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“WHAT IS GOD’S WILL FOR MAN?”

The question “What is God’s will for man?” is the most fundamental question that anyone can ask. The answer to the question embraces the answer to many other lesser questions which are frequently asked, questions like “Why am I here on earth? Where am I going? How do I get there? and What happens when I die?” Indeed, people who try to answer those questions are searching for meaning. What is God’s will for man? As Bible Students we know the Bible gives us some very clear answers to that question. The answer is a little complicated by the fact that we live in the Christian era. A comprehensive answer to the question must include not only God’s will for the men who live in the Christian era but also for those who lived before the Christian era. So what is God’s will for man?

The Scriptures tell us that there are four aspects of God’s will for man. The first one is that man is to have dominion over the earth. The second is that he was to experience the consequences of disobedience. Those two aspects of God’s will for man apply to all men from the very first day of Creation. A third aspect of God’s will for man is that He was going to call out a special church class, but that aspect of God’s will for man only applies to those who live in the Christian era. The fourth aspect of God’s will for man is that God preplanned that He would graft in the Gentiles. Now that’s a very large subject and we aren’t going to have time to consider all those four aspects in this session, so we will just concentrate on the first two - the fact that God’s intended Will for man is that he will have dominion over the earth and also it is God’s will for man that he will experience the consequences of disobedience. (The third and fourth aspect will be covered in a later session.)

MAN’S DOMINION

Let us now take the first aspect of God’s will for man, the fact that God’s will for man is that he will have dominion over the earth. In all of our considerations I believe it is necessary to keep in mind that when we are talking about God’s will for man we are talking about what God wishes, what God wills, God’s intention, God’s objectives beforehand. In Genesis 1:26 we read: ‘And God said, “Let us make man in our image...” ‘Let us’ is a statement of intent, expressing His purpose,

expressing His Will. This is something God was setting out to do. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” That was God’s will for man – to have dominion over the earth. God is almighty and therefore it follows that His will would be accomplished. And so it was, as we read in Gen.1:27 and 28 – “So God created man in His own image” He did just what He had planned. “In the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.” Have dominion, you are in control!

The next verse tells us that God in fact provided for all of man’s needs on earth. In Genesis 1:29-30 we read: ‘And God said, “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.” ‘ So God provided for man’s needs on the earth. “And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth wherein is life, I have given every green herb for meat.” And it was so.’ So God provided for man’s needs on the earth. What God said to man was, Let him have dominion over the earth – not over the moon, and not over Mars. If many of our politicians and eminent scientists understood that simple truth and believed it, we might not have wasted so much

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money trying to investigate whether man should be on Mars. God's will for man was that he would have dominion over the earth. In the next verse, verse 31, we see that God's will was accomplished. It says: 'And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.' Now, when do we say something we have made is very good? We say it's very good if, when it comes to fruition, it is just as we had planned it. Yes, that worked out perfectly; it is very good! And so we have God's Creation, and God saying it is very good, that it had worked out just as He had planned.

Of course, that was way back at the beginning of time, and with our great learning and scientific development people will scoff at such an elementary truth. Even before our time the concept of man being confined to earth and that being his dominion suffered some derision. So I find it very comforting to note that the Apostle Paul also held to the same fundamental truth. I would like to read just a few verses of Paul's sermon on Mars Hill. He makes some very important points in that sermon. We don't have time to go through them all, but in Acts 17:22 we read: 'Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions I found an altar with this inscription: To the Unknown God, whom therefore ye ignorantly worship Him I declare unto you." Him declare I unto you. Whom did Paul declare? "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing He is Lord of heaven and earth..." (for this Creator is not just the one who made the earth, He is not restricting man to earth just because He made the earth. No, God made heaven **and** earth.) ... He "dwells not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with man's hands as though He needed anything, seeing He gives to all life, and breath, and all things..." He is the instigator of life "and hath made of one all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth." That's exactly what we were told in Genesis. That is God's will for man – to dwell on the face of the earth. "And hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation." The NIV there says He has determined where man would live or the places where man would live.

We could discuss that at some length, whether we are to live at the North Pole or the South Pole, but nevertheless the point is, either way, that God made man to dwell on the face of the earth. Yes, on the face of the earth. How high can you go and still exist? Can you live under the ground without atmosphere? How long can you live under water? God made man to live on the face of the earth. So simple, isn't it? And what a grand appointment that was! Even just living on the face of the earth. In Psalm 8 the Psalmist expresses it so beautifully, if only we could capture the grandeur of man's original appointment. The Psalmist says: 'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hath set thy glory above the heavens!' Then

in verse 3: 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him.' What am I? What are you? Not even mere specks almost in the Universe. 'And the son of man, that thou visiteth him; For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour. And madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.' Yes, we are not even mere specks in terms of God's overall creation, yet He gave to man dominion over the whole earth. And He put all things under his feet. 'All sheep and oxen; yea, and the beasts of the field. The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea and whatsoever things pass through the paths of the seas.' All of these were put under man, man's dominion. What a glorious position man had on the earth! 'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!' Yes, man's appointment was indeed grand.

