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“THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD”

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.” 1 Peter 5:6.

The hand is one of the most remarkable members of our body. Its capacity ranges from actions requiring the most highly trained skill imaginable down to the most menial of tasks, from the carrying through of delicate operations upon the human body, and the performance of scientific experiments, to the playing of musical instruments in a way that exhibits brilliance in the use of both fingers and hands. Hence the hand is often used as a symbol of power or ability to perform. To show one's hand has come to mean the manifestation of a person's skill or power in a certain way. The hand is also used in the Scriptures as a symbol of power to perform in many ways.

In harmony with this, we read of God's hand being active in the works of creation. Isa. 45:12 says, – “I have made the earth and created man upon it. I, even my hands have stretched out the heavens and all their host have I commanded.” The whole creation is His care; Jehovah our God is the great Emperor of the whole universe, and His wisdom, power, goodness and benevolence are abundantly equal to all the responsibilities of so exalted an office. The human mind staggers in its efforts to comprehend the mental resources of a Being who is able to assume and to bear such responsibility.

Think for a moment of the memory that never fails, the judgment that never errs, of the wisdom that plans for eternity, without the possibility of failure, and that times His plans with unerring precision for the ages to come; of the power and skill which can harness even every opposing element, animate and inanimate, and make them all work together for the accomplishment of His grand designs, whose eye never sleeps, whose ear is ever open and who is ever mindful of all the necessities, and active in all the interests of His broad domains.

The Psalmist has well said in considering the immensity of God's hand over all His works, – “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it”, Psa. 139:6. In line with this, we read of the Lord's powerful hand working for His typical people Israel and His gracious providences on their behalf. These things, Paul tells us, have been recorded for our admonition on whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Cor. 10:11) If God's hand did so much for them, His typical people, how much more will His hand be manifested to assist those who have entered into a covenant of sacrifice to follow in the steps of Jesus, in the hope of sharing with Him and assisting in the great work of His coming kingdom. As spiritual Israel, the Lord's people can take the words of the Psalmist to themselves – “Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation, and thy right hand hath held me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great.” (Psalm 18:35)

In Jesus we have the perfect example of humbling oneself under God's mighty hand. He left His Father's rich estate and humbled Himself in human form. He humbled Himself still further and became obedient even unto the death of the cross. It was because of His humbling of Himself in this way that God has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name. (Phil. 2:8,9) To have a humble mind and heart, we must therefore keep the lifeline of communion with God continually open and certainly in prayer there are reservoirs of power beyond our capacity of reasoning. James wrote that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:16) Prayer is the expression of our soul, our spirit, our very being; through prayer we claim the promises of God, and they become veritable realities in our lives.

All of God's consecrated people who possess and properly exercise true humbleness, are used by Him as channels of grace and peace to others. Imbued with His love and peace, they are shining lights wherever they go in this dark world of sin. Where there is wrong, these will reflect and demonstrate the spirit of forgiveness

and tolerance. Where there is error, they endeavour to present truth with grace and humbleness. Where there is despair, they will reflect confidence and hope. In humbling ourselves they would seek to comfort rather than be comforted. These will try to understand others rather than to be understood by them; they will forget self, that they may be remembered and found in Christ. They will delight in forgiving, knowing the joy of being forgiven by their Heavenly Father.

Thus in the doing of these things, they find they are doing their Father's will, and keeping their Master's words when He said, "This is my commandment that ye love one another as I have loved you", (John 15:12) God has also promised to dwell with those whose hearts are in this humble condition. He says in Isa.57:15, – "Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite one." This, then, tells us that God also is ready to condescend to dwell with those whose hearts have been so prepared to receive Him, whose chief desire is to know and to do His will. He dwells with them through His Spirit, His Word helping to revive them when they become faint and weary by the way, for guiding them and lifting them up are His powerful everlasting hands.

The Psalmist tells us to "commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him". (Psa. 37:5-7). We must not be cast down nor allow our faith to falter when the test of patient endurance is applied, while the outward peace and quietness which we crave tarry long. Outward peace and calm are not always the conditions best suited to our needs as new creatures, and we would not desire conditions in which the precious fruits of the spirit would not grow and develop in us. "Therefore, beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rather rejoice", 1 Pet. 4:12. Because whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth, Heb.12:6. Thus the Lord is chipping away the dross and the things not in, accord with His purpose for us, and with His skilful hands will make us unto the delineation of our Head and Master, the perfect chief corner stone in the temple of our God.

