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The Riddle of Government

We can't live without it, and we can't live with it. Why is governing ourselves always a lose-lose quandary?

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Who should rule? This has been the question of the year, and not just for the bicycle-helmeted, bloodied street protester in Hong Kong. It is the question raging among Algerians, Argentines, Bolivians, Chileans, Czechs, Ecuadorans, Egyptians, Georgians, Hondurans, Iranians, Iraqis, Lebanese, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, Sudanese and others. Even Americans, French, Germans and Russians are challenging their own leaders and foundational institutions.

The modern world thought it had that question mostly answered. We did not realize that this is actually one of the most intractable quandaries of human existence.

And it is boiling over, all at once, across the globe. People are conspiring to overthrow elected leaders. People are smashing government offices. People are getting killed. They are trying not only to throw out governing individuals and groups, but to dismantle entire institutions of government.

The *Washington Post* described it as "a global explosion of people power" and wrote, "this year is exceptional for the sheer breadth and diversity of the unrest" (Oct. 27, 2019).

Let's take a whirlwind trip: In Hong Kong, massive protests have been occurring since June, with people demanding greater autonomy, democracy and freedoms. In Lebanon, people are protesting a government that is subjecting them to cutbacks and austerity measures even while corrupt officials are rewarded for perpetuating the regime. In Iraq, masses are protesting government corruption that impoverishes many, and public services and infrastructure that are falling into ruin while leaders bicker and squander the nation's oil wealth. In India, protests have raged countrywide over an immigration law; some are angry it discriminates against Muslims, others fear it incentivizes illegal immigration. In Spain, the Catalan separatist movement turned violent over the imprisonment of separatist leaders, and new activist leaders called for civil disobedience against the democratically elected government. In Ecuador, the government ended fuel subsidies, sparking protests that killed eight people and injured 1,340 before the government reinstated the subsidies. In Chile, protests over an increase in subway fares and economic inequalities swelled to an estimated 1.2 million Chileans filling the capital of Santiago, some of whom burned dozens of subway stations and clashed with police.

The nations we consider to be more developed are not immune. In America, Britain and Israel, the unrest is roiling within our government buildings. Examples: Britain's somewhat recently established Supreme Court handled the Brexit issue by establishing itself as superior to the government and even the Queen. American Democrats are trying to abolish a crucial constitutional safeguard, the electoral college, or to abolish the entire document. All three countries face battles between popularly elected leaders and establishment officials trying to thwart their agenda and even remove them from office. Voters are returning to the polls over and over as governments succumb to scandal, face votes of no confidence, and call snap elections. Politicians everywhere are resorting to extreme measures, political "nuclear options," destroying long-standing traditions, rules, institutions and constitutional provisions for short-term political gain.

These are not normal times. Governments are being investigated and exposed, protested and challenged, opposed and attacked, overturned and smashed. Populations are rising up not only against dictatorships but even against elected officials

in free countries. "[T]he demonstrations are fueled by local grievances," Associated Press wrote on October 26, "but reflect worldwide frustration at growing inequality, corrupt elites and broken promises. [These] latest demonstrations are rattling elected governments. The unrest on three continents, coupled with the toxic dysfunction in Washington and London, raises fresh concerns over *whether the liberal international order, with free elections and free markets, can still deliver on its promises"* (emphasis added throughout). Even the precept that people should rule themselves through representatives is being seriously questioned, even discarded.

How is it that our developed, sophisticated, technological, 21st-century world still does not have the answer to the question, *who should rule?*

Should it be the one, the few or the many? How much power should they have over the lives of the people? How much command should the people have over their own lives? Should the rulers be accountable to the ruled? Is the state more important than the individual, or the individual than the state?

The Origin of Civilization

The key to understanding these riddles lies in an unlikely place. "To understand the world you live in, you must go back to the beginning," *Trumpet* editor in chief Gerald Flurry wrote last month ("The Mystery of Civilization"*theTrumpet.com/21560*). "You can find that in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Holy Bible."

Genesis is a record of the literal beginning of human civilization within the first human marriage. God offered Adam and Eve a choice between two ways of life, symbolized by two trees. The tree of life represented the way of God's revelation and law. "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represented mankind taking to himself the ability to produce knowledge of what is good and evil, what is right and wrong," Mr. Flurry wrote. "God told them plainly that this was the way that would lead to death! It represented the cause of all the unhappiness, suffering, contention, violence and death in our world! Nevertheless, Adam and Eve both took of that tree. Sure enough, soon their lives were plagued with violence and death.