We can see even more of just how grand an appointment was given to man if we just think about the dominion given to Adam before his transgression. We read in Genesis 2:19 and 20 'And out of the ground the Lord formed every beast of the field' (that is, lions, tigers, elephants, cattle and sheep, etc.) 'and every fowl of the air and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. ' And Adam gave names to 'all the cattle and the birds of the air and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helpmate for him.' What a grand position Adam had - all the beasts of the field coming to him, and Adam allocating them their name. What grandeur! But of course, that is not the case today. If any of you have tried to earn your living from farming you will well know that many of the beasts of the field and fowls of the air and creeping things destroy man's effort to eke out a living from the land. Kangaroos can destroy a crop overnight. Emus, rabbits, foxes, snakes, kookaburras, mosquitoes today really are at odds with man on the earth. In other words, man has lost the dominion that he originally had.

LOST DOMINION

And so we come to the second aspect of God's will for man. We have to ask ourselves the question, Was this really God's will for man that he should experience the current environment, or is it something that man has brought upon himself, or was it an after-thought? Was the fact that man was going to experience the loss of dominion really part of God's will for man? As I have just mentioned, from observation there is no doubt that man has lost the dominion that he had in the Garden of Eden in the early days. Solomon, of course, also stated very clearly that man had lost that dominion. In Ecclesiastes 1:1-4 we read: 'The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem, Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

What profit hath a man of all his labour that he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever.' Vanity of vanities, all is vanity! That's what life is all about, the search for meaning. Solomon goes on to give us a first glimpse of the fact that the present loss of dominion was also God's intention. In Eccl.1:13 and 14 he says: 'And I gave my heart to search and seek out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven.' Solomon sought wisdom. He sought meaning. This is what he concluded (in the KJV) – 'This sore travail has God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under heaven, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.'

Solomon makes a very important point in verse 13: 'This sore travail has God given to the sons of men.' So it is God's purpose, God's will. He did this, He gave it to the sons of men, to be exercised thereby. Now the NIV says 'what a heavy burden God has laid on the sons of men'. Now those two thoughts are quite different, aren't they, because in the KJV it says 'This sore travail has God given to the sons of men to be exercised thereby' but in the NIV it says 'What a heavy burden God has laid on the sons of men'. In both cases, though, we realise both translations endorse the fact that it is God's action, the initiative comes from God. God has given it to man for man to be exercised thereby, or God has laid the heavy burden, but in both cases God did the work. However, the concept of God laying a heavy burden could well be interpreted that this was a punishment - you have done the wrong thing, my friend; this is the burden you must bear as a punishment. On the other hand, giving it to them to be exercised thereby, we exercise for profit, for benefit. So, if the KJV is correct, God gave this sore travail to man for their ultimate benefit, not just for their punishment. But is that going too far? What really does it mean when he says 'to be exercised thereby'?

The word 'exercise' comes from Strong's Concordance, No. 6031, which means 'To look down, to browbeat, to depress or to humble'. I just now want to fasten on that meaning of 'humble'. This sore travail has God given to the sons of men to be **humbled** thereby. Let us look at three places where this word, No.6031, is translated 'humble'. The first one is in Exodus when God was dealing with Pharaoh to release His people, Israel. Exodus 10:1-3: 'And the Lord told to Moses, "Go in unto Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart" (for I have hardened his heart – God's will) 'and the heart of his servants, that I might show thee my signs before him; And that thou mayest tell thy son and thy son's son what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the Lord. And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?' 'Humble' is the same word as

'exercise'. In Deut.8:1-2: 'All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness.' Why did He do that? 'to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or no.' And so He led them forty years in the wilderness to humble them. God gave His sore travail unto man to humble him, and if you have ever been in a situation where you have been subject to the elements, it is a very humbling experience. Don't we see this now? This nation is gripped in dire drought. There was dust blowing in northern Victoria yesterday. I have been in a place where you are so dependent upon the elements that you realise there is Someone up there who really is Almighty! The sore travail that man is experiencing today has been given to humble him.

We see a stark contrast, as I see it, with the temptation that was given to Eve, because the nature of Eve's temptation was to aspire to a position above her God-given appointment. That was the temptation which Satan put before her. Let's just go through that in Genesis 3: 'Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field (and I would love to talk to you about subtleness, but there isn't time today) which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.' But not just that, for he said: 'For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods' - not just a man or a woman confined to the face of the earth to have dominion over the earth, but the temptation was that when you eat of this fruit you will become as gods. The temptation was to a position above the God-given appointment, and of course mankind has suffered the consequences of Adam and Eve's transgression. At the end of the day the sore travail is going to humble man again. The sore travail is given to the sons of men to humble them, to realise that at the end of the day, while there might be a way that seems right unto a man, the end of the way is death.

That's a very gloomy picture, isn't it? The bright part of it is that God also planned for man's salvation, and he pre-planned man's salvation. We see this in Hebrews 2:5-8: 'For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set

him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.' Man lost his dominion. 'But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.'

Now the question is, When did God provide Jesus as our Saviour? Was it pre-planned before He created man? Was it added after He created man but before He gave him the experience with disobedience? Or has it been added later? We know the answer is that God planned for Jesus to come to earth as man's Redeemer before He even created the world. Let's look at 1 Peter 1:18-20: 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world.' How precise is that term! The Greek meaning is 'to know beforehand'. So God knew beforehand that He was going to send Jesus as man's Redeemer. I have heard it said so many times that God provided Jesus as man's Redeemer **at** the foundation of the world, that is, after man fell, but Peter's words already quoted also references such as Acts 2:23 and 2 Timothy 1:9 show that this was foreknown. God had planned for man's redemption before the foundation of the world, but it was only manifest in this last time.