Our Heavenly Father furthermore will with every testing, if it becomes too great for us, provide a way of escape. When we find ourselves in difficulty we can say, "The Heavenly Father is permitting this trial and the Lord Jesus will help me", and we can rejoice that we will not be allowed to be overthrown, for He has promised that all things shall work out for our good because we seek to know Him more and to do His will. Therefore, however dark the way may become, however severe the storm may rage about us, our Father's hands are always there to console and to lift us up again, so that we are never in despair, though cast down for a while. As He assures us (Psa.91:11) – "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

Precious indeed are the Lord's promises to us that He will accomplish all that He has said in His Word, but it is necessary to have faith along every line. Without faith, we would not have the courage to go on, and if we did not have faith in His ability to help us in all our hours of need, where would be the source of our help? As Paul says (1 Thes. 5:24) "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." A son humbles himself under his father's hand when he renders obedience to his father's wishes, even when he might feel at times this curtailed his own liberties in certain directions, and limited him in many of his natural desires.

Let our attitude be the same toward our Heavenly Father, whatever the cost, whatever the sacrifice, for in doing this we shall be following our Redeemer, who continually humbled Himself under His Father's hand, becoming obedient even unto the death of the cross, wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." In thus following Jesus, we shall find that our Heavenly Father's mighty hand continually upholds and sustains us, doing for us exceeding abundantly above, all that we ask or think. – Eph.3:20.

The Importance of the Call of the Church

Young's Concordance gives the meaning of "church" as – that which is called out (Greek *ekklesia*). John 6:44 says, "No man can come to me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him". So we see that each one needs to be drawn. In this 6th chapter of John, there are recorded some sayings of Jesus that many of His followers found hard to understand. In verses 65-69, we read that Jesus, who knew their thoughts, said "no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father". Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?", to which Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we Go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God."

Turning to Matt 16:13-18, we read, "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon BarJona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Hell is the condition of death, and Christ would have the power to

prevail against it and eventually give them eternal life, even immortality. (1 Cor 53:55)

In 1 Tim 3:15, the church is described as “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”. The margin has for ground the word “*stay*”. It is the pillar and stay of the truth. What an Honour! How we need to keep clear of the seeds of tares that the enemy sows. In Heb 12:23, it is described as the “church of the firstborn, who are written (or enrolled) in heaven.” What an honour, what a privilege, this is; what a necessity to become an overcomer, so that He may give the rewards promised to such in Rev 2 and 3! “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 15:57)

Who are the ones God is calling to this position? 1 Cor 1:26 states “For ye see your calling brethren,” (the diaglott has ‘*invitation*’ for calling), ye see your ‘invitation’ brethren. The Living Bible has, “Notice among yourselves, dear brothers, that few of you who follow Christ have big names or power or wealth. Instead, God has deliberately chosen to use ideas the world considers foolish and of little worth, in order to shame those people considered by the world as wise and great. He has chosen a plan despised by the world, counted as nothing at all, and used it to bring down to nothing, those the world considers great, so that no one anywhere can ever brag in the presence of God”. Jesus first called or invited those that God had given Him out of the nation of Israel. Israel was the only nation God dealt with in olden times. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth”... (Amos 3:2)

For a time the call was confined to the ones with hearing ears out of the people of Israel. But because they were not as interested and faithful and obedient as they could have been, Jesus said, “Your house is left unto you desolate”. “He came unto his own and His own received him not”. So three and half years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the call went to the first Gentile, Cornelius, “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway”. The record of this is in Acts 10. There was much discussion and dissension over taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, and what of the Jewish law needed to go to the Gentiles, so that a conference was held to decide these matters as recorded in Acts 15.

Saul who persecuted the early church was converted on the road to Damascus, and, as Paul, became a chosen vessel to bear Jesus’ name before Gentiles, Kings and the children of Israel. “I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake”. This same Paul reminded the believers in Ephesus of the privileged position they had come into. “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision, That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.” (Eph 2:11-14). So now the Gentiles can be part of this “called out” class.

The Church is described in many ways to show its relationship to its Head the Lord Jesus and to its Father, the Almighty God. In John Chapter 15 Jesus says he is the true vine and his followers are the branches that need to have the sap (ie the Spirit of Truth) abiding in them so that they bring forth fruit, otherwise the Father who is the husbandman will take them away, and even those who bear fruit he will prune so that they will bring forth more fruit. In 1Cor Ch 12, they are described as like the members of a human body, with Christ as the Head. “For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body, so also is Christ.” (Vs 12). “But God now hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” Verse 21 states therefore “the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” All need to work harmoniously together, from the most prominent to the most insignificant. “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (Vs 27)

The members are spoken of in James 1:18 as a kind of first fruits of His creatures who were begotten by the word of truth. “Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself in Jesus Christ; and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ”... 2Cor 5:17, 18, 20. To be a good ambassador one needs to be well trained in the knowledge and spirit of God and His plan and Christ’s method of accomplishing it. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end (margin has perfectly) for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ: As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: Because it is written, Be ye holy: for I am holy.” (1Pet.1:13-16)