"That act was the foundation of the world as we know it today! That is where our civilization started: with that seminal act of rebellion against God." Yes, what many people consider the "story" of Adam and Eve *is the literal genesis of modern civilization.*

Obviously God had wanted Adam and Eve to choose the tree of life—yet Genesis 3:24 records the stunning truth that in response to their rebellion, *He barred their access to it.* Why? The answer to that mystery is deeply illuminating, and is vividly explained in Herbert W. Armstrong's book *Mystery of the Ages* (which we will gladly give you upon request). Nevertheless the reality is clear: God gave humans free choice, and they made their choice—to reject Him and rely on themselves. And they and all humanity would have to live with the consequences.

By banishing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and from access to the tree of life, "God said, in effect, YOU have made the decision for yourself and the world that shall spring from you,'" Mr. Armstrong wrote in *Mystery of the Ages*: "'[Y]ou have rebelled against my command and my government—you have chosen the "GETTING," "TAKING" way of Satan. … Go, therefore, Adam, and all your progeny that shall form the world, produce your own fund of knowledge. … Produce your own educational systems and means of disseminating knowledge, as your god Satan shall mislead you. Form … your own religions, YOUR OWN GOVERNMENTS, your own … forms of society and civilization.'"

Adam and Eve refused God's revelation regarding right and wrong, good and evil, instead believing Satan's lie that we could determine these absolutes through observation, experimentation and reason. For 6,000 years since, mankind has pursued the same course, wrestling with the resulting tangle of disputes and conundrums involved in forming our own societies, our own civilizations, our own *governments.* We have done it without God's help because *we didn't want God's help.* In generation after generation, to this very day, people fight and even *die* for however *they* think they should be ruled—rather than submit to God's rule.

In the Garden, man chose the tree representing a mixture of good and evil knowledge that leads to death. That tree perfectly typifies our history in puzzling over the government riddle: It has been an epic story of greatness and corruption, a combination that inevitably leads—sometimes slowly, other times with the speed of an assassin's bullet—to ruin.

The Age-Old Argument

When you read history, you find questions surrounding government at the heart of the story all the way through. You read of the rise and fall of rulers, kings, kingdoms, empires. You read of brilliant men searching desperately for principles on how to make society function successfully.

In the 400s B.C., the historian Herodotus depicted a group of Persians discussing relative merits of democracy, oligarchy and monarchy.

A first man says, "To me, it seems advisable that we should no longer have a single man to rule over us." How can monarchy be good, "when it allows a man to do as he likes without being answerable? [G]ive a person this power, and straightway his manifold good things puff him up with pride, while envy is so natural to humankind that it cannot but arise in

him … both of them leading on to deeds of savage violence." He goes on to describe the problems with kings, adding, "[T]he worst of all is, that he sets aside the laws of the land, puts men to death without trial, and subjects women to violence." The solution, he says, is "the rule of the many." "I vote, therefore, that we do away with monarchy, and raise the people to power."

The second man agrees that the vices of monarchy mean it should be put down, but he says giving power to the people is a bad idea. "For there is nothing so void of understanding, nothing so full of wantonness, as the unwieldy rabble. [T]he tyrant, in all his doings, at least knows what he is about, but a mob is altogether devoid of knowledge …. It rushes wildly into state affairs with all the fury of a stream swollen in the winter, and confuses everything. Let the enemies of the Persians be ruled by democracies; but let us choose out from the citizens a certain number of the worthiest, and put the government into their hands." He therefore advocates oligarchy, the rule of a few.

The third man agrees that elevating the best men is the best way to govern. But, he says, "[w]hat government can possibly be better than that of the very best man in the whole state? [I]n oligarchies … fierce enmities are apt to arise between man and man, each wishing to be leader, and to carry his own measures; whence violent quarrels come, which lead to open strife, often ending in bloodshed. Then monarchy is sure to follow; and this too shows how far that rule surpasses all others." He laments how, in a democracy, groups form to advocate policies that hurt other people. This factionalism worsens until someone stands up to stop it! "Straightway the author of so great a service is admired by all, and from being admired soon comes to be appointed king; so that here too it is plain that monarchy is the best government."

Such are the arguments that have been circling round and round for 6,000 years. These arguments have brought to birth countless versions of each of these types of government in infinite varieties. As each experiment has encountered trouble, man has continued to search and argue and postulate and tinker.

Yet despite incessant failure, these efforts have endured. Somehow mankind cherishes the hope that, if he can implement the right system, or oust the current regime, or install the right leader, or pass the right regulation or ordinance or law, then all will be well. Yet time after time throughout history, these hopes have been forgotten, tarnished, buffeted or crushed.