GOD'S WILL IN THE CHRISTIAN ERA

That leads on, of course, to the third aspect of God's will for man, that as well as Him having predetermined that Christ would be man's Redeemer, before He even made the world, He had also predetermined that He would call out a church class. (That, and the matter of the grafting in of the Gentiles will be the subject of a later article.) But we see, don't we, the grandeur of God's will for man. He created man, gave him dominion over the earth, and there was nothing on the earth which was not under man's dominion. What a glorious position he had! Man lost that dominion. God pre-arranged that our experience with death will humble all men and God has also pre-arranged for man to be lifted out of that condition up to the original dominion that he enjoyed.

I would like to close by reading two verses in Revelation 21 which embrace so much truth. Rev.21: '24 And the nations shall walk in the light of it and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it. 26 And they shall bring the glory of the nations into it.' I think there is a tremendously lovely picture there of the kings of the earth bringing their glory into it. They won't be aspiring for a position above their appointment. They will be delighted to bring their glory into God's completed creation. God certainly has a wonderful plan, and we are privileged to understand something of that plan, His will for mankind.

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"DOING THE WILL OF GOD FROM THE HEART"

Paul wrote the letter to the church at Ephesus from his prison cell in Rome. He had spent more than 2 years in Ephesus preaching Christ and the word **of** God to both the Jews and the Greeks. "And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:8-10NAS)

Paul had a very close relationship with the Ephesus Church and although later in his journey to Jerusalem he did not have time to visit, he summoned the Elders as we read in Acts 20:16-17 "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to

spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church". (NAS) Paul had great concern for the future of the Church in Ephesus and admonished the Elders as we read in Acts 20:28-32 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified".. (NAS)

The Epistle to the Ephesians is acknowledged to be one of the richest and most profound of the Epistles. The

concepts of doctrines are expressed with grandeur and depth, there is richness and fullness in its message, plus practical exhortations on Christian living which are both profound and vivid, making it very precious to all believers. The first three chapters are Doctrinal setting out the Believers standing in Christ, thanksgiving for their redemption, prayers for spiritual enlightenment, the power of God as illustrated in their salvation, and the unity of Jew and Gentile in one body under Christ their head.

The second three chapters are Practical looking at the believers lives in Christ, their walk as Children of the Heavenly Father, both inward and outward, with the aim to imitate the example of Christ in their lives. Paul also looks at the duties of God's family in different aspects of every day life and how their behaviour affects how people conceive our Heavenly Father to be. The subject – "Doing the will of God from the heart" – is taken from this second section (Eph 6:5,6) and reads – "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. (NAS) Here Paul looks at the attitude and relationship of a consecrated believer and his/her employer, or of those whom we serve through our dealings in business. Paul refers to the believers as slaves or servants in verse 5.

Thayer's definition of the Greek word gives us an insight into what Paul was explaining to the Ephesians. The word slaves is from Strong's number 1401 *doulos* – which had the meaning of:

- 1) a slave, a bondman, a man of servile condition
 - a) a slave
 - b) Metaphorically, one who gives himself up to another's will, those whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing His cause among men
 - c) Devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests
- 2) a servant, an attendant

In the theme verse the word slave denotes one who is bound to render service to another, whether that service is free or voluntary. In the words "Be Obedient to those who are your masters" Paul was telling them that their behaviour should show forth the qualities of the religion that they professed. They were to be kind, gentle, and obedient, as becomes their Christian walk. Paul instructed the Ephesians that in their relations with their Masters they were to obey with fear and trembling. So we too should give due respect to those who are over us, fearing to displease them, and aware of our actions so as not to justly incur their anger or indignation. The Ephesians were to be sincere in their obedience: This meant with singleness of heart, not just pretence of obedience and respect, but serving them

with faithfulness as if their master was Christ.

With Sincerity of Heart in verse 5 has the thought of singleness of heart, that is with a simple, sincere desire to do what ought to be done. Our Lord speaking to his disciples brings out this thought in Luke 16:13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (NAS) If we take the attitude that we are serving God through our work, then we will have singleness of heart. With a heart full of love for the Lord and of devotion to his purposes we can sometimes make it hard to give our full energies to our employer during the hours for which we are paid. In the Epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians Paul speaks of this problem. We are told, (Col. 3:23.) "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men." Here Paul tells us that our attitude should be that whatever we do should be carried out as if we are doing it for our Heavenly Father.

How can we show such diligence without getting so involved that we cannot put work out of our minds in our free time? The Apostle does not suggest that we should become devoted to our daily work for its own sake. Only the Lord's service calls for our devotion. We are to work for our employers "heartily as unto the Lord," (Colossians 3:23) as an example to those around us and as evidence to our Heavenly Father of the honesty with which we discharge earthly responsibilities. Our spiritual "work" for him is on a different plane. It is this work into which we should "throw our heart and soul," in a spirit of loving devotion to him. Surely, we have to bring our lives into balance. If our earthly responsibilities appear to be intruding into our thoughts at times when they have no business to be there, we need to ask ourselves whether they are drawing our heart away from the Lord. We must remember our Master's warning that "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:21. In its early stages it may seem absurd to think that a small overflow into sanctified time constitutes any sort of "treasure" to us, but most things have small beginnings, and "how great a matter a little fire kindleth." - James 3:5.