Paul in his letter to the Colossians, said in Ch 3: 12-15, “Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering. Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity (or love), which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” Paul also wrote to the brethren in Phil 2:12, 13 “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which

worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Yes, it/God’s good pleasure that He works in this called or invited class of individuals to do His will. Peter tells us the believers are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that should show forth the praises or virtues of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”. (1Peter2:9)

The writer to the Hebrews in Ch3:1 says “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus:...” In Chapter 5:1-5, there is more about this High Priest. A High Priest taken from among men in Israel of old might offer both gifts and sacrifices. No man could take this honour unto himself, but he that was called of God as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a High Priest; But he that said unto him, ‘Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee.’ This last part is from Ps 2:7, and is used in Act 13:33, when referring to God raising Christ from the dead, and continues in Heb 5:6 – “Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.” Verses 8,9 – “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; Called of God a high priest after the order of Melchisedec.” So Christ offered the perfect gift of himself in sacrifice, and according to God’s Plan could offer himself as a covering to those who would sacrifice and walk in His steps in obedience.

Back in Heb:3, it says “And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after: But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” This house is spoken of in Isa 49:8, “Thus said the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee.” This portion is quoted by Paul in 2 Cor 6:2 – “For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time: behold now is the day of salvation.” Isa 49:8 continues, “and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages:” The margin has ‘to raise up the earth’. What a desolate heritage condition the world is in now! How it will need Christ and His Church even more by the time this age ends.

Eph 1:18 speaks of the riches of the glory of God’s inheritance in the saints, and the need for the eyes of understanding being enlightened by the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. It may be asked, How could God inherit anything in the Saints, as He is all powerful and all wise and is the creator of heaven and earth? But in the overcoming saints, He has a ‘house of sons’ who have been tested in very trying and exacting conditions and have learned obedience and a love for righteousness and a hatred for iniquity, as the Lord Jesus did, and He is not ashamed to call them brethren. Ps 87:5,6 reads, “And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her; and the highest himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah.” Verse 2 – “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.” So at this present time He is developing these heirs, children of His, joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom 8:17)

In Matthew Ch 16 Jesus said that ‘He would build His church’. Do we have any indication, any date, when it will be finished? If a great high skyscraper is being built, or a railway across a continent, or a great ocean liner is being constructed, the builders expect to finish at some approximate time, they don’t expect to go on building indefinitely. We read earlier how many in Israel did not have ears to hear, so that the call or invitation went to the Gentiles but how obedient have they been? After the pure seed of the Kingdom was sown, the enemy would come in and sow tares or imitation wheat, so there has been a large crop of tares and comparatively few wheat throughout most of the age.

Daniel Ch 12. tells about a great time of trouble “such as never was since there was a nation and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” Daniel wanted to know when these things would be, but was told they were sealed to the time of the end, and that he would then “stand in his lot.” “Many shall be purified and made white and tried.” The wicked would not understand, but the wise would understand. Jesus also spoke of a great tribulation such as never was since the beginning of the world, nor ever shall be, but that these days will be shortened. (Matt 24:21,22). Jesus also spoke of a night coming in which no man can work. (John 9:4).

Rev. 7 contains some interesting verses. This chapter is fitted in between the opening of the sixth seal. (Chapter six, verse 12) and the opening of the seventh or final seal: (Chapter eight verse one). Verses one to three of Chapter seven read: “And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.” This shows that the winds were ready to blow, but the servants were not all sealed. Perhaps many had not been as faithful as they could have been or the number would have been sealed by then.

Peter speaks in 2 Pet 3:12 of looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God in which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements melt. Other translations are interesting – Today’s English Version has – “Do your best to make it come soon.” Rev 3:11 reads – “Behold I come quickly, hold

fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”, while in Rev 22:20 we read – “Surely, I come quickly, Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

How long will the church last when it is completed, when all are sealed? The members are promised eternal life, even immortality. Eph 2:6,7 reads – “(God) has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”. The New International Version has “the incomparable riches of His grace”. What favour, what kindness, is here shown! Paul sums up in Eph 3:19-21 – “that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God — according to His power that is at work within us. — Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

In summary, we can see just how important is the call of the Church. It is called by God through Christ, who was also called to be its Head. It is tested through very severe trials and only the overcomers can God have in His family. These are they who have been proved to love righteousness and hate iniquity, these are saints and are His inheritance. These are to receive immortality, and God will demonstrate through the ages to come the exceeding greatness of His grace to them. What great incentive to make our calling and election sure! (HG:00/01)

What Would Jesus say?

Have we ever stopped to really think seriously 1 just how the Saviour would view matters and what He would say to us were He visibly to appear in our midst in these times? Some have said, “Oh! how I wish the Master would visit us as He did those disciples long ago; how I wish I might consult Him with regard to many questions that have so troubled me; I am sure, if the Master were right in our midst, we could soon have the burning, vexing problems and issues that have disturbed us in these recent years quickly settled.” But, brethren, is there any question, problem or difficulty before us today that the Master has not already answered in one or another of His many sayings when He was here long ago? Has He not through the spirit in the Apostolic messages dealt with all the present issues?

