17). This is a command to feed the Spirit-begotten members of the Church. If they are to grow and thrive so they can ultimately be born into God’s Family and live forever, they must be fed by righteous ministers who are willing to give their lives for the sheep—just as Peter was told that he would have to do (verses 18-19).

God’s ministers work tirelessly in this endeavor to strengthen people and lead them to salvation! This can mean working for hours on end with a member to help him or her overcome a serious problem. It can also mean removing someone from the Church in order to save him—or to save an entire congregation! Only a minister who is close to God can discern the difference. We cannot turn to a page in a manual and figure out what to do. A minister making these types of decisions must be on his knees, crying out to God to allow Jesus Christ to lead him into the best course of action that will help to save people. **HE IS THE HIGH PRIEST WHO KNOWS HOW TO SAVE PEOPLE!** Apart from God, ministers simply cannot do the job, and serious mistakes will be made.

“For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself” (Hebrews 7:26-27). The High Priest of the New Covenant is a perfect Being. He is not like the ancient high priests who needed to offer sacrifices to cover their own sins. He died once for all as a perfect sacrifice!

LAW NOT THE PROBLEM

Paul sums up the entire subject in the next chapter. “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Hebrews 8:1-2). Members of God’s New Testament Church have a High Priest sitting at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven RIGHT NOW!

The Old Covenant is no longer in effect. “But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (verse 6). This new, *better* covenant that Christ administers is established on *better* promises—eternal promises. The ministry of the Church is *privileged* to be part of this more excellent ministry.

“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second” (verse 7). Again, if the Levitical priesthood could bring perfection, there would be no need for the New Covenant (Hebrews 7:11).

What was the problem with the Old Covenant? “For finding fault *with them*, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Hebrews 8:8). The problem was not with the law, and it wasn’t with the covenant; the fault of the Old Covenant was with *the people*. They disobeyed, broke their word, and therefore broke the covenant.

If the Israelites had kept their part of that covenant, what would have happened? They would have received only *national, physical blessings*. Their obedience would

not have brought them eternal life. They would not have experienced a change of heart or a change in their thinking. They would not have received salvation. These promises were not given at that time.

However, the Israelites failed to keep even the letter of the law. Finding fault with them, God made a different covenant: “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (verses 9-10). Notice carefully! The New Covenant does not do away with the law; neither is it founded on a different law. God here is talking about the exact same spiritual law that the ancient Israelites couldn’t keep. This New Covenant involves people who have God’s laws *written in their hearts*. *These people have hearts that are able to obey because they are empowered by God’s Holy Spirit*.

“And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest” (verse 11). This New Covenant leads to a wonderful time when God’s Kingdom will rule over the Earth. Then, everyone in the world will know God. Everyone in the world will be able to keep His great law under this New Covenant.

Now notice the distinct difference with the Old Covenant that Paul addresses in verse 12: “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” It is possible

to exercise mercy under the New Covenant. This is not talking about a lack of judgment. God's government must administer punishment and correction; that is part of God's love. God uses correction to bring us to repentance. Then as we change, God is merciful toward us, forgiving us our sins and removing them from His memory.

The administration of the Spirit differs from the administration of civil government under the Old Covenant. The administration of the Spirit, under the leadership of Jesus Christ, allows for mercy, repentance, change and conversion. God's ministers operate with this reality in mind as they work with His people. If one of God's people maintains a humble, teachable attitude, and he or she is not causing division, there is room to work with that person for a long time to help him or her overcome.

THREE

THE SPIRIT OF GOD'S LAW

WITHIN ANY PHYSICAL FAMILY, PROBLEMS ARISE that need to be addressed by the administration of that family. The same is true within God's spiritual Family. God is deeply concerned that those administering His government treat the family members the right way.

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1-2). When someone approaches the ministry with a problem, the goal must be to restore the person as a productive, growing member of God's Family. God wants the ministry to use His Holy Spirit to help His people to see and overcome their flaws. The

ministers approach this challenge with authority, but tempered with mercy, knowing that they themselves are not perfect either (Hebrews 5:2).

LETTER OF THE LAW NOT COMPROMISED

If a minister uses the Spirit of God while he counsels, the members of God's Church know they are loved! They will be inspired and motivated to change.

In serious cases, using God's Spirit may mean removing a member from the fellowship. But even that is a tool used in the hope of eventually restoring the one who has been suspended, as well as protecting other Church members.

This does not mean God's ministers compromise with the *letter* of the law. A minister cannot "spiritualize away" God's law and say, "As long as you keep the Sabbath in your heart, you can work straight through it." Being administrators of the spirit of the law does not mean getting rid of the letter of the law, but it does acknowledge the *attitude* as well.

Notice this description of God in Exodus 34: "And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, *merciful and gracious, longsuffering*, and abundant in goodness and truth" (verses 5-6). Right at the beginning of the establishment of the Old Covenant, God describes Himself as being abundantly MERCIFUL.

Other scriptures prove that Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:4). God the Father and Christ are perfectly unified in thought

(e.g., John 10:30). God says, “I change not,” and Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). So, does the fact that Christ is merciful mean that He sometimes relaxes the law?

The description of God in Exodus 34 continues: “Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, *and that will by no means clear the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (verse 7).