As unto Christ:

By rendering proper service to our masters we are in fact serving the Lord, and that will be well pleasing to him. Fidelity, in whatever situation we find ourselves in life, is acceptable service to the Lord. We can acceptably serve our Lord Jesus in the condition of a servant, just as well as we can in a position of authority. Besides, it will greatly lighten the burdens of such a situation, and make the toils of a humble condition much easier, if we remember that we are serving the Lord.

Change of Heart: The attitude of our hearts marks the change from the old creature to the new creature – from children of darkness to children of light. We are called to entirely consecrate ourselves to do the will of God. We need to have Christ in our heart and Christ in our life. By the grace of our Heavenly Father we have found Christ, and through the help of the Holy Spirit we have come to an understanding of God's word. This should bring about the first steps in our journey of consecrating our lives to God. We have to start the process of yielding of our will, then surrendering our will, to the will of God. This will not be easy, it will be a struggle between the old creature and the new developing creature; but we must submit to God's will before we can be renewed. We have to make a conscious decision whether or not we will be set free from the bondage of sin, and share in the glorious liberty of the sons of God; offered by our Heavenly Father, and so allow his will to work in us.

Consecration means not only doing the will of God, but it also includes separation in all the fullness of the word. Separation in the Scriptures is twofold: firstly, separation from whatever is contrary to the mind of God, and secondly, set apart unto God, as revealed in 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18: "...we are the temple of the living God...Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. (NAS) As followers of Christ we have not only to be aware of the truths contained in God's Word but also to be faithful in applying them in our own experience. Our personality has to be permeated by our comprehension of God's character. We have to be careful to heed the instruction of God's Word to be "a good servant of Christ Jesus, {constantly} nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine"...1 Tim 4:6 and "holding forth the Word of life." (Phil 2:16) We not only have to hear the word, we have to be nourished by it and we have to expound it to others

Our Service should therefore be;

Not with eye service That is, not with service rendered only under the eye of the master, or when his eye is fixed on us but this service should be preformed regardless of whether the master is present or not. As followers of Christ we are bound to perform our duty with as much fidelity as though the eye of the employer was always upon us, remembering that though the eye of man may be turned away, that of our Heavenly Father never is.

Not as men-pleasers: Vines expands on this thought to mean "not simply one who is pleasing to men... but one who endeavors to please men and not God" We have to remember that man looks on the outside but God looks at the heart, He looks not only on our actions but also the spirit that we have in our heart

Doing the will of God from the heart:

To be able to do the will of God from the heart we must be fully acquainted and in harmony with our Heavenly Father's will. Complete harmony with our Heavenly Father's law can only be secured by entire harmony with the perfect law of love—supreme love to God and love to the neighbor as to one's self. This law is the full expression of God's will and purpose concerning us. His will is to be our happiness and peace and joy, and is essential to our fitness to live forever in the possession of his favors. The proper attitude, therefore, of every loyal child of God is not only that of submission to the fullest extent of ability, but also of grateful and joyful harmony with it, and delight in obedience to it and in reflection of His will.

This law of love, has as its foundation, justice, the only law which seeks the highest good of and for its subjects, and it is the only law which will ultimately be permitted to rule anywhere in God's kingdom. Now, however, the case is different: Satan is permitted to interfere in the affairs of this world, and for a time the world is permitted to take its own course unhindered by divine intervention, within the bounds of God's plan of the Ages. And in the midst of this state of affairs are the Lord's children, growing and developing.. They find themselves under human laws sometimes approximating the perfect law of God, and sometimes opposed to God's law.

What should we do about these laws when they fall short of the perfect law of God? —Do we resist or do we submit to them? To resist all such laws would place one's self in maybe violent and fruitless opposition to the whole present order of things, and we must remember that even this present order of things is ordained of God as we are told in Rom 13:1 "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God". (NAS) Our Heavenly Father decreed that the time of Gentile rule should continue until the appointed time for Christ to reign in righteousness. Consequently the children of God are counseled to be subject to the powers that be, because the powers that be, although imperfect, are ordained of God to continue for a time. Therefore His will for his children is rather that we suffer injustice than to spend our strength and time in a fruitless effort to interrupt the present order of things.

While this is the case for the Church in its relationship to the world, this should not be the case between Church members. In the Church every member should be a careful student of the perfect law of love, and his/her society should be, so far as possible, a model example of this glorious law. No member of the body of Christ should lord it over another; for, "All ye are brethren, and one is your master, even Christ." (Matt 23:8) Of necessity the present order of things often

places one member of the body of Christ in a measure of subjection to another member of the same body. Examples of this could be in the relationship of master and servant, of parent and child, of husband and wife; however in all these relationships the graces of the spirit of love should be foremost in our minds. Our daily walk and conversation in all the little things of life, should be aimed at letting our "light shine before men", as the Lord commanded.--Matt. 5:16.