But still someone says, “If He were here I would like to ask Him who has charge of His Church today, and whom He has put over His people to control and direct them with power and authority.” How would Jesus reply to this question? I believe that we already have His answer to that question — My dear disciples, I have never vacated the position which the Father gave to Me in the beginning of the Age. As I then said, “One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren,” so now I say that I alone have charge of My Church, and I have never delegated authority to any man or company of men to rule over the Church or to interfere with the individual liberty of each member.

Another might ask: Master, tell us what great movement or work have you authorised your people to carry on in the earth today; what great pronouncement is there to be made in fulfilment of your will? Again we may be sure the Lord would answer in harmony with what He established as the mission of the Church when it was instituted, and that answer would be: I have not authorised any great movement or any great work to be achieved during this dispensation, for “My Kingdom is not of this world.” I remind you that in the beginning of the Age I said that My people would be scattered here and there throughout the earth. I never authorised My disciples to organise any great and wonderful work while yet in their earthly pilgrimage. Was not this the sum of the teachings of Christ and the Apostle with regard to what was authorised or expected of the faithful Church all along through the centuries until her glorification?

Another question might be: Master, will you not tell us just who and where your people are to be found in the earth today so that we may be numbered among them and thus enjoy fellowship with the true saints? We believe the Lord would answer, saying, “My followers are those who do the will of My Father in heaven; they are those who possess My spirit; they are such as are consecrated—surrendered—to My will; they are those who deny themselves and have taken up their cross to follow Me; in fact, whoever will do the will of My Father the same is My Brother, My Sister, My Mother.” And, dear brethren, should not this reply of the Master be satisfactory to us? Do we not really love all who love the Lord Jesus and possess His spirit? As many as are led by the spirit of God they are the children of God.

All our perplexities of today can be settled if we properly take them to the Lord and enquire what the spirit has long ago said unto the Church.

(1930 Convention Report)

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent word! What more can He say than to you He hath said? You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled.

(G. Keith)

Discord Precedes Harmony

It seems to me the trials and the temptations of this life are all making us fit for the life to come—building up a character for eternity. You have been in a piano factory; did you ever go there for the sake of music? Go into the tuning room and you will say, “My dear sir, this is a dreadful place to be in; I cannot bear it; I thought

you made music here.” They say, “No; we do not produce music here; we make the instruments and tune them here, and in the process much discord is forthcoming.” Such is the church of God on earth. The Lord makes the instruments down here, and, tunes them, and a great deal of discord is perceptible, but it is all necessary to prepare us for the everlasting harmonies up yonder.—Spurgeon.

Steadfast, Immovable

The old Lollards were called “Holdfasts,” not only because of their firmness under persecution, but of their strong grasp of the truth. Coleridge said, with a practical aptness unusual with him: “What does not withstand has no standing ground.” “Hold fast, then, the form of sound words, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus.” Be modest, unostentatious in all that is your own, willing to concede everything you have a right to yield, but be scrupulous and immovable about all that is Christ’s.

Watching and Praying

I am watching for the answers to
the prayers which I have made,
I am eagerly expecting all the
things for which I’ve prayed
But I know if they appear not in the
forms I thought they would,
It is just that He is planning for me
something extra good.
Yes, I’m certain, and I trust Him,
He has heard and He will give;
Let me then “pray without ceasing,”
And in “watching” every live.
Anon.

Predestination (Part 1)

Predestination, and the associated concepts of foreknowledge and free will are scriptural concepts. They are important concepts that determine not only how a believer views such divine attributes as power, wisdom, justice and love; as well as how they balance with one another, but also they reflect on and affect the doctrine of the ransom.

The aim is to explore some of the historical concepts of predestination and their consequences, then to focus more on the biblical use of the term and the associated concepts of free will and foreknowledge and in particular to look at whether the scriptures apply predestination and foreknowledge to the individual and/or groups.

These thoughts are expressed explicitly as thoughts for consideration and not as inflexible dogma.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica there are three types of predestination doctrine, with many variations.

One theory (associated with Semi-Pelagianism, some forms of nominalism, and Arminianism) makes foreknowledge the ground of predestination and teaches that God predestined to salvation those whose future faith and merits He foreknew.

At the opposite extreme is the doctrine of double predestination, commonly identified with John Calvin but more correctly associated with Synod of Dort, and appearing also in some of the writings of Augustine and Martin Luther and in the thought of the Jansenists. According to this doctrine, God has determined from eternity whom He will save and whom He will damn, regardless of their faith, love, or merit, or lack thereof.

A third doctrine was set forth in other writings of Augustine and Luther, in the decrees of the second Council of Orange (529) and in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. It ascribes the salvation of man to the unmerited grace of God and thus to predestination, but it attributes divine reprobation to man’s sin and guilt.