This is a beautiful description of how Christ’s ministers are to operate. Following the example of our High Priest, God’s ministers do not ignore judgment or the law. They do not allow chaos or lawlessness into their congregations.

Ministers serve God’s people through the administration of the Spirit, meaning God’s people will know that His ministers love them. They will see God’s mercy and forgiveness in the ministers’ counsel. And when God’s ministers must implement a strong correction, suspension or even disfellowshipment, the members will know that the administration of the Spirit does not ignore the law—they will know that those decisions are also made in love.

LAW OF LOVE IN ACTION

Philadelphia Church of God Pastor General Gerald Flurry has said that ministers cannot approach shepherding God’s people as if it were a math equation. The Spirit of God cannot flow in that type of counseling! God’s people are not math problems. When true ministers of Jesus Christ must put someone out of the Church, they work to show that individual that such a measure

actually represents God's law of love in action. Even in such difficult situations, the person must know that the administration is working with him or her with a desire to bring him or her back. God's ministry is eager to throw the person a *life preserver*, not an anchor! In everything the ministry does, the law of love should be magnified in the eyes of God's people.

Take one example. A couple had been in the Church for a considerable time, yet their family life was a mess; the husband, wife and children were all miserable. The husband was the kind of man who would say one or two words to his family in a week. He never prayed with his family. He never studied the Bible with them. He and his wife were completely divided. *All of them* were going to fall away if something wasn't done quickly.

Over the course of several weeks, repeated, difficult counseling sessions were aimed at addressing their problems. Finally, they had to be told, "We really don't want to have to put you out of the Church, but this is it! There had better be some changes, or you leave us no other choice." At that stage, it was hard to imagine them turning things around.

In the weeks that followed, however, the demeanor of this family changed remarkably. They came to services smiling! Their marriage was happy for the first time in many years! At services the man started discussing some of the family Bible studies that he had held with his family. The change was truly miraculous!

Sometime later, this family's minister e-mailed the man, saying how encouraged he was to talk with him and to observe the changes he had made in his family. He told him how great it was that he had applied the counsel. The man thanked him for the encouragement.

Since then there has been regular, cordial conversation back and forth between the ministry and the member.

That is an example of the administration of the Spirit!

BEARING ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Such a case illustrates what it means to bear one another's burdens. There is no manual telling ministers when to suspend, when to give one last chance, when to give one last warning, or when to encourage. It requires the Holy Spirit and direction from our High Priest.

Notice what Christ taught His disciples in what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil [or magnify]" (Matthew 5:17). Christ went on to explain how not just the letter of the law must be applied, but even the *spirit of the law*—the obvious spiritual intent. Magnifying the law means we are motivated by the love of God in everything we do. After all, "this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 John 5:3).

God had this magnification in mind even during the time of the Old Covenant. "The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable" (Isaiah 42:21). Jesus Christ came and fulfilled this prophecy of magnifying the law—which is the *opposite* of doing away with the law as most professing Christians teach. With every law God gave, He had this ultimate spiritual reality in mind of magnifying it from the letter to the spirit.

Ministers of Jesus Christ need to MAGNIFY God's law in their own personal lives as well as those of the members. They do this by demonstrating God's love in

how they counsel, how they show mercy, and how they execute judgments. God's spiritual law must permeate everything we do and think.

RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT EXCEEDS THE PHARISEES'

The sermon recorded in Matthew 5 was delivered during Jesus Christ's early ministry. At the time, He had only been working with the disciples for a short period. The religious, pharisaical leaders of the day were steeped in a ritualistic form of law-keeping. Because of that, Jesus Christ had to reshape and remold the disciples' minds to show them what His law actually is. Christ had to revolutionize their understanding of the law.

“For I say unto you [disciples], That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (verse 20). Christ told them that their righteousness had to exceed what they saw among the religious teachers of the day. That was true for the disciples back then, and it is true for Christ's disciples today. Our righteousness must far exceed that of the Pharisees. Our understanding of God's law must go far beyond the letter. It has to be magnified to include the spiritual intent.

Our perfect High Priest continued, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (verses 21-22).

Verses 27-28 give another example: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Similar to how thinking evil thoughts toward your brother is breaking the Sixth Commandment, thinking lustful thoughts about a woman is breaking the Seventh. Christ then magnified the law to show that if you even hate your brother, you are guilty of murder. In fact, if you don’t *love him*, you are guilty of breaking the law! How ridiculous it is for people to say that Christ *did away* with the law when He obviously expanded it!

Now notice verses 38-39: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” People have long mocked and ridiculed the Old Covenant, saying, “If it’s an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, then everyone would be blind and hungry.” This law was indeed part of the Old Covenant (Exodus 21:22-25; Leviticus 24:17-21; Deuteronomy 19:16-21), but it is discussing a fair recompense for a crime. This was an important principle in the civil law for a carnal-minded nation. It acted as a great deterrent to people who were tempted to commit a crime.

In the New Testament administration of the Spirit, Christ takes it to a whole different level, introducing forgiveness and mercy. While sometimes problems are black and white and can be dealt with in that fashion, a true minister is not too quick to insist on a letter-of-the-law punishment for an offense. He aims to use the spirit of the law, to give more time for repentance and

forgiveness, for example. The right course of action in each case cannot be determined with a *letter-of-the-law* manual. This priesthood is better than that! God's ministers endeavor to stay close to God so they can apply the spirit of the law to each situation.