The Apostle Paul counsels those in authority to remember that they have a Master in heaven, and that there is no respect of person with him; that he regards no distinctions of Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female, because we are all one in Christ. He counsels us to be generous in our dealings, saying, "Give unto your servants that which is just and equal, refrain from threatening", remembering they are children of God. Eph. 6:9; Gal. 3:28; Col. 4:1. Paul has a special message for those of us that have believing masters. In 1 Tim 6:2 we are told - "And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved". With singleness of heart we should render our service as unto the Lord, not as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart, knowing that it will be accepted of the Lord and rewarded by Him.

Formation of Character

There is no disgrace in service, however humble the task may be. Service rendered in the proper spirit is always dignified and noble; and recognition of such service on the part of the master is also a beautiful example of the spirit of Christ., Service however humble is part of the formation of our character to be like our Master, Christ. The supreme example set by our Lord was in the last hours of his human life when at the last supper we are told in John 13:12-17 "And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His

garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. (NAS)

Let us endeavor to have more and more of the mind, the Spirit of God -- to have His Word abide in us richly (John 15:7; Col. 3:16) --- to have and to keep His commandments, that the abiding presence of the Father and the Son may be with us; and that, realizing that the Christ-character and life are definitely being formed in us, the hope of glory may be ours; for our Lord said, Matt 7:21 "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (KJV) How careful then should we be in seeking both to know and to do the will of God? Many indeed will come forth with the plea of their wonderful works, hoping to be admitted into the Kingdom, but only those will be recognized who have done the will of the Lord, and who have no theories or works of their own whereof to boast.

Paul continues on in the chapter giving more insight into the reason for his lesson for all Brethren as we read in Eph 6:7-10 'With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. And, masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him **"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might."** (NAS) (RC4/04)

MY LORD AND I

I have a friend so precious, so very dear to me,
He loves me with such tender love, He loves so faithfully.
I could not live apart from Him; I love to feel Him nigh,
And so we dwell together - my Lord and I.

He knows how much I love Him, He knows I love Him well,
But with what love He loveth me my tongue can never tell.
It is an everlasting love, an ever-rich supply,
And so we love each other - my Lord and I

Sometimes I'm faint and weary, He knows that I am weak,
And so He bids me lean on Him, His help to quickly seek.
He leads me in the path of light beneath a heavenly sky,
And so we walk together - my Lord and I.

“THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS”

The Old Testament records the messages of four “major” prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, and of the twelve “minor” prophets, the last of whom was Malachi. These prophets were not philosophers; they did not indulge in abstract discussions about God. They were sent by God. And were ‘spokespersons of God’ delivering messages to the people. They acted as a conscience of both the people and their rulers. The messages they gave were often predictive. In each message there was usually an urgent call to change or redirect the quality or nature of the civil behaviour or practice of the people or the king. In most cases the messages were to make them return to God and His laws. Lofty promises were often included, giving a hope of a brighter future. Interesting to note is that God delivered His messages through specially selected individuals rather than the established priesthood. The priests were comfortable with the status quo created by the monarchs. They may even have helped in creating the acceptable status quo, but it was this that God wanted changed. Obviously the change preached by the prophets developed a resistance or reluctance by the priests to co-operate with the prophets. Many times prophets were persecuted or killed at the instigation of the priests, but prophets were highly respected by the people.

The message given, whether written or oral, is called a prophecy. One type of prophecy foretells a future event. For example, Daniel interpreted the vision of the four beasts; a future predicting extending governments that would create civilizations in the world long before they occurred. Prophecies can also involve morality if moral behaviour has been judged and condemned with disastrous punishment about to occur. Noah preached to the people about their immoral behaviour. This made Noah a prophet. He implored them to change and they had refused. The great flood was the consequence. Prophecies can be motivated – Jeremiah was the priest who went up to Jerusalem to seal the covenant with Nehemiah for the dedication of the rebuilding of the Temple. This was the beginning of the change and restoration from a laid waste condition. Prophecies can be Divine judgments – Elijah fought the Baal prophets and was responsible for the massacre on mount Carmel. Here God intervened. Then in turn, Elijah was persecuted and forced to flee and hide. Because prophecies are messages from God, the prophets become intermediaries between God and His people. Messages were given to nations, rulers, tribes, families and individuals. Unfortunately the messages were often in the form of a judgment rebuking wicked ways. Prophecies can be literal, figurative, poetic, symbolic, or typical, depending on the time and period of the message and through whom it was directed.

The office of the prophet was not through the general

priestly descent, although many were from the tribe of Levi. None of the prophets were developed through formal education and training. Prophets were selected by God to deliver and to announce a message to an intended recipient. In Elisha’s case, his appointment as a prophet came through his predecessor, Elijah. From the Biblical records we know many prophets were appointed, often within the same time period. This did not mean that God spoke to them continuously, rather God’s spirit came upon them to reveal the message and steer them to take up the mission to its completion. Seldom were they steered to take on several missions. This steering by God’s spirit was strong; strong enough to create a condition of mind to deliver the message even under the threat of persecution or death.