Time does not permit examination of these theories in detail and Br Russell has written about and clarified their deficiencies, particularly of the Calvinistic and Wesleyan views of predestination. Most of the theories are underpinned by the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and therefore intrinsically flawed. Also, they do not distinguish between the salvation of the elect and the salvation of the world in general.

The common view of the meaning of the word predestination comes largely from these theories, particularly the Calvinistic view. Specifically, that predestination refers to a fixed destiny that occurs irrespective of the will (free will) and action of an individual, having been determined beforehand by God.

To look specifically at the biblical view of predestination we need to clarify the concepts of free will and foreknowledge.

FREE WILL

Free will is denied by those who espouse any of the various forms of determinism. Determinism is a philosophical theory that all events, including moral choices, are completely determined by previously existing causes that preclude free will and the possibility that humans could have acted otherwise.

Arguments for free will are based on: the subjective experience of freedom, on sentiments of guilt, on scriptural evidence, and on the universal supposition of responsibility for personal actions that underlies the concepts of law, reward, punishment, and incentive.

When God made man in his image, free will was an integral part of that image and likeness. This is the distinguishing characteristic between a deterministic robot and man. The concept of free will is fundamental to the value that God placed on the worth of the human creation in its final perfect form. At present this human creation is a work in progress. The value of this human race is underscored by the sending of His only begotten Son Jesus as the ransom sacrifice.

Free will in humans is usually used in the sense of: the power or capacity to choose among alternatives or to act in certain situations independently of natural, social, or divine restraints.

Free Will: Disobedience

Genesis 2:16 *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:*

Genesis 2:17 *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

Genesis 3:6 *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

Free will, in itself, implies nothing about whether the individual is informed or aware of the consequences of a particular free will choice. Adam was not deceived but exercised his free will in disobeying God. His knowledge of good and evil was deficient but this did not preclude a free will. Punishment only has meaning if there is a free will choice. And of course Adam and Eve began to die as a result. We notice that for humanity as well as for Adam this same free will will again be exercised in the kingdom but this time having some acquaintance with the knowledge of good and evil.

Free Will: Obedience

Rev 22:17 *And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely.*

So it appears that free will does not imply of itself that it has to be informed.

Also, true free will is not constrained, which means that the free will choice is not necessarily a good one. And again this is attested to by the free will choice of Adam which plunged the human race into darkness and death.

Free Will: True Choice

Deuteronomy 30:19 *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:*

Therefore a free will choice must contain the possibility of either choosing the good or the bad. There would be no point in God placing an apparent choice to man if true free will did not exist.

FREE WILL: PERSONAL EFFORT

2 Peter 1:10 *Therefore brethren, give diligence all the more to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things ye shall never fall.*

Philippians 2:12 *Therefore my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

If there was no free will then encouraging statements made to the elect of God concerning personal effort such as “make your calling and election sure, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...” would be empty and devoid of any real meaning.

Once God has called and imparted His grace the individual needs to apply oneself and to give diligence to this, otherwise the desired place will be lost. Peter shows that without that diligence our calling and election is not sure.

Free Will: The Prize

1 Cor 9:24,27: *“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”*

Also, it would not be called a race if one did not exercise one's free will to obey and become disciplined and focused on the path laid out by our Lord. This requires one's free will to decide to take control and subject

oneself to the will of God.

This ability to freely choose without constraints is what makes an individual responsible for that choice and deserving of reward or punishment. One cannot hold responsible an individual if he or she had no choice. It would be unfair to pass on the punishment of death on Adam and the human race in his loins if he had no free will.

Free Will: Personal Responsibility

James 1:13 *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man:*

14 *but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.*

James makes this individual responsibility plain when he shows that those things (viz temptations) that lead man astray have their origins within oneself. And with this comes the responsibility for following them.

Free Will: The Fallen Nature

Some have argued that true free will does not exist since man's fallen state precludes doing what is good. In fact it appears that Paul says as much in Rom 7 verses 18 and 19.

18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.

19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

The problem with this argument is that this pertains to the carrying out of the will and not to the will itself. Paul continues:

20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.

Therefore the freedom of the will is intact, even in man's fallen state. The great blessing of the new creature is that through the merit of our Saviour, God deals with us on the basis of our wills and not on the carrying out of what will, which is beset by the problems of the fallen nature.

Free Will: The Ransom

Another important aspect to free will is shown by the value of Jesus laying down his humanity *as a sacrifice*. If Jesus had not exercised his free will in doing so, then this could not be seen as a sacrifice. A sacrifice is truly such only when one gives up something; in the case of Jesus a perfect human everlasting life. If Jesus had no choice and was destined in the deterministic sense then it could not have been a sacrifice since there would have been no other alternative for Him to give up. So if Jesus had no choice then the value of the ransom would necessarily be undermined. This shows how important a true free will really is.

