

Government Shutdown

I am sure that all of you have been following the government shutdown that has come out of the impasse between Republicans and Democrats in Washington. Unfortunately, this isn't anything new because it is actually the 21st time in U. S. history that the federal government has experienced a budgetary shut-down.¹ President Donald Trump wants his \$5 billion border wall, while the new House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, refuses to approve any such thing.² The problem is that the longer this goes on the worse it is for the country. Nothing gets accomplished. Vital needs are left unaddressed. And our political leaders seem to be left just treading water in the Washington swamp. It's a very sorry state of affairs regardless which political party you happen to blame—because governments, like people, can't tread water forever.

And, when you think about it, our lives are a lot like the government. We are governed by our hearts. And our hearts are a purely democratic government with votes taken on every action and decision that we make. But, unlike most democracies, the one governing your heart doesn't need a host of election machines to tally the votes. Rather, the vote count is fairly easy because only one vote is cast, and that vote is cast by you. You are solely responsible for how the government of your heart is run. No one else can be blamed when things are governed poorly. Although many people ignore the laws and statutes by which we are governed, the truth is that we are all bound by those decrees that have been set by God. And for all of us, that's a crucial problem because we naturally oppose His laws—and so often rebel against Him by casting our votes against His commandments. When we do that, it is called "sin." You don't need a course in political science or theology to know this. In fact, the Apostle Paul pointed out this human tendency many years ago when he wrote: ⁷ "For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. ⁸ That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God." Romans 8:7-8 (NLT2)

So, if someone is a Christian, if they are true followers of Jesus Christ, then the "**government of their hearts**" is a safe one. In other words, we know something about the "**spiritual party**" to which they belong. Are they Republicans or are they Democrats?—or some other party, for that matter? No, they are not defined by any political party. Rather, they are members of a very special party that John tells us about in one of his letters. John wrote: "Since we know that Christ is righteous, we also know that all who do what is right are God's children." ¹ John 2:29 (NLT2) So that's the party to which we belong!—We are the "**party of God's children**"—for all of those who live their lives according to God's Word are members of that holy party. And, what a great comfort that is for all of us.

But, what happens when we don't do what is right all of the time? Are we kicked out of God's party? Are we no longer considered "*children of God*"? Quite, honestly, the answer to that **depends**. Despite this, I know that there are some who would tell you that once you are a member of God's party, so to speak, that you are party member forever. They would tell you that, unlike Republicans and Democrats who might change from one party to another, that you can never lose your status as a member of God's party. They contend that once you call yourself a Christian—that's the party in which you are permanently entitled to a lifetime, eternal membership. "*Once saved, always saved*"—they will tell you. But, the reality is that God's Word does not teach that. Now, I am well aware of the fact that some Christians would gasp to hear me say that. But, they need to not only hear it, but believe it. It is better to be freed by the reality of God's Word than to be imprisoned by a wishful, yet false, theology.

Now, I asked you what happens when Christians don't do what is right ***all of the time***—when we seem to sin, in one way or the other, each and every day. And, I answered that by saying that "***it depends***." Depends on what? On not ever sinning again? Well, I can tell you that if that is the standard, then—come Judgment Day—all of us are in for a very warm time in eternity. If you don't believe in climate change now, you will believe in it then—because things are going to be a lot hotter for all of us if we are condemned to Satan's party based solely upon the fact that we may sometimes sin even after accepting Jesus as our Savior. The reality is that Christians, all of us, do sin even after committing our lives to Christ. If you don't believe me, then listen to these words from Paul. Paul admits: ¹⁸ "And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't.

¹⁹ I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway." Romans 7:18-19 (NLT2)

If Paul admits that, then certainly we'd have to admit it as well. In fact, I need those words on a little plaque on my desk at work; I need it splattered across the dashboard of my car—and, have it as a screen-saver on my laptop. But, even though we all sin, even on a daily basis, does that give us an excuse to go right on sinning? It is amazing to me, but some people seem to think so! They call themselves Christians, yet you see no difference in the way that they live their lives after they supposedly have accepted Christ, than those who would be a part of ***Satan's party***. Their response to their on-going pattern of sin, is to simply shrug their shoulders and casually say, "***Oh—no worry. God loves me. He will always forgive me.***"

God does love you and He is certainly forgiving. He will forgive us when we stumble ***if***—but ***only if***—we truly wish for sin's power over us to be broken. But, no one can claim to be freed of sin's

power if they continue to cling to a consistent pattern of sin in their lives. Those who are content to continue in their own preferred pattern of sin are like a government that willingly stays shutdown.

And, for those who **plan** to just keep right on sinning—and rely, again and again, upon God’s forgiveness—they will remain spiritually shutdown. They are in for a big surprise and will find that their plan is gravely ill-conceived. Jesus used the metaphor of a house built upon a foundation of shifting sand to describe such people when He said: “The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, the wind blew hard against that house, and it fell. And what a terrible fall that was!” Matthew 7:27 (Today’s English Version) And, Paul addresses this when he says: ¹ “Well then, shall we keep on sinning so that God can keep on showing us more and more kindness and forgiveness?” ² Of course not! Should we keep on sinning when we don’t have to? ³ For sin’s power over us was broken when we became Christians and were baptized to become a part of Jesus Christ; through His death the power of your sinful nature was shattered. ⁴ Your old sin-loving nature was buried with Him by baptism when He died; and when God the Father, with glorious power, brought Him back to life again, you were given His wonderful new life to enjoy.”