God used several methods of inspiring and steering the prophets. For one, He used verbal communication through the angels. It was an angel that spoke to Moses in a burning bush to commission Moses to deliver the Hebrews from captivity in Egypt. For another, God used dreams to the prophet or to another person while they slept, and the prophet was given the meaning to interpret the dream. There was a dream of the pharaoh where he saw seven starving and lean cows, and seven well-fed cows grazing in the meadows. A second dream by the same pharaoh saw seven thin ears of grain and seven fat and full ears. The spirit of God steered Joseph to the meaning of the dream, who conveyed it to the pharaoh. In still another method, God used visions to prophets for rulers. Daniel had a vision in a dream of four great beasts that came up from the sea. In the dream, Daniel enquired what these beasts meant and one who stood by in the dream explained that they are the four kings who shall arise out of the earth. Finally, on occasion God used music to give the Divine communication.

The prophets in the Old Testament of the Bible in the Judean stage saw their role and duty to preserve the moral and spiritual values of the people they lived with, whether free or in captivity. They also related the message to the coming biblical civilization which gave them hope. Sometimes they sought to console the people for the predicament they were in. An example is the vision of Ezekiel during the captivity period in Babylon. The vision of the dry bones of Ezekiel was to give the Jews a bright future for those in captivity. Like dry bones which became covered with skin and flesh, Israel exiles would rise up again to restoration and rebirth. When we look at it the first human spokesman for God was obviously Adam, who initially conveyed God’s instructions to his wife, Eve, and to that extent fulfilled the role of a prophet. The first faithful human prophet mentioned was Enoch and the last of these Hebrew prophets was Malachi, previous to John the Baptist, the fore-runner of our Lord. (ZC:1/04)

“JESUS HIMSELF DREW NEAR”

One of the fascinating stories of Jesus in the New Testament is that of the two rather bewildered friends of His who were trudging along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, on the third day after His crucifixion and later after they were joined by the unrecognized stranger. A record of all that was said on that occasion would be indeed a rich one but we may be able to piece together in our minds what some of these things were.



The distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus, according to Luke was 60 stadia, about 7 miles or 11 kilometres. The present location of Emmaus is uncertain, as far as records go, but the distance given would take 2 hours or so at a steady walking pace. We might conjecture that the return journey later in the evening may have been quicker, any tiredness being forgotten in their anxiety to report their experience to the eleven in Jerusalem. Mark in his gospel alludes to this appearance of our Lord after His resurrection but it is left to Luke to provide details.

The full account is in Luke 24, verses 13 to 35, concluding with the return of the two to Jerusalem to tell the eleven and others with them. The timing of this account is the first day of the week, i.e. the day of Jesus' resurrection, and these two friends, as they must have been, like the other disciples and friends of Jesus were still shocked, bewildered, by the events of recent days. How they had come to love Him, what great hopes He had planted in their hearts! Now all appeared lost, their hopes were dashed. We are told the name of one of the two walkers (Cleopas) but the other remains unidentified. Their conversation centred, not surprisingly, on the sad events of the past days. Luke says they talked together and "reasoned", that is, they sought to fathom why things had turned out as they had.

At this point, Luke records the lovely words of the text - "Jesus Himself drew near"! As yet, of course, in the story. He was still the unknown stranger but we note that it was at the time of their deepest need that He joined the two disconsolate friends. Is there a lesson, a reassurance here for us as the Lord's people? Perhaps like the two, we also may not immediately recognize His presence and His aid in our time of need, though later we realize how He has safely

guarded and protected us. How short our memories can be!

We recall how often Israel needed to be reminded of all Jehovah's care and Psalm 78 for example rehearses all His manifold mercies to them. Our blessings and keepings would no doubt also make a goodly list if we stopped to count them.

The stranger evidently kept silent at first, but finally He asked them "What manner of communication are these you have one to another, as you walk, and are sad?" Our Lord knows the feelings and desires of our hearts, as He did of these two, long before we come to Him but He waits for us to see our need, to own up to it, and then if we can to articulate it. At such times, the simplest prayer, even the prayer of desperation and what faith remains, can be eloquent. Two such prayers are recorded in the New Testament - "God be merciful to me a sinner", and "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief."

In the case of the two walkers, the Lord still unknown to them was drawing them out. How strange, they thought, that He does not know what all Jerusalem is all agog about and they asked Him whether He was a complete stranger and unaware of all the things that had been happening over recent days. Our Lord still wanted to draw them out further and asked - "What things?" So this time they recounted to Him how much they had come to appreciate the character and power of this Jesus of Nazareth in whom they had developed such high hopes - a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. Further, they said, we trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel.

Their words would indicate some familiarity with the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, as we would expect. In this they were not alone, for Luke tells us elsewhere that at the time of Jesus' birth "the people were in expectation, and mused in their hearts whether he (John) were the Christ (Messiah) or not."

The two friends were likely among these expectant ones, so we can imagine their disappointment after finding that He whom they thought was the promised One had been put to death ending all their hopes, or so they thought. But it was now the third day since these events and they had received strange reports that this Jesus of Nazareth was alive and the tomb had been found empty.

What were they to think? Who or what could console them? As yet, they knew not that "Jesus Himself had

drawn near", but now the stranger began to gently chide them for slowness of belief. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" How we would love to have the full text of what Luke has embraced in the one verse (27) "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets. He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." The reference to Moses would include all the five books of the Pentateuch.

Would our Lord have started with the very first hint of God's redemptive purposes centred in the "seed of the woman" (Gen 3:15)? Would He have opened up to them the significance of the offering up of Isaac by his loving faithful father, an account no doubt well known to them and fulfilled in the Lord's own words in John 3:16? Would He have gone on to show how the various offerings and sacrifices of the Law Covenant foreshadowed Messiah, the perfect Lamb of God?