(To be Continued)

They Had Been With Jesus

How much is told respecting Peter and John, I land what their opponents thought of them, in the words of Acts 4:13 – “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.”

One of the remarkable things connected with an understanding of the Plan of God is its effect upon those who receive it – its transforming effect, its renewing effect. As the Lord knew and foretold, the Gospel message has not in general appealed specially to the rich, the great or the learned; these feel themselves above the Master's teachings, and are comparatively satisfied with their conditions.

The Gospel message takes hold chiefly upon those less favoured in this present life, and this is true as well of the special features of truth as of the general features of the Gospel message. In every case, however, the marked effect of the Gospel of Christ is manifested where it is received into a good and honest heart. It lifts up. It gives courage instead of fear. It gives hope instead of despondency. It gives an aim and purpose in life instead of futility. It cultivates the will and manifests itself in the open expression of the eye, the alertness of the step, the increased deftness of the hand, and the loosing of the tongue to speak of the Lord and His grace.

It is well with us, as with the apostles, that those about us should note that we have the courage of our convictions; that we fear the Lord only; that our highest aim is to give out the good tidings of great joy to all who have the hearing ear. But here we need to note more particularly the importance of the second feature of the verse, namely that “they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus” – that they were His disciples, learners in His school. This is truly the important thing for us – to learn of Jesus, to become like Him.

It is right that we should give due weight to doctrinal knowledge of the Divine character and plan, as set forth in the Word of God. But while emphasising this and its absolute necessity to our growth in grace, how important that all the Lord's followers keep in mind those features of the Master's teachings which constitute more particularly His spirit, His disposition. The sum of these is LOVE. Of our Heavenly Father it is declared

that “God is love”, so also love is the special characteristic of our Redeemer, who was the image, the very reflection of the Father.

The analysis of love, as given by the apostle Paul, may be understood to be an analysis of the Divine character as exemplified in our Lord Jesus— meekness, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, brotherly-kindness, love, And since all His followers are invited to become disciples or learners, under Him as their Teacher, it follows that all who truly learn of Him will gradually attain to these same elements of His character.

How better could we proclaim our relationship to Him? How better could we recommend to others the School of Christ? How better could we show forth the praises of our Master than by living out His example, representing His character before others. Surely, this is the significance of His injunction, “Let your light so shine before men that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven.” It is proper indeed that we let our doctrines shine out before men, but it is specially important that we let the character of Christ shine out. It is also important that the doctrines and the character correspond and co-attest to each Other.

We remember our Lord’s words, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another.” This was His new commandment that we should love one another as He has loved us – with a pure, unselfish love, which thinks no evil, does not vaunt self, is not easily offended, does not seek its own – the love which lays down time, energy and even life itself for the brethren.

We may never become entirely satisfactory to ourselves in thought, word and deed while still in the flesh, and we may never, therefore, be entirely satisfactory to others; but we can, we should, we must, and by the grace of God let us each resolve that we will, attain to all of this, so far as our hearts are concerned. Nothing short of this will be satisfactory to our Lord, to whom we are “betrothed” as members of the chaste, virgin church. If we fail to come up to this reasonable, possible standard, we will fail to make our calling and election sure to a place in the Bride company.

But if we do these things, if at heart we are at this standard, if we are daily seeking to live it to the best of our ability, the heavenly Bridegroom will rejoice to own us as His elect. How much indeed depends upon our learning this lesson! “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.” (John 13:17)

* * * * *

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things, you shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” (2 Peter 1:10,11)

Oneness in Christ

“ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS”

These words of the apostle Paul could well be the banner for every gathering of Christian people for they are both a reminder and a challenge to all who enter the family of God or the house of God that who they are and their backgrounds or standings in human terms are no longer relevant. All who enter do so solely as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

Beautiful and scriptural as these sentiments are, there is an even greater and deeper oneness for which our Saviour prayed in the lovely words recorded for us in John 17. The oneness of “all one in Christ Jesus” is the established reality of Christian faith, the oneness for which Jesus prayed is his will for each one of his disciples – “that they may be one, even as we (Father and Son) are one”.

The scriptures give us much instruction and encouragement about the development of this oneness, this unanimity of love for the one Lord, for His word, His service, His people. And from these, we learn that the only sure foundation for such oneness is the personal abiding in Christ of each one of his followers. For the Saviour’s will is that “they may all be one, as Thou Father art in me and I in Thee that they may be one in us”.

The reality of oneness in Christ Jesus already established in God’s purposes, the development of the spirit of oneness which is our Master’s will for us all, and the only foundation for oneness – let us briefly consider together these aspects of Christian unity.

THE REALITY OF ONENESS

The full text from which the words “all one in Christ Jesus” are taken is found in Gal. 3:26-29:

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs

according to the promise”.