TURN THE OTHER CHEEK

Herbert W. Armstrong said in a May 1979 *World Tomorrow* program titled "Spirit of the Law": "[H]ere, according to the way of God and being perfect like God and having the mind of God, having the nature of God, and the Spirit of God, here's what a Christian is to do. He said: 'I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil. But whosoever smites you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.' How many people do that today? I wonder how many Church people today really believe what Jesus said. Or do they think He was some kind of a sissy that didn't know what He was talking about? You know people today don't think that's very practical. No, if somebody hits you today, you're going to double up your fists and get good and angry and hit him right back, aren't you? Well, that's all the carnality in you and that's hatred and that's a spirit of MURDER in you that is doing it, and that's what it is."

The spirit of this command applies to more than getting hit physically. It applies to anyone making accusations or saying unloving things.

Mr. Armstrong continued, "That's the spirit of murder in you. That's what it is, and it takes a lot more courage and it takes a lot more self-control and power and strength to turn the other cheek and let him sock that one, too, than it does to start socking away at him. That's all there is to it! Oh, Jesus wasn't any sissy."

Matthew 5:43-45 continue, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father ...” Notice the reason God’s people are to live and think this way: It is so they can be sons of the Father! When God’s people make decisions that are guided by the Father’s Spirit, they become more like Him.

Mr. Armstrong elaborated, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies. *Oh, but surely we’re not to do that, are we? Now that wouldn’t be practical, would it?* People today don’t believe that. People today don’t do these things. Why, people today don’t believe we should obey God’s law and keep it. People today don’t magnify the Ten Commandments and obey them.”

At the time, Mr. Armstrong was in the midst of dealing with his own son’s rebellion. Out of love, Mr. Armstrong used the government of God to fight for the truth God had revealed to the Church. Out of love, he put his own son and other rebellious leaders out of the Church and frequently prayed for their repentance. Mr. Armstrong practiced verse 44, yet he was no weakling.

He continued, “People today don’t believe in loving their enemies. And He says to pray for them that persecute you. If anyone would persecute you and accuse you unjustly of things, deliberately, maliciously, knowing that they’re doing wrong, I’ll tell you, humanly the thing that has always been the hardest for me to resist of anything is to avoid a real indignation over an intended wrong. If somebody makes a mistake and they didn’t mean it, why that doesn’t offend me a bit. I don’t think

it ever did. But if someone really INTENDS wrong and does it maliciously and purposely, that's always been the hardest thing for me to forgive. But you know in Christ we must, even that. 'Love your enemies, pray for them that persecute you that you may be sons of your Father, which is in heaven.' Well, there it is."

FOUR

THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS OF THE LAW

IN MATTHEW 23:23, JESUS CHRIST LISTED WHAT HE called the “weightier matters of the law.” What was He talking about?

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted *the weightier matters of the law*, JUDGMENT, MERCY, and FAITH: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

Here, Jesus Christ confirms that all of God’s laws, including tithing, need to be kept. But He also emphasizes that there are weightier matters within that law. As Christ said, applying the spiritual principles of *judgment*, *mercy* and *faith* are vitally important!

These “weightier matters” are crucial in the administration of the *spirit*! These matters are what

God's ministers need to be concerned about most of all! We must understand, apply and teach the spirit—or spiritual intent—of God's law.

We also must understand that to be a part of the administration of the spirit, God's ministers must be filled with the LOVE of God. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) and God's law is love (1 John 5:3). Indeed, God's love is what underpins all the law—including these weightier matters. With that in mind, you could even say that *love* is the WEIGHTIEST matter of the law (Luke 11:42).

Jesus Christ had some strong correction for those people who commanded the meticulous keeping of *their interpretation* of the *letter* of the law over the obvious spiritual intent of the law. In the verses following Matthew 23:23, Christ said they were like blind guides who lead people astray. He called them hypocrites who, while looking good and appearing righteous on the outside, were really like a whited sepulchre—an elaborately crafted tomb filled with dead men's bones and uncleanness. In verses 33 and 35, Christ called them serpents and a generation of vipers, and said it was their kind of thinking that was responsible for killing the righteous from Abel to Zacharias! He warned them, “[H]ow can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

This is some of the strongest condemnation in the Bible! But notice the *love* behind these strong words of correction.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (verse 37). Christ was eager to forgive! Christ loves people, and He wants to cover them with His love as a hen covers her chicks. This is how we need to think and act as well.

Let's deepen our understanding of these "weightier matters of the law"—judgment, mercy, faith and love.

JUDGMENT

In administering God's government, many judgments must be made. This truly is a *weighty matter* of the law! Pastor General Gerald Flurry has stated that when making these judgments, ministers need wisdom, patience, finesse, boldness—and that LOVE must inspire and motivate all their judgments. It must inspire and motivate how we speak to and deal with people. Every minister of God should pray for more of God's love every single day.