The Need for Government

Mankind generally recognizes that, however often our efforts fail,*we do need government.*

People want the benefits of coming together to converse and trade and otherwise interact. But this combining of human beings into a society brings with it a growing need for proper government. *Who should rule?* and related questions become more pressing. Authority is required to resolve disputes, enforce laws, deter and punish criminals, provide protection from threats, and so on. The alternative is anarchy, in which the person in charge is whoever has a weapon, and the law of the land is whatever he decides at the moment.

In their marvelous survey of man's past *The Lessons of History,* Will and Ariel Durant say that "only a fool would dispute over forms of government. History has a good word to say for all of them, and for government in general. Since men love freedom, and the freedoms of individuals in society requires some regulation of conduct, the first condition of freedom is its limitation; make it absolute, and it dies in chaos."

As Charles Krauthammer wrote in *Things That Matter,* government "is the moat, the walls, beyond which lie the barbarians. Fail to keep them at bay, and everything burns."

Beyond that basic need, however, the quality of a government has far-reaching effects on the quality of life for the governed. This is true within a family, a clan, a classroom, a courtroom, a company, a county, a country. Imperfect government is generally better than no government—but bad government can be a horror, good government a magnificent blessing.

The bitter reality is that *mankind has devised all his governments under the influence of the devil rather than with the direction of God.* That influence expresses itself in HUMAN NATURE, the toxin that corrupts even the noblest of governors and governments. For millennia, kings and princes and emperors and caesars and sultans and czars and kaisers have paraded and strutted around, abusing their power; populations have suffered under corruption and deceit and fraud and nepotism and greed and wickedness and injustice. Mankind has witnessed dictatorship, despotism, tyranny, oppression, persecution, genocide, unrest, uprising, coup, assassination, mutiny, revolt, rebellion, revolution, government after government, generation after generation.

Human nature is the fundamental reason mankind has proven himself unable to devise a system that maintains enduring justice, prosperity and peace. This is the recurrent and predominant lesson that resounds like the cyclical gong of a clock on every continent and nation, through every age and era.

Untold human effort has been expended on devising the right system to ensure good governance. But the fundamental flaw is not the system; it is the contaminating presence of *human nature*—and that, Scripture reveals, is an expression of man's influence by Satan the devil.

Autocracy

Of all the forms of government men have tried, the most common has been monarchy. “Monarchy seems to be the most natural kind of government, since it applies to the group, the authority of the father in a family or of the chieftain in a warrior band,” write the Durants. “If we were to judge forms of government from their prevalence and duration in history we should have to give the palm to monarchy; democracies, by contrast, have been hectic interludes.”

However, when authority is concentrated in the hands of one man, the fate of the nation tends to follow the quality of that leader, for good or ill. Under a decent king, a people can thrive and prosper. Singularity of command enables the ruler to act swiftly and decisively for their benefit, unencumbered by bureaucratic constraints or the politics of committee. History has many examples of such competent rulers.

Yet when one individual possesses such vast power, a bad king is a disaster. He can be unconcerned about his people, viciously self-serving. His perverse example can encourage the spread of vice and can lead others into terrible wickedness. In many cases, the intoxicating effect of power has transformed otherwise impotent men into tyrants. Every country with a history of absolute rule has experienced its being savagely abused.

Among the worst autocrats in history have been those motivated by erroneous ideology, who believe they bear the sacred secrets, the blueprints to utopia, for which any action is justified. These include the religiously driven Holy Roman emperors, who slew millions with the sword they purportedly wielded on God’s behalf. Adolf Hitler sought to found a thousand-year, racially pure paradise—and his perverse vision drove him to unspeakable evil. Then there are atheistic dictators, unaccountable to any higher power. Joseph Stalin, for example, was so convinced of the secular holiness of communism that he murdered somewhere between 20 million and 60 million people to enforce it.

This planet is soaked with the blood of millions accused of somehow hindering these leaders’ glorious visions. As U.S. President John Adams said, “Power always thinks it has a great soul and vast views beyond the comprehension of the weak and that it is doing God’s service when it is violating all His laws.”

These examples also show how power often combines with overconfidence—and not just in autocracies. Leaders believe themselves expertly and uniquely qualified to regulate, dictate and control virtually every detail in others’ lives. This is amply evident in the technocracy of the European Union and in the imperious impulses of America’s political left.

One-man rule has the additional problem of succession. Sooner or later, that one man dies. If succession automatically passes to his next of kin, at some point it almost inevitably ends up in the hands of someone unqualified, whether through youth, weakness, wickedness or incompetence. At other times, there is no clear successor. Thus, all long-term systems of autocratic rule also have histories of civil war. In the Roman Empire, especially, they never solved the succession puzzle; the result was nearly a century (the third century B.C.) of unrelenting warfare as one leader after the next tried to seize power, weakening the state and inviting outside attack.