All are children of God, all have put on Christ, all have the same inheritance, all are one in Christ.

This statement of the apostle has been true in every century but how revolutionary it must have sounded to his hearers in the context of the extreme national, social and sexual divisions of Paul's day. In today's western society, at least, these have been broken down in considerable measure, but for whatever reason there can never be first and second class Christians, nor can there be any room for the sectarian spirit. We rightly respect those specially blessed by God with gifts and talents for service but as each one appears before God, he or she has only one standing – a sinner saved by grace – all one in Christ.

On more than one occasion, Jesus had to give the disciples the illustration of the childlike character, and even in the shadow of the coming cross, he had to reprove them for self-seeking. “One is your Master”, he told them, “even Christ, all ye are brethren. He that is greatest among you shall be your servant” Matt. 23:8,11. All are brothers and sisters in Him, and all are equally precious in the sight of Him who has called them with the one high and holy calling in Christ.

Particularly at the Memorial season, we are reminded of the oneness of the Lord's people, as we read – “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread” 1 Cor. 10:16,17. What a depth, what a privilege of oneness with each other and with our Head are presented to us in these words.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ONENESS

Going on from the existing oneness of the body of Christ, made up of all his faithful followers, and the worth of each member of that body, let us hear again the words of our Master, shortly before the end of his earthly ministry.

“Neither pray I for these alone but for them also who shall believe on me through their word, that they may all be one, as thou Father art in me and I in Thee, that they may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. And the glory which Thou gavest me, I have given them that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” John 17:20-23.

What a standard of oneness the Lord prayed for! One even as the Father and the Son are one! Furthermore, the oneness prayed for is a oneness “in us” – in the Father and the Son. And if this be so, then we should surely be looking for character development and emergence of a family likeness, not only to one another but more importantly to our Lord and to our Father in heaven. “He who has seen me has seen the Father” – Jesus told Philip; how much of our Master do others see in us? Is the family likeness there, is it developing? Do others take knowledge of us, as they did of Peter and John, that we have been with Jesus? These are questions we may all well consider.

It is easy to equate oneness with uniformity, that is, uniformity of understanding, uniformity of practice, even in earlier days uniformity of dress and demeanour among Christian people. In all these things, reverence and respect for others are most important, but they are not criteria of oneness in Christ. These are to be found in Paul's words:

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in you all.” Eph.4: 1-6

THE PRESERVATION OF ONENESS

We note that the Christian's endeavour is not required for the establishment of the unity of the spirit, but to hold it fast, to preserve what God has already ordained. Paul's earnest plea for maintenance of this Christian unity, as here expressed, embraces two essentials for true oneness and we might sum them up as mutual considerateness and mutual conviction. The first needs continuing cultivation, the second constant calling to mind. Failure to attend to both aspects has been probably the greatest cause of the world's condemnation of those who name the name of Christ. And the adversary is still active in the area of personal relationships between Christians and the need for vigilance is just as great today as it has ever been.

“With lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance, in the bond of peace” – these qualities alone can ensure any degree of oneness, harmony and united effort in any sphere of human activity – political, social or religious. Our news media furnish us with frequent examples of how promotion of self-image and self-interest can lead to disintegration of associations of people, even although all involved profess to have common ideals and aims. These alone, however, are clearly not enough for real unity, where mutual respect and concern for others are forgotten.

“Fulfil ye my Joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things but every man also on the things of others” Phil.2:2-4

“Be like minded” – does this imply that all will hold exactly the same view on every subject? No, the like mind which is needed in each one is that described in the next verse – “let this mind be in you, that was also in Christ Jesus”. This is the mind of humility, obedience and self-sacrifice.

“The same love, one accord, one mind” – these take our thoughts back to the oneness of the Father and the Son. The full extent of that divine oneness is well beyond human comprehension, but we see it expressed in the perfect loving obedience of Jesus to do His Father’s will and to further His purposes even at the cost of his own life. And we see it displayed in the manifesting forth by Jesus to all with eyes to see and hearts to appreciate something of the character of the Almighty, who is also the one God and Father of all who come to Him by faith.

And these should be the characteristics of every child of God, as he or she seeks to show forth by word and deed the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. To concentrate all our endeavours along such lines will surely contribute to greater unity of the spirit among all the Lord’s people. There will always be differences of background, of understanding of details of God’s plans and purposes, of personal ways of expression, and so on, but these can safely be left in the Father’s hand, until that day dawns when we shall all know even as now we are known of God.

THE FOUNDATION OF ONENESS

Those precious things which are shared by all who truly love God and are trusting Jesus as Saviour and Lord are in reality so much greater than those which are too frequently allowed to divide His people and sever fellowship. “One body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father” – seven unshakeable things – a seven-fold foundation which should be more than enough as a basis for mutual heartfelt love and respect and co-operation among all the Lord’s dear ones.

