

## God's COUNSELS of Grace and His WAYS of Government.

It is extremely important for all men to understand that *the ways of God in government*, and *His counsels of grace* are two things that are entirely distinct.

**God's counsels** and the way they are to be fulfilled as to us exist from all eternity: they have been realized in Christ, the perfect Man whom God has exalted to His right hand, giving us the same blessings. *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him."* (**Col 2:10**) The counsels of God are therefore realized by pure grace. This grace is unchangeable, unvarying, and secure forever for those who by grace have been saved through faith in Christ Jesus.

**God's government** is in contrast to His counsels. This government is associated with man's responsibility and exists from the beginning of man's history here on earth. It was first manifested in Eden where man, innocent but responsible, disobeyed and was driven from the garden and made subject to death. From that moment on, God's government continues to function toward man who is responsible to conduct himself in this world in a way conformable to the righteousness, holiness, and goodness of his Creator who rewards the good and punishes the wicked. *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."* (**Gal. 6:7**) and *"Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner."* (**Prov. 11:31**)

But He makes His sun to shine on the just and on the unjust, for He is a God of goodness who, rather than desiring the death of the sinner, leads him to repentance by His longsuffering and patience. Nonetheless it is true that men's wicked actions bring their own consequences and often for their children to the third or fourth generation. They may feel God's government on earth but the final word of God's judgment for the lost will be pronounced at the last judgment. *"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."* (**Exodus 34:7**)

As for the elect, we must remember that by virtue of the fall and of the sin thenceforth inherent in their nature, not one—not a single one—is righteous until he is in Christ. Then God, through faith, and by the Spirit, communicates a new nature, a heart capable of owning, honoring and serving Him. They are the objects of grace and through faith in Christ become the objects of God's favor.

This great fact answers to the counsels of God who from all eternity has sought to find His good pleasure in men through Christ. To obtain this result it was needful to conquer Satan who had begotten and summoned forth sin, abolish sin itself, and annul all its consequences. This is the result of Christ's work at the cross.

But the new nature the Christian possesses in no wise dissolves man's responsibility. He must, through the Holy Spirit, maintain the position of relationship with God and with Christ in which grace has placed him. Though still having the flesh, the old man, in him, he is responsible to conduct himself before God according to the new nature, not according to the old. The Holy Spirit, the power of new life, makes him capable of this. (**Rom. 6:6-12; 2Cor. 4:10; Col. 3:5-7**)

That is the reason for God's government toward His elect, His children. If they do good, they are the objects of God's favor here upon earth; if they do evil, of His judgment, and this judgment is all the more prompt and direct in that they are part of a redeemed people. *"Judgment must begin at the house of God."* (**1Pet. 4:17**)

This judgment, which can touch them only on earth, can have no other goal than their final restoration. As for the Church, viewed as the body of Christ she is never judged; but the Church viewed as the house of God can definitely be judged. (**2Tim2:20, 21; 4:1**)

There is only one case where judgment is definite and without mercy and that is after warning, namely where the world, the sinful man whether religious or not, sets himself against all the appeals of grace. (**Prov. 29:1; Ecc. 9:12**)

Besides the ways of God towards the redeemed, towards His house, and towards men, there is His more general government. God is interested in everything that harmonizes with the precepts of His righteousness and holiness. The man who honors his father and mother, (**Eph. 6:1**) or that young man in the Gospel, amiable although unconverted, prospers on earth. (**Mark 10:17-22**)

The upright man who does not wrong his neighbor reaps earthly advantages, for God's government operates upon earth although its seat is in heaven. In a future eternity in the new heavens and the new earth there will be no more throne, and no more government for righteous will dwell. (**2Pet.3:13**)