The solution, some say, is democracy. Yet the record here is also troubling.

Democracy

Democracy has a short, spotty history. Prior to modern times, only two significant states (which left much record) came close: the Greek city states, and the Roman Republic. Yet neither was a democracy by modern standards. In Greece, only a handful of citizens could vote. Rome also disenfranchised many; the votes of the poor were worth less than those of the rich, and high birth carried enormous privilege. (Even in early America, only 10 to 20 percent of the adult population were eligible to vote.)

Nevertheless, the lesson is clear: In both Greece and Rome, the democracies were spectacular failures.

In the Greek civil wars between Athens and Sparta, the Athenians’ democracy made an utter muddle of its war efforts. Top military leaders were continually put on trial by their own people. Some fled or defected to avoid punishment. It was a war run incompetently by a committee of hundreds, ending in defeat by the authoritarian Spartans.

And this was hardly Athenian democracy’s only failure. It ultimately turned society into “a chaos of class violence, cultural decadence and moral degeneration,” the Durants write. It was “corroded with slavery, venality [bribery and corruption], and war. [D]emocracy is the most difficult of all forms of government, since it requires the widest spread of intelligence.”

The Roman Republic succeeded where Athenian democracy failed: in the crucible of war. But in 133 B.C., it began to fall apart. Infighting among politicians resulted in the deaths of several prominent leaders. The republic descended into civil violence. Assassinations became common, then rebellions and uprisings. Around 60 B.C., Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (better known as Pompey), Marcus Licinius Crassus and Julius Caesar formed a private agreement to control the political process. This, according to Mary Beard, “for the first time effectively took public decisions into private hands. Through a series of behind-the-scenes arrangements, bribes and threats, they ensured that consulships and military commands went where they chose and that key decisions went their way” (*SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*). The three men famously fell out, and civil war erupted. This time, the conflict would determine who would effectively become Rome’s first emperor: Caesar or Pompey. Democracy was already dead.

Modern Democracies

The founders of America did a remarkable thing: They pondered all history's examples and sought to devise a government that would avoid the traps and troubles that have shipwrecked nations and empires. Most presciently, because of their education in the Bible they recognized that the real enemy of good governance and national longevity is human nature. Thus they sought above all to constrain this evil. They created a government with very limited powers, one that would afford the people an unmatched level of individual freedom and responsibility. They devised a system that harnessed the strength of a monarchy (in the president), elements of oligarchy (with state and national legislatures made up of representatives), and limited elements of democracy.

America's founders were cautious in applying democratic elements. Only certain leaders were chosen by vote, at certain intervals. The extreme tendencies of the masses were filtered through an electoral college. Voting was restricted to men who were considered responsible and able to rightly exercise that power. Yet still, by historical standards it was a remarkably universal democracy. This form of government has safeguarded unparalleled freedom and has released an outpouring of productivity and creativity. The founding principle of freedom was applied to trade as well, and the free market has helped to lift more people out of poverty than any other single force in history. This democratic experiment has proved especially long-lived and successful.

And yet, as inventive as the founders were in working to bridle human nature, human nature has proved itself far more inventive. The separation of powers, the checks and balances they established to limit the problems caused by a bad king—though they made America remarkably resilient despite some bad leaders—are increasingly being wielded as weapons for nakedly political purposes. Right now a shocking level of entrenched corruption within governing bodies is being exposed, and the government is at absolute war within itself.

Beyond that, ultimately, democracy is subject to the same peril that monarchy is: An incompetent ruler can make life unlivable. In a democracy, the "ruler" is the people. The more wicked the people become, the more rapidly governmental and social stability turns to dust. And the more democratic a government, the more volatile.

As Herodotus said, "The mob is altogether devoid of knowledge." Winston Churchill admitted that "the best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter." People can be very foolish. They can vote for politicians who promise benefits at the expense of the national good. Besides racking up massive debts, this can mean neglecting areas of spending that don't give immediate returns, like defense. This weakness almost saw democracy wiped out in World War II. The dictatorships of Hitler and Stalin attacked the surrounding democracies without warning. Too many had not properly prepared for the fight, and even those who were well armed lacked the stomach for one. After declaring war on Germany in 1939, France and Britain merely waited meekly for the Nazi juggernaut to turn on them.

Enjoying broad freedom also gives human nature more room to stretch out. Far too often people descend into excesses and evils. America's founders knew that preserving freedom depended on the religion and morality of the people (see "A Republic, If You Can Keep It," page 16). Today's Americans have largely dismantled these pillars of society. We broadly celebrate perversions and sins that were barely imagined in previous generations.