One writer has said – “we shall never be of one mind” in the sense of all holding the same opinions, but we may all be of one mind when beneath diversities of opinion, expression and view, we are animated by a common devotion to Christ, a common loyalty to the great underlying facts of redemption, and a common love to all who ‘hold the Head’, though they may differ from us in an infinite variety of minor considerations.” Here, the hard core of those things that unite Christians is clearly identified.

1. Common devotion to Christ;
2. Common loyalty to the gospel;
3. Common love to all who are Christ’s.

Another has presented the thought of unity in diversity as follows – “In the church there is room for an infinite variety. Each brings his or her own contribution and we must gather with all the saints, if we would comprehend the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of Christ. You cannot see the whole sky, the whole mountain, the whole broad ocean, nor can I. But I will tell you what I have seen, tasted and handled of the word of life, and you shall tell me what you have experienced. Thus our spirits shall have fellowship one with another. There will be a mutual exchange in commodities, as we report our discoveries of the unsearchable riches of Christ. For none has exactly the same viewpoint as another has, and none exactly the same (way of expression). So, be yourself –make your own discoveries of the manifold grace of Christ.”

Following the apostle’s words in Eph.4:1-6, he goes on to say that to every one of us is given grace to help in the upbuilding of the body of Christ. There are particular gifts to some, but grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ is provided for all. And what is the ultimate objective? Verse 13 tells us beautifully – “till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the fulness of the stature of Christ. At the end of the way, the oneness of spirit, the co-operative service of each member of the one body will blossom in full and complete understanding, in perfect oneness, in full reality.

THE NATURE OF ONENESS

Looking again at our Lord’s words in John 17:22, we read:

“And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one”.

This is, as it were, God’s viewpoint of the church of this gospel age – one holy temple in the Lord, being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone (Eph 2:20,21). And again:

“Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His.” 2 Tim.2:19.

He knows personally all who make up that one body, that holy temple.

The spirit of love, meekness and service to all the Lord’s people is clearly so very important for it is the divine arrangement that there be one body. It was for this oneness that Jesus prayed earnestly and in harmony

with which he addressed his disciples right down the age:

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” John 13:34,35.

Wherever there has been disunity among the Lord’s people, it would be safe to say that this spirit of “love as I have loved you” has been conspicuous by its absence.

THE BOND OF ONENESS

There is then already a oneness of standing and calling between all Christ’s followers and in God’s sight. Further, there is also a need for constant development of the oneness of the spirit, of mutual love, loyalty, purpose and considerateness, among all his brethren in keeping with his will for us. What is it then that alone will assure such oneness? The oneness of standing and call is “in Christ:”. The oneness for which Jesus prayed is that they might be one “in us”. Here surely is the key – abiding “in Him”, and He in us. For just as there can be no fruitage unless we abide in Him as in the illustration of the vine and the branches, so there can be no oneness either.

The writer earlier quoted on unity in diversity has further commented:

“Christ is the bond of unity to the church –Christ in each individual and each individual in Christ. Let us never forget that gracious reciprocity. The sponge must be in the ocean and the ocean in the sponge. Each believer is written in the Lamb’s book of life by the same fingers. Each of us has been grafted into the true vine, though in different places. Each of us has some function in the mystical body. We were in Him when He died and rose and entered His Father’s presence. In Him we have access into this grace wherein we stand.

The gift of Christ, on the other hand, has been made to each one of us, that he might realise himself through all the experiences of his members. As of old it required four gospels to reveal to mankind what Jesus Christ was, so all believers are required to set forth and exemplify to the world all the excelling glories of our Emmanuel. It is for this reason that we are told that the church ‘is His body the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.’ Eph.1:23.”

The illustration has been given that just as the nearer the spokes of a wheel get to the axle, the nearer each gets to the others, so with Christians –the closer each draws to Christ, the closer will all be drawn to each other. This is the all-important requirement and the only foundation for true unity – abiding in Christ. We need to look upon Him first and always, and upon others for what of Christ we may see in them. We need to be as kind to others who may sometimes upset or disappoint us as we know in our hearts we need them to be to us.

THE CHALLENGE OF ONENESS

To realise the true oneness, even now despite human frailties, of all who are “in Christ Jesus” is a rich blessing and a treasure of our faith. It will serve to extend the horizons of our love for God and of our appreciation of the wideness of His mercy. We will never know most of His dear ones in this life, but what a privilege we have to open our hearts to them and to pray for them, known or unknown to us. What a challenge, is ours to develop in our hearts and lives that spirit of oneness which is like to that of our Father and His dear Son. Truly “the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above” when it is centred in Christ.

Let us treasure the privilege of being called by God to membership in that one body of Christ, let us rejoice with all who are truly His in that one great hope of our calling, let us endeavour always, in love and understanding for others, to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. For this is our Master’s will for us here and now; its fulness we will know when we see Him face to face.