Would the wonderful words of Isaiah 53 have been opened up for these two friends, or the prophetic words of the Psalmist? There is so much more in the Old Testament not only of His first advent but also of His second and the setting up of His kingdom of righteousness and restitution though His focus would no doubt be on the more immediate events and the call to discipleship. Would He have reminded them of His own loving words in the pre-crucifixion discourses recorded by John?

Though we do not have our Lord's words from what must have been a wonderful and intimate discourse, we are blessed particularly at this end of the age to have the inspired apostles and evangelists' words and records to illuminate both the Old and New Testament scriptures, and the Holy Spirit to guide our understanding.

On arrival at Emmaus, the two pressed Jesus to stay and sup with them and here they recognized Him when He took bread and blessed it as was His custom. "Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him and He vanished from their sight. "And they said one to another. Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures." When we first came to an understanding of the love of God and later of the call to discipleship, did our hearts "burn within us"!

Does His word still touch our hearts? Some portions, particularly words of our Lord, including His parables, still move us each time we read them and again realize the breadth and length and height of the love of God and the wideness of His mercy in Christ Jesus.

In recent times we have heard much of the requirements of the Christian walk, that is the Christian way of daily life. But how important is the company we keep. The 'Master promised all His followers - "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age."

These are often thought of in group terms, and correctly so, but like so many of His promises, they may be taken personally and individually, for He is the Friend indeed, the good companion of each and every one of the lonely or the troubled. The promise still stands - "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you. (James 4:8) and for us is fulfilled in Christ. Especially in time of trouble, in times of perplexity or loneliness, let us remember these of His promises and that inherent in the account of the two walkers to Emmaus. "Jesus Himself drew near" is the experience and testimony of so many of the Lord's people; it can and will be ours also as we trust Him.

SO VERY NEAR

"JESUS Himself drew near," I saw Him not--
Because my eyes were dim, my heart was sad,
When He through faith revealed Himself to me.
My heart o'erflowed with love, it made me glad.

"Jesus Himself drew near," just at the time--
I needed most His presence and His aid;
He came to strengthen me, my soul to cheer;
He came to tell me not to be afraid.

"Jesus Himself drew near"; He came Himself--
To heal my broken heart, my sin-sick soul,
I heard Him say, "Come unto Me, find rest,
For I have heal'd thee, cleans'd thee, made thee whole."

"Jesus Himself drew near," when sorrow came;
He brought such love, and sympathy divine,
The trial seemed to lose its keenest sting,
Into the wound He pour'd His "oil and wine."

"Jesus Himself drew near"; so very near,
So close, that He is always within call;
Dear Lord abide, on earth my portion be,
In Heaven my Everlasting "All in all."

BSH 184

IN BRIEF

LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

When one enrolls in a school of secular learning, he or she is required to study, and a Bible Student must do the same. We all need to become good "Bereans" (Acts 17:11). Our entry and work in the "school of Christ" may be seen in Romans 12:1-3. Verse 1 is our enrolment, verse 2 shows how we must apply ourselves – not allowing distracting influences to affect us. Verse 3 emphasises the need of humility, teachableness; we must not think we know more than our teacher.

We must keep our minds set on the lessons before us, anxious to know what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God for us. We must learn to make mistakes "stepping stones" to better things; some instructors have expressed the belief that for a student to make a mistake and be corrected is the best way of having the point impressed. Some one has said, Peter did not become the great man of God he was through sterling character, but through denial of his Master. Not until anyone has failed once can he or she learn true humility.

We all have to see ourselves for what we really are before we can become good scholars in the school of Christ. We may think of John Mark who deserted Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey. To his credit he still continued in the Christian way, but when Paul and Barnabas were ready again to begin a missionary journey, and Mark wanted to go, Paul did not trust him and refused his service. It was left to Barnabas to give Mark another chance to prove himself. Some 15 years later when Paul was about to finish his earthly course he sent for Mark stating that he considered him profitable for carrying on his ministry.

It is a nice story to encourage us to continue on when we make a mistake, as well as to show the value of giving one who has failed another chance. In this day of rush and bustle we need to "study to be quiet". Glittering TV's, blaring radios, and rowdy behaviour are no accompaniment for the Bible Student. A mature Christian is never rowdy; the more of the Holy Spirit that flows in, the quieter the demeanour. The more mature a Christian grows, the more restful his ministry. We have a wise Instructor, and He is very patient. He does not look for too much too soon, but He corrects judiciously.