Romans 6:1-4 (The Living Bible)

Do you know what the problem is for those who delude themselves into thinking that they can always continue in their pattern of sin? The problem is this: They show an amazing lack of love. More specifically, they lack any true love for God—for they cannot possibly love Him and consistently fail to obey His commandments. After all, didn’t Jesus say, “If you love me, obey my commandments”? John 14:15 (New Living Translation, 2nd Ed.) It may sound harsh to say that such people lack any love for God, but putting it that way is actually quite a bit tamer than what the Bible has to say. This is what God’s own Word has to say about such people: ⁴ “For it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened—those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come— ⁶ and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance; by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame.” Hebrews 6:4-6 (NLT 2nd Ed.) So what does this mean? It means that so-called Christians who deliberately continue to sin, and plan to keep right on doing so, are the ones who sneer at Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. By their continuing sins, they willingly nail Jesus there time after time after time, pounding the nails with a hammer that is engraved with their favorite slogan: ***“I know that you’ll forgive to me, even if I chose sin over You!”*** Of course, they are wielding hammers of lies. That is what those words from Hebrew 6 mean.

Now, on the flip-side, let's consider what those words do **not** mean is this. It does **not** mean that if you find yourself in such a condition that it is too late. It is never too late to repent. It is never too late to **truly** come back to God. It is never too late to change your voting policy. If you will do exactly that, what a dramatic difference it will make in your life.

What then is this difference when we **truly** come to Christ? Paul gives the answer: "For I endorse and delight in the Law of God in my inmost self with my new nature." Romans 7:22 (Amplified Bible) Although we may stumble in sin even after coming to Jesus, the difference is that we sincerely regret our stumbling and we, as Paul says, "**delight in the Law of God.**" And when we delight in the Law of God, we want to immediately rectify our behavior and avoid doing that sin again. We sincerely want to be a member of the ***party of God*** because we want to do what is pleasing in His eyes. And so, we do our best to consistently practice what is right according to the Bible, God's Holy Word—it becomes our **standard operating manual**. Sin becomes something that we vigilantly try to resist. And although we won't live perfect lives, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can start to live more and more consistently for Christ—and so, begin to take on His image, rather than the distorted image of the world around us.

The problem is that so many people try to turn that kind of Christ-centered personal government on its head. Following God's decrees becomes a mere secondary goal and the primary default position ends up being the pursuit of sin. If you happen to find yourself in that position, you **do** need to ***change your voting policy***—i.e., the way you cast those ***votes*** in the ***government of your heart***. Paul spoke along these lines when he turned to Timothy to make sure his voting policy remained sound. And so, he said: ¹¹ "But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness." 1 Timothy 6:11 (NLT2) Do you know why Paul felt so compelled to write these words to Timothy? It was because Timothy was serving in the Church of Ephesus³—in what now is modern day Turkey, and the world all around him was so very sinful world. Paul knew that the platform of God's party is so counter-cultural—reflecting vastly different values and practices than the society in which Timothy found himself. God's party is in the world, but not of the world. Paul's message to Timothy was to encourage him to stay the course, and not give in to the world. Those words are meant for us today for the very same reason.⁴

So, what is your ***governmental policy***? It doesn't matter if you are a Republican, a Democrat or whatever your political persuasion may be, for those who are set on continuing a life of rebellion, at the end of their days, their ***government will collapse***. Though they may have lived their lives under the delusion that they are their own masters, they will find out, too late I am afraid, that they will be the

host of their true master for the rest of eternity—for their true master is Satan and his kingdom is a place called Hell.

But, the Good News is that even those whose lives may presently be in a **government shut-down**, they still have a chance. They may be just as stuck in moving forward with their lives as our U. S. government is right now, but they are at least struggling as to which way to go. And it is that struggle that makes them eligible to be part of God’s party—to be His children ***IF*** they truly want to be freed from their pattern of sinning and repent. And we, along with them, can take hope in God’s Word that assures us God “will not reject a broken and repentant heart”⁵. . . for “We know that God’s children do not make a practice of sinning, for God’s Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot touch them.”

¹ John 5:18 (NLT2)

As we enter the perils of a New Year, we need to offer a prayer for our government leaders—all those little “kings” who reign in Washington. Consider this prayer of the Psalmist: ¹ “Teach the king to judge with your righteousness, O God; share with him your own justice, ² so that he will rule over your people with justice and govern the oppressed with righteousness. ³ May the land enjoy prosperity; may it experience righteousness. ⁴ May the king judge the poor fairly; may he help the needy and defeat their oppressors. ⁵ May your people worship you as long as the sun shines, as long as the moon gives light, for ages to come.” Psalm 72:1-5 (Today’s English Version) We need to pray this prayer for our country’s leaders; then pray the same prayer for the **“government of our hearts”** as well—so that in 2019, we will be sure to avert a government shut-down—the kind that makes our spiritual lives look like a Washington swamp.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
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¹ Tara Golshan, “Congress didn’t even pretend to try to reopen the government,” <https://www.vox.com>, Dec. 28, 2018.

² Michal Kranz and Mariana Alfaro, “The longest government shutdown lasted 3 weeks in 1995-96 — here’s what happened then, and how it compares to today,” [businessinsider.com](https://www.businessinsider.com), Dec. 26, 2018.

³ 1 Timothy 1:3

⁴ New Living Translation Study Bible, p. 2211.

⁵ Psalm 51:17 (NLT2) The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.