Wisdom is a vital key required in making proper judgments. It is imperative that we get down on our knees daily to pray in detail for wisdom on how to solve problems. Such wisdom can come only from the mind of God. Put it to the test and see how many answers come *while* praying. With serious problems, fasting may be required.

Oftentimes, people like a list of do's and don'ts for every *possible* situation. Providing such a list is not possible! Nowhere in God's Word is there a list of every potential infraction of His law. God's ministers cannot legislate every possible infraction of the law, because the law is spiritual (Romans 7:14), and God wants His people to understand the spiritual intent of the law (John 4:24). Both ministry and lay members should regularly pray to grow in wisdom so that we are able to apply the *principles* of the law. This magnifies the law and helps to ensure proper judgment.

Another vital key for proper judgment is God's government. God's government is hierarchical in form; you can read about it in Exodus 18. Judgments needed

to be made for and concerning the people of Israel. Moses was simply unable to handle all this on his own. Positions under Moses were established, and duties were delegated accordingly. More serious matters were brought up the line to help ensure proper judgments were made. This is the same structure established for the New Testament Church—the administration of the spirit. When questions arise about how to proceed with a particular situation, the minister can take the matter up the line of authority to the regional director; if necessary, the regional director may take the matter all the way up to God’s apostle.

Following this biblical governance structure keeps *God* in the judgments being made. This is essential because God admonishes us in 2 Chronicles 19:6, “Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment.” We are not judging for man but for God, and He **MUST** be with us in the judgment. Only He has perfect judgment in every situation. He knows exactly what to do. God wants us to *learn* to exercise righteous judgment like He does.

There are *weightier* matters of God’s law, and proper judgment (or justice) in applying the **TOTALITY** of God’s law is one of them.

MERCY

“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

Concerning the phrase “Father of mercies,” *Barnes Notes* says, “This is a Hebrew mode of expression, where a noun performs the place of an adjective and

the phrase is synonymous nearly with ‘merciful Father.’ The expression has, however, somewhat more energy and spirit than the simple phrase ‘merciful Father.’ The Hebrews used the word *father* often to denote the author or source of anything; and the idea in phraseology like this is, *that mercy proceeds from God, that He is the source of it, and that IT IS HIS NATURE to impart mercy and compassion ...*” (emphasis added throughout).

God has lived for eternity, and His law is simply an expression of His perfect way of life. Mercy is a weightier matter of the law since God is the Father of mercies!

God even rules from a *throne* of mercy. The representation of God’s heavenly throne was called the *mercy seat* (e.g., Numbers 7:89). In the tabernacle, in the most holy place, was the ark of the covenant: a chest that housed Aaron’s rod, the Ten Commandments and a golden pot of manna. On top of the ark was the mercy seat. The law was enclosed with mercy!

What is God most concerned about? “Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (Micah 6:6-7). Is God going to be pleased with physical works alone? Will we receive God’s approval *solely* because of great tithes and offerings, for example?

Verse 8 answers: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to *do justly*, and to LOVE MERCY, and to *walk humbly* with thy God?” This is one of the major aspects of character that God wants from us: to LOVE mercy! There is nothing

physical about that. We need to pursue and cultivate a merciful mind. We must come to have a merciful mind that loves to see people forgiven. That is a weightier matter of the law!

Consider the parable of the debtor. In Matthew 18:21, Peter asked Jesus Christ how often a person needed to forgive a brother who sins against him. He wanted to know if there was a limit. *Seven times?* Christ replied, *70 times seven!* Christ then gave a parable about a king who called his servants to pay the debts they owed him. When one debtor couldn't pay the 10,000 talents he owed, the king commanded that the debtor's family and all that he owned be sold to pay as much of the debt as possible. The stunned man fell to the ground at the king's feet and begged for mercy, promising to pay if the king had patience with him.

The king was "moved with compassion" and released him—completely forgiving the debt (verse 27).

But look what happened next. Consider what this man who just had his debts forgiven did. This same servant went and tracked down a fellow servant who owed him a tiny amount of money. Instead of showing this man the same mercy that the king had exhibited, the evil servant threw this man into debtors' prison until the debt was paid (verse 28-30).

When the king heard what had happened, he was very angry. He took the evil servant who would not show the same mercy that had been extended to him and threw him in jail. Then Jesus Christ said: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (verse 35).

Why was the king in this parable so angry about what the evil servant had done? Why was Christ so strong in His warning? According to the letter of the law, the one

who lent the money had the legal right to throw that debtor in jail, and so he did. The point is that God has forgiven us GREATLY; therefore, we must likewise have the same merciful, forgiving attitude toward others!

While God is, indeed, very merciful, do not mistake His mercy for tolerance of sin.

Remember this powerful summary of the *name of God* recorded in Exodus 34:6-7: “The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, AND THAT WILL BY NO MEANS CLEAR THE GUILTY; *visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*”

Yes, God is full of mercy, graciousness, forgiveness, and is very longsuffering. But there are serious consequences for sin, and very often those consequences have a lasting impact for decades and into future generations. So be thankful for God’s mercy and strive, with His help, to develop this same aspect of His character within yourself—but as stated before, never mistake God’s mercy for tolerance of sin.

FAITH

Why is *faith* a weightier matter of the law? What is the relationship between faith and the law?