In music, the better trained the ear, the quicker discordant notes are detected. As we progress in the School of Christ, we will learn the things the Lord loves, and detect the things He hates. Remember our training – "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." We will never reach perfection in the flesh, but nothing less than perfection will ever satisfy us. That is why so often we "groan within ourselves" waiting for the full redemption of our body in the resurrection. (Rom 8:23)

OUR MOMENTS AND OUR DAYS

God bestows many blessings on all mankind; the five senses - touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing are wonderful provisions. We have also been given something else that is vitally important - the element of time. It does not register on any of the senses; we cannot feel, taste, touch, see or hear it, but it is something that blesses us if we use it wisely, and acts against us if we waste it. It is good, like the Psalmist, to ask God to teach us to number our days wisely, to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

The mad rush of our days, with the desire to get rich quick, and nearly everyone trying to do more than one thing at a time, is very nerve-racking, with the result that we have numbers of people in hospitals and institutions with mental disorders. In the home, there can be the problem of some listening to radio or watching TV, and trying to hold conversation at the same time; certainly nothing is gained in this way. Solomon told us that there is a time for everything; timing our speaking is important, there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

Christians should seek to REDEEM time for the important ministry in God's service; some interests can be sacrificed so that we may serve Him better. We must continue to recognize the obligations to wives, husbands, children, etc, for they that do not provide for their own households are "worse than infidels"; but some of OUR OWN earthly comforts and pleasures should be given up for more important things. Today it seems hard to get enough time, and Christians need to learn to apply their hearts unto wisdom. But in whatever way we redeem time, it must be OUR OWN, we are not to deprive others of their just right to our time.

Paul in his day wrote that "the time is short" - today time is really short, so "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation... I will pay my vows unto the Lord NOW". Procrastination is the thief of time; yesterday will never return, so let us do it TODAY, let us look ahead and plan so that we do not waste our time.

**Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone--
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.**

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LOVE IS ...THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

1 Corinthians Chapter 13 is one of the most widely read chapters in the Bible. It has been read at marriage ceremonies (including the marriage ceremony of at least one member of the British royal family), child dedication services, baptism services, and funerals.

Even when taken in isolation the words are lovely and comforting and most appropriate for each of the ceremonies listed above. However their meaning is enhanced when considered in the overall context of Paul's letter.

It is apparent that the church at Corinth had written to Paul asking for guidance regarding four issues - Chapter 7:1 reads "*Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me ...*". The four issues were:

- marriage (Chapter 7)
- "*Now as touching things offered unto idols ...*" (Chapter 8:1).
- "*Now concerning spiritual (gifts) ...*" (Chapter 12:1)
- "*Now concerning the collection for the saints...*" (Chapter 16:1)

This overview of Paul's letter shows that Chapter 13 is part of Paul's reply regarding the role of spiritual gifts. The fact that his exposition occupies four chapters of our Bible indicates that a correct understanding of the role of the gifts was very important in the early church.

The miracles that were performed in early times were very influential. We read of Jesus "*...when he was in Jerusalem ... many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did*". (John 2:23)

Likewise on the day of Pentecost - "*And they ... began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven ... and (they) were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language...and they were all amazed and marvelled*". (Acts 2 : 4 - 7)

The healing of a man who had been lame from birth was equally spectacular - to see him immediately receive strength such that he was able to "*leap and walk and praise God*" filled the people "*with wonder and amazement*" (Acts 3 : 1 - 11). Later the people "*...gave heed unto the things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did, ...*". (Acts 8:5 - 7).

Notwithstanding the power and spectacle of the gifts that enabled the apostles to perform miracles, Paul declares that he would show unto them "*a more excellent way*" (Chap. 12:31) which is the development of love.

How excellent then must be the quality of love!

The fact that the development of love is "*more*

excellent" than the miraculous gifts does not mean that the gifts were not necessary. On the contrary, the gifts were essential to establish the church, especially amongst the "*Gentiles*" (1 Cor. 12:2). As he also explained to the Ephesians. "*And he gave some apostles, and some prophets ...some evangelists and some... pastors and teachers, For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ*". (Eph. 4 : 11 - 12). Not all of these roles required spectacular and publicly visible gifts, but nevertheless they required "special talents" that were equivalent to gifts - "*For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?*" (1Cor. 4:7)

Coveting the best gifts

In the King James Version, 1 Cor 12 : 31 reads "*but covet earnestly the best gifts and yet I show unto you a more excellent way*". As written, this verse exhorts the brethren to "*covet earnestly the best gifts*", the inference being that some gifts were better than others ("best" being the Greek "*kreitton*" which Dr Strong says means "stronger, that is figuratively better, ..."). However this exhortation is inconsistent with Paul's explanation in verses 23 - 25 where he says that "*those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour ...*". The lesson in those verses is that all members are necessary and are to be given the same honour.

The Diaglott translates verse 31 "*but you earnestly desire the more eminent gifts; and yet a much more excellent way I point out to you*". That translation is harmonious with verses 23 - 25, and shows that the quality of love that Paul is about to expound in the next chapter is superior to all miraculous gifts. The New International Version contains a footnote that supports the Diaglott translation. While the translations give different inflections, the overall message of verse 31 is clear - there is "*a more excellent way*" than the gifts and Chapter 13 goes on to describe that more excellent way.

A more excellent way

It is also profitable to reflect on why the apostle calls it "*a more excellent way*". Strong's Concordance confirms that these English words accurately convey the meaning of the Greek; a 'way' (path or road) that is superior to all others.

A path or road is a means of going somewhere; in the figurative sense we use the expression today to refer to "achieving an objective" - that objective was the ministry of the Gospel and the edifying of the body of Christ. The gifts were powerful and many were spectacular, but the apostle tells the Corinthians that the development and manifestation of the fruit of love is an even more powerful means of achieving that objective.

God willing, subsequent articles will examine each of the qualities of this "*more excellent way*".