Democracy may in fact be, as Churchill said, "the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." his is supposedly the peak of human achievement in government, and it is a wreck! Few look at the political muddle in Washington today and see a system worth emulating. Many nations are surrendering freedom in favor of a stronger single leader—a 21st-century king. Even more and more Americans are being seduced by European-style socialism or populism, and want to change or trash the Constitution. Democratic presidential candidates in particular are calling for some of the most egregious power grabs by a government imaginable.

For 6,000 years man has been writing these lessons in government, mostly through suffering and oppression—and by showing WHAT DOES NOT WORK.

The Solution to the Riddle

Some years ago, *Trumpet* editor in chief Gerald Flurry wrote a booklet titled *God's Family Government*. This is how that booklet begins: "In man's entire history, we have not found one government that will truly serve the people. This whole world is in a crisis, and the major problem is government."

This lesson is screaming at us—through the pages of history and across the nations today, where millions of people are crying out for changes in government. Yet how exceedingly *few* recognize the real cause of the problems and the real solution. Man is blind! No matter how bad conditions get, he will not turn to God.

But the Bible is clear that this era that flowed from Adam's decision will last only 6,000 years. God said, in effect, to Adam, "After the world of your descendants has written the lesson in 6,000 years of human suffering, anguish, frustration, defeat and death," Mr. Armstrong wrote, "I will supernaturally intervene. By supernatural divine power I shall then take over the government of the whole world."

That is the real solution—the ONLY solution to the government riddle. GOD HIMSELF will intervene and TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD!

In the first century, just months after Jesus Christ had been crucified, the Apostle Peter told a crowd gathered at the temple in Jerusalem, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall

come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).

All the prophets have spoken of this since the world began. "God's prophets have known from the beginning that something was dangerously and fundamentally wrong on this Earth," Mr. Flurry writes. "Throughout most of recorded history, these prophets have warned this world it was going in the wrong direction. But if we go back far enough, we see that the Earth was full of joy, peace and abundance. Then disaster struck! We must receive 'the restitution of all things' to solve mankind's problems. … [T]his world is upside-down and must be put right-side up. What does this involve? A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT!" (op cit).

The King of Kings

Revelation 11:15 records this extraordinary prophecy: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD ARE BECOME THE KINGDOMS OF OUR LORD, AND OF HIS CHRIST; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

When Jesus Christ returns, the governments of this world will be replaced by the government of God! The Communist Party of China under paramount leader Xi Jinping, the Islamist clerical regime of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Iran, the reigns of Kim Jong-un in North Korea, of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, of Vladimir Putin in Russia, of Bashar Assad in Syria, of the people of Britain and the United States will become "the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ"!

"And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because *thou hast taken to thee thy great power,* and hast REIGNED" (verses 16-17).

God will strip man of all the power he has assumed and reign in his stead. He will show the TRUE ANSWERS to all the questions of government. He will stop the abuses, correct the injustices, and show man what good government looks like!

Occasionally you see a dictator of this world removed from power and humbled. It is sobering to see the fate of a Saddam Hussein, a Muammar Qadhafi, a Robert Mugabe. This will be happening with ALL "the kingdoms of this world"—except that God still has a plan to reach those disgraced dictators and discredited leaders.

Who should rule? The reason we haven't found the answer to this crucial question, even after millennia of trying, is that *only God should rule.* Human beings simply never have had the capacity to rule other human beings properly. That is the reason for the quandary, and that is the answer—the only answer.

When Christ returns, when Satan is removed, when eyes are opened, people will begin to grasp the most important lessons of these past 6,000 years. Here is what Jeremiah prophesied about this time: "O Lord, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, *Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit"* (Jeremiah 16:19). People the world over will realize that they have been taught lies. They have trusted men and put their faith in schemes and charlatans. They will be ready for a change. They will recognize fully just how much we need the government of God.

"Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods? Therefore, behold, I will this once cause them to know, *I will cause them to know mine hand and my might;* and THEY SHALL KNOW THAT MY NAME IS THE LORD" (verses 20-21). People will finally come to know the true God! He is going to show Himself and bring them under His rule.

Proverbs 29:2 states, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn." When the righteous King of kings rules, He will turn a lot of mourning into rejoicing! Human nature will be eradicated. Questions of succession will be moot. God will govern with perfect love, judgment and justice—forever! You can read more about the kind of government God will establish in "A Form of Government That Works!" (page 26).

This whole world coming under God's government will be a beautiful revolution. God truly does have the blueprint for utopia. And that time is almost here—the transition from the failed governments of men to the perfect government of God!

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