“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! *On the contrary*, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31; New King James Version). The word *establish* means “to cause or make to stand, to make firm, fix, uphold or to keep intact.” Rather than doing away with the law, faith *upholds* God’s law.

In other words, it requires the *faith of Christ* to be able to properly keep the spiritual law of God. It means that we *trust God* to make obedience possible.

Some people might point to verse 28, where the Apostle Paul said that we are justified by faith, *apart from* the deeds of the law. Yet Paul also said that the *doers* of the law are justified (Romans 2:13).

Do these scriptures contradict each other? What exactly did Paul mean?

“Rather than contradict, these scriptures *complement* each other,” the *Herbert W. Armstrong College Bible Correspondence Course* says. “It is not by the deeds of the law—the actions *themselves* APART FROM faith—that we are justified (made righteous before God); that’s only possible through the faith of Christ in us. Yet all who have His faith and *exercise* it to make obedience possible—the *doers* of the law acting IN FAITH—which makes it a *living* faith—are the ones who are justified by that faith!” (Lesson 13).

Simply put: The doers of the law who produce works INSPIRED BY FAITH are the ones who are justified. Righteous works *follow* faith; otherwise it is a *dead* faith (James 2:14-26).

It is Christ’s faith dwelling in us that trusts God to give us the *love* of the Holy Spirit to *fulfill* God’s law, enabling us to be righteous. If *we* were able of ourselves to supply the faith that brings about God’s love, then we would earn our own salvation by OUR works! But in fact, that kind of righteousness is as *filthy rags* to God (Isaiah 64:6).

It was precisely this WRONGHEADED APPROACH to law-keeping that Paul condemned. There were those who *rejected* Christ and the righteousness that comes by the FAITH OF CHRIST. They attempted *by their own*

righteousness to keep the law as the means of being justified—made righteous before God. This *self-righteousness* is what Paul condemned. Paul wrote in Romans 10 that there were those who had zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. In verses 3-4, he stated: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their *own righteousness*, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” The word “end” means aim, outcome or goal. The goal of keeping the law is to become like Christ!

We cannot become a born son of God without faith! Consider all of this within the context of what is recorded in Romans 14:23: “[W]hatsoever is not of faith is sin.”

Faith is indeed a weightier matter of the law! Anything not of faith is sin! This verse appears in the context of a vegetarian who sincerely believes that eating meat is a sin—yet when he is told it’s not a sin or sees other brethren eat meat, if he elects to eat it anyway while he still THINKS it’s a sin, then it is a sin for him!

The *Principles of Healthful Living* booklet states: “We must follow what God has revealed to us to be right according to the Word of God. This does not mean that our consciences always tell us what is right—not at all. We have to continually study to learn what is right and wrong. But God thinks more highly of a vegetarian who might sincerely and conscientiously deny himself the clean meats because he does not know the full truth than He does a person who would do the right thing according to the letter, but who really believes in his heart that he is doing wrong.”

What God sanctions to be lawful may NOT be lawful for every individual—if the individual cannot act in faith!

Can we begin to understand why the weightier matters of the law cannot be legislated in the letter ONLY? God is building CHARACTER in us, and character-building *requires* that we exercise judgment, mercy and faith so we learn to THINK as *God thinks!* This requires God's Spirit—His mind—to be actively at work in us, joined with our human spirit. That is why we have *weightier* matters of the law: because the law expresses how God THINKS AND LIVES!

AGAPE LOVE

Now let's look at what we might call the WEIGHTIEST of all the matters of the law.

Luke 11:42 is the parallel passage to Matthew 23:23, quoted earlier: "But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment AND THE LOVE OF GOD: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

Romans 13:10 says that love fulfills the law. In other words, the whole law, God's way of life, is summed up in that one word, *love*—because God is love.

Mr. Armstrong defined the spiritual law of God as "a general principle which, in its spirit, covers every act. God expects for us today to apply the principle to every act. ... In the Bible, God does not write down every specific detail of the *principle* or *spirit* of His law! He expects us, with His Holy Spirit, to apply the principle to *every* circumstance, act or question" (*Good News*, March 1979).

The trouble is, almost no one knows what love really is.

Notice how Mr. Armstrong defined it: "Love is an '*unselfish outgoing concern*' for the good and welfare of the one loved. Love is primarily on the *giving, serving,*

sharing side of the fence—not on the *getting, taking, factional, striving* side. It is not selfish. ...

“Love is **unselfish**. It is not an emotion, though it may be expressed with an emotional content. True love *combines* the rational aspect of outgoing concern—desire to help, serve, give or share—along with sincere concerned affectionate *feeling*” (*The Missing Dimension in Sex*).

God’s love (from the Greek word *agape*) is not an emotion. This kind of love comes from outside of us—from God Himself. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, *and of love*, and of a sound mind.” God has to give it. Emotion comes from within. God’s love is *from without*.

Notice what Christ said when one of the Pharisees challenged Him on what the greatest commandment in the law is: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5).

The First Commandment is the most important. Every other point of the law flows from that one. Keeping God at the center of everything we do is the essence of this commandment. A list of do’s and don’ts may help us understand, in part, how to keep this foremost commandment—but a list could never fully express the spirit of that all-encompassing law.

Even getting excited about the Bible’s prophecies is not as important as getting to **KNOW** the God *behind* those prophecies!

Matthew 22:39-40 continue: “And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Loving *God* includes loving His Family—God’s Spirit-

begotten saints—more than we love ourselves. Our *neighbors*, whom we love AS ourselves, are those in this world who have yet to be called and converted.

The Apostle John wrote: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1 John 5:1).

“That is one of the most beautiful scriptures in the Bible,” wrote Gerald Flurry in the July-August 2004 *Royal Vision*. “You are to have the same love toward those who are begotten as you do toward God, the one who begat. You are to have the same love, because they are now members of God’s Family; they are begotten of the Father. That could never apply to our neighbor.

“Of course, we place the Father and our Husband, Christ, at the head of this family of love. Nobody could ever replace them. But when someone enters the God Family, the Father wants them to receive the *same love* He receives. He wants you to love that new member with all your heart, soul, strength and mind—*more than you love yourself*. That is what makes a family work!

“Paul tells us in Philippians 2:3 to ‘let each esteem other better than themselves.’ That is talking about those in the Family of God. We can love those in the world as ourselves, but we must love God’s Family more. What better way to unify God’s Family than to grow more deeply in this kind of love?”

As it is written, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:13). The Greek word for *charity* is *agape*—which is the very *love of God!* This love is what must fill us if we are going to be able to understand, teach, live by and administer the weightier matters of the law!

FIVE

ADMINISTERING THE ROYAL LOVE OF GOD

AS DISCUSSED IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, THE weightiest matter of all of God’s law is the LOVE of God—denoted by the Greek word *agape*. In 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul defines this God-level love that we all need to exhibit and apply in every aspect of our lives.

Let’s take a closer look at these qualities of *agape* love.

A LOOK AT GOD’S LOVE

Love “suffers long” (1 Corinthians 13:4): It endures patiently. That means we may have to suffer while *continuing* to be patient. Agape love prevails *when things go wrong*. It bears up under the pressure when being oppressed or provoked.

How easy it can be for people to lose their temper! When dealing with someone who is self-righteous, for example, it might be easy to be provoked into speaking or acting imprudently or unwisely. It can even provoke you to sin yourself! Outgoing concern (*love*) for God and others helps us avoid these pitfalls.

Treat others the way you would want to be treated by God. Remember, God is extremely patient with your shortcomings.

Love “is kind” (verse 4): It is good-natured, gentle, tender and affectionate. It *responds* to other people’s needs. Consider Jesus Christ’s own example. Think about how much time He spent doing good works. He was constantly concerned about the needs of others; He helped them because He was moved with compassion for them (Matthew 9:36).

Love “envies not” (1 Corinthians 13:4): It isn’t jealous of other people’s blessings and opportunities. On the contrary, it *rejoices* in them: whether stature, reputation, wealth, health, domestic comforts, education or anything else! Love *rejoices* that others have such blessings without wishing that those blessings were upon ourselves. *Never begrudge another man’s blessings.*

Agape love is not *possessive*. Rather, it allows and encourages others to do their best.

Love “vaunts not itself” (verse 4): It does not brag or sing its own praises. It isn’t boastful and doesn’t like to show off. It does not seek to impress others to get noticed. What is your attitude, for example, in how you dress? We should dress nicely to glorify God and to uphold His standards, just as we should strive to do in all aspects of our lives. We should not be trying to draw undue attention to ourselves, such as causing the opposite

sex to lust. Extremes in fashion can be motivated by vanity, rebellion or lust. These are grave sins and are the opposite of God's love. God's love does not parade itself above others, thinking it is somehow superior.

Love "is not puffed up" (verse 4): It is not arrogant, proud, haughty or vain. It doesn't harbor inflated ideas of its own self-importance. This can happen to anyone, but especially to someone who is in a position of authority. It is easy to begin thinking you are entitled to special treatment. We must all guard against such deceit because agape love is humble, modest and unobtrusive. It does not overemphasize the self.

Love "does not behave itself unseemly" (verse 5): It is not rude or lacking in manners and does not act in an unbecoming way. It is polite, courteous, discreet and modest. It avoids profane, indecent, vulgar, improper and unseemly language.

Agape love seeks to do and say that which is proper and becoming under the circumstances. It strives for proper, appropriate conduct and deportment in all relationships and situations. It respects those in authority and holds proper regard for those under our authority. It strives not to offend. It avoids words or deeds that would violate the decency of any given situation.

AN UTTERLY UNSELFISH LOVE

Love "seeks not her own" (1 Corinthians 13:5): It is not selfish; does not *insist* on its own rights or its own ways. It is not self-seeking. It does not pursue selfish advantage over others, but rather seeks the welfare of others. It desires to promote *their* happiness even if it requires self-denial to the point of sacrificing comfort and time.

There will always be times when situations arise and people need help when it is inconvenient to help. It is in these situations that the amount of agape love in you will show through.

God's *family plan* is an example of this. God wants all people to have the opportunity to be part of His Family—and more than that, God wants all people who have ever lived to have this opportunity. God's plan of salvation is not closed or limited to Himself and Christ, or to just a small inner circle of special individuals. It is an opportunity He will freely give and share with *all people* for all eternity. And He has sacrificed tremendously in order to provide that opportunity to so many.

To say that agape love “seeks not her own,” is to say that it seeks not to *be served* but to *serve*—without demanding that others do the same in return.

Love “is not easily provoked” (verse 5). The words “easily provoked” come from a single Greek word, and this simply means that God's love *is not provoked*. It is not prone to anger or to exasperation with others. A person with this love does not give way to sudden bursts of emotion even though he may have been emotionally injured. Even when someone must be corrected, it should be handled without provocation and with as many positive and encouraging words as possible.

Agape love “is not provoked” also means that it is not overly sensitive or touchy. It is not easily offended by other people's words or actions *toward us*. This is another aspect of God's love we must be filled with.

Love “thinks no evil” (verse 5): It is not malicious or overly suspicious of others. Agape love is not disposed to find fault with others or eager to impute evil motives to others.

“Thinks no evil” also means that love does not take account or keep record of the sins of others. Exercising *agape* allows for mistakes and forgives them—and requires separating the sin from the sinner and not condemning the one with the other.

According to one commentary, *agape* love “desires to think well of the [person] whom we love; [not to think] ill of his motives, opinions or conduct until we are compelled to do so by the most unbreakable evidence.” In other words, we assume the best in another person and we give that person the benefit of the doubt unless there is “unbreakable evidence” to do otherwise. Be careful not to think the worst by relying on your “instinct,” your perceptions, your ability to read body language, etc. Unless there is strong reason not to, we should take others at their word and assume the best.

God’s ministers operate according to this love. They are not out to catch God’s people in an evil deed. That is not how they think. So God’s people should feel comfortable around the ministry. The ministers should be like beloved family members.

Love “rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” (verse 6): It does not rejoice over the vices of others or feel smug when others sin. It doesn’t hope that others will hurt themselves. It doesn’t gloat over the wickedness of others, and it is never glad when others do wrong. Rather, *agape* love *rejoices in the virtues of others*. It is pleased when they do well.

Love “bears all things” (verse 7): It bears the private and personal faults of others and does not seek to avenge itself. The word *bear* also means to cover. *Agape* love keeps a *private* matter private. As Proverbs 11:13 says, “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful

spirit concealeth the matter.” It is inclined to hide or conceal the faults and imperfections of others and certainly does not gossip about sins or shortcomings! “And above all things have fervent charity [agape] among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). Love is willing to conceal or bear with the private offenses of others patiently. That is why we first go to our brother alone when an offense or grievance occurs (Matthew 18).

Love “believes all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7): This doesn’t mean love believes truth and error equally or that we don’t differentiate between right and wrong. This is referring to the *conduct* of others.

Agape love is willing to believe *the best* about someone’s actions—to consider the best possible interpretation of what happened. Have you ever interacted with someone who assumes the worst about a person’s actions and doesn’t even consider that they may have misinterpreted those words or deeds? This verse shows that thinking that way is not actuated by the love of God.

Furthermore, agape love gives room for people to change. It does not lose faith in the ability of a Spirit-begotten son of God to change!

Love “hopes all things” (verse 7). This too is in the context of other people’s actions. However sinister something may *appear*, agape love holds on to the possibility that we may have misunderstood the situation. There is a hope that the matter may be explained and made clear. Do not make assumptions and automatically jump to the worst possible conclusion.

In the context of Matthew 18, when a person goes to his brother in the right attitude to address an offense or

grievance, he should expect a positive outcome because agape love “hopes all things.”

Love “endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7): This means “to endure or sustain a load of miseries, adversities, persecutions or provocations in faith and patience” (*Key Word Study Bible*).

Agape love bears up under any adversity and does not complain. The *New King James Study Bible* says it “accepts any hardship or rejection and continues unabated to build up and encourage.” How well do we bear up under hardship?

Love “never fails” (verse 8): Agape love never fades out or becomes obsolete. It is as permanent as God because God is love—*agape* love (1 John 4:8, 16). Agape love is adaptable to any and every circumstance anywhere in the universe! It will never cease to exist and will continue to be exercised for all eternity.

THE ESSENCE OF THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS

In a Passover message years ago, Mr. Flurry said, “With this kind of love, we can’t help but solve the world’s problems.” Stop and meditate on that!

Understand this: The essence of the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy, faith and the very love of God—is all about relationships. It is about our relationship with God and God’s people first—and second, our relationship with our neighbors.

In *The Missing Dimension in Sex*, Herbert W. Armstrong stated that God’s law “governs and regulates all human relationships!” That is what it boils down to. In a *Good News* article, he wrote that God’s law

“outlines, in broad detail, our right relationship with the true God [and His Family]; and also man’s right relationship toward human neighbors” (July 1952).

In fact, our relationships with people say a lot about our relationship with God. “How do we show God that we love Him? It has a lot to do with human relations,” wrote Mr. Flurry in *The Last Hour*. “WE MUST LOVE CHRIST’S CHURCH—GOD’S FAMILY! THE WAY YOU LOVE THEM IS THE WAY YOU LOVE CHRIST AND THE FATHER. Words mean nothing if they are not followed by deeds—if you *say* you’re in the light, that must be reflected in your love for the brethren.”

Mr. Flurry continued: “If we don’t work out our problems with each other, we are not abiding in light! There is something *wrong* if we cannot get along! We must get to the *cause* to solve our human problems. If we love Christ, we will love each other. If we don’t love each other, WE DON’T LOVE CHRIST! ...

“A BATTLE is raging between God’s people and the devil—and we have to CONQUER! If you know God, you will conquer. If you don’t know God, you will be conquered. Families will fall apart. Problems will fester between people. John is talking about human relations in the Church!

“If we keep God’s law of love, we will SOLVE those problems.”

GOD’S ROYAL LAW OF LOVE

How do we solve problems when they arise? We need to administer God’s royal law of love. “But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” (James 2:9). The greatest

injustice we could commit in our judgments is to have respect for appearances. That is sin because it is based on selfishness.

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (verse 10). If you break one of the laws, you have broken them all. But notice why!

“For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law” (verse 11). Which law is James talking about? The royal, constitutional law of LOVE. Remember, the Ten Commandments are merely 10 POINTS of the constitutional law of love. And if you break the law in one of these points, you have SINNED AGAINST GOD’S CONSTITUTION and have become a transgressor of the law!

God’s constitution is a PERFECT, royal law! Although it does not codify every possible circumstance or infraction, the *spirit* of it does cover every possible circumstance, act or question. That is the law that we must learn to administer, and that is the law we are being judged by NOW!

“Speak, act, as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom; for the judgment will be merciless to the man who has shown no mercy—whereas the merciful life will triumph in the face of judgment” (verses 12-13; Moffatt).

God holds His people accountable for how they uphold His royal law of love. “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge” (James 4:11). God wants us to realize that *we* are the ones being judged. We are the

ones on trial to see if we are innocent or guilty according to His royal law of love. We need to show God that we can use His law to solve problems.

“There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” (verse 12). This verse is not saying that you cannot go to your brother to help him with a fault. God is saying that when you go to him, know that you are being examined! God is watching to see *your attitude* and how you *administer* the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy, faith, encompassed with God’s love.

“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). Love should underpin everything we do. Showing love toward others is *how* we fulfill the royal law. And as it says in Romans 5:5, “[H]ope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit] which is given unto us.” God’s love must be in us if we are to administer His law of love.

We must understand this because God’s ROYAL FAMILY will administer His ROYAL LAW in the soon-coming World Tomorrow—and GODLY LOVE WILL encompass every detail!

FULFILL THE LAW AND FEED THE WORLD!

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ,” Paul told the brethren in Galatia (Galatians 6:2). “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (verse 10).

How can we do good to all men as well as those within the Body of Christ? We do this by giving this world what

it needs most! By administering the spirit of the law of God, we feed this starving world.

“Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees” (Isaiah 66:10-12).

These verses reveal what Christ’s wife will be doing after His imminent return. Jerusalem has been one of the least peaceful cities on Earth, but peace will soon flow out of Jerusalem like a river. The message taught and distributed from Jerusalem by God’s royal Family will soon nourish the whole world just as a nursing child is nourished by his mother.

That is our future. As Paul indicated in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, we will be like a nursing mother who cherishes and feeds her little children. That is how much we need to love our fellow brethren and those of the world—like they are our own flesh and blood.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:13-14). When we do the job Christ has given us, we become His friends. As He said in verse 15, we are no longer servants, but actual friends of God.

God needs people who are skilled in administering His royal law of love. To fulfill such a calling properly, we need a heart after God’s own: one that fears God and keeps His commandments (Deuteronomy 5:29)—a heart that only God can give.

A HEART TO OBEY

Ancient Israel, under the Old Covenant, simply did not have the *heart* to obey. They didn't have the *heart* to be a part of the *administration of the Spirit*. For us to be a part of the administration of the Spirit today and in the future, we must be *given* a heart with the right spirit. We must be *given* a heart to obey.

In Hebrews 8, God clearly identifies the problem with the Old Covenant: *the people!* (verses 7-8). Most people believe that the problem with the Old Covenant was the law. *That is the opposite of what God's Word says!* In the same chapter of Hebrews, God says, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; *I will put my laws into their mind*, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (verse 10). Clearly, the New Covenant and the administration of the Spirit is based on the LAW OF GOD, which is the LOVE OF GOD! Just two chapters later, God *again* emphasizes, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, *I will put my laws into their hearts*, and in their minds will I write them" (Hebrews 10:16).

This is what the administration of the Spirit is all about! This is what God has wanted from the beginning: a people—a *family*—with a *heart* to obey. He wants a family that thinks like Him and that will *administer* His law and government the same way that HE does. John 4:24 says, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in *spirit* and in *truth*."

God has called a few people out of this world today to begin working with them and to teach them His ways. Those few are, actually, *now* in contact with an

innumerable company of angels, the true Church of the saints, God Himself and Jesus Christ, the *Mediator* of the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24).

But that is only the beginning! God is about to bring the *whole world* into His Family! We are being offered the opportunity to share His throne and to help in the administration of His government—a government of spirit and truth! God will give us the heart to keep His commands always if we sincerely go to Him and ask for it. He will give us the Spirit needed to understand and to love and to apply His *administration of the Spirit*.