

# COUNSEL

**WAS GOD INCARNATE ONE OF US?**

**LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES—LAODICEA**

**THE PLURALITY OF ELDERS**

**HEZEKIAH (PART 4)**

**BUT GOD**

**THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS**

**PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 16**

**THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY: COMMITMENT OR CONVENIENCE?**

*May—June 2007*

# The Plurality of Elders

From the earliest days of the church the Lord ordained that each local assembly would be under the care of elders. The first mention of such a group is found in Acts 11:30, where elders were responsible in handling a matter of financial aid given to believers. Likewise, one of the first things Paul and Barnabas did at the close of their first missionary journey was establish elders in every church (Acts 14:23). This pattern continued throughout the early days. For a time the elders were always connected with the apostles, for example they are linked in Acts 15 and 16. But as things developed and the temporary role of the apostles became evident, it was elders in local churches who became responsible for the flock.

There are several English words used to translate two Greek words (*episkopos* and *presbuteros*) referring to elders. The English words are elder, referring to spiritual maturity, overseer (or bishop), referring to the responsibility to watch and shepherd, emphasizing the care of the flock. There is another expression used in Hebrews 13 which, strictly speaking, is not a translation of the two Greek words, but nonetheless appears to refer to elders work. It is the expression "*them that have the rule over you*" (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24).

We should always keep in mind that this arrangement of governing God's people is not a man-made one. It was not simply a clever idea of the apostles or early church, but was ordained of God and is His will. Titus 1:5, for example, points out that elders were to be appointed in every city. This teaches us that elders were

intended for every church, in every time, in every place. Changing times and cultures do not negate this divine order.

One of the striking things about elders is that they are always referred to in the plural in the New Testament. There is never a case of a single elder. In fact, when men did arise to act in a singular way it was generally a case of trouble, although there are cases when trouble makers came in twos. Read 1 Timothy for some examples.

The plurality of elders has proven to be a tremendous safeguard in the care of God's people. It is one practical outworking of the truth of Proverbs 24:6 "*...in multitude of counselors there is safety.*" Men of different maturity, experience, temperament and personality acting together can bring about a care of God's people that is not subject to unwarranted extreme behaviour. The plurality of elders provides balance among the oversight in the care of the flock.

It is folly to assume that one man, no matter how gifted, can provide better care for the flock than a plurality. Often elders feel inadequate for the task to which they have been called. They feel the lack of time, of knowledge, of experience, of ability. Critical saints often compound their sense of failure. At times like these, there is a temptation to change God's order of things. Many assemblies have fallen prey to engaging one full-time elder to do all or most of the spiritual shepherding work. Such individuals became charismatic leaders among God's people and seem to do a far better job than what is assumed to be untrained

part-timers. However, trouble soon arises.

The full-time elder can develop a superiority about him. There are no real practical controls placed on his ministry. Any who challenge are often disregarded as being jealous or simply incompetent. Other people's gifts are soon stifled as they are seen as second class compared to the full-time man.

Finances soon become an issue. Financial commitments to the full-time man take away from support of itinerant workers, foreign missionaries and other needs of the assembly. Financial tension starts to eat away at the fellowship.

The flock is now exposed and has taken on a great risk. Should the full time man depart from the faith or leave for another place, the flock is left in the lurch and must look for a replacement. A plurality of elders prevents this catastrophe.

Elders everywhere need to be committed to the divine order of things. They need to keep on despite feelings of failure and stay with God's Word. Saints should be very careful about criticizing oversight. They may not be perfect, but they are God's men for the moment. Men with exceptional gift should turn their attention to itinerant ministry and help a variety of assemblies. Visits by itinerant workers can be a tremendous help in the assembly.

Elders, never forget, "*when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*" (1 Pet. 5:4).

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# COUNSEL

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# Letters to the Seven Churches—Laodicea

## Revelation 3:14-22

*“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”*

The city of Laodicea lay around 50 miles south-east of Philadelphia and almost due east of Ephesus, so that by the time the messenger carrying the letters arrived there he was just about back opposite to where he had started at Ephesus. It was quite near to Colossae and Hieropolis and, situated in the stunning Lycus River valley, had superb views of the nearby mountains capped with those permanent calcium deposits which looked exactly like snow. In the lush meadows of the valley floor grazed the area's famous black sheep with their wonderful glossy fleece which was utilized in the making of wool, woven garments and especially, of course, the “must have” black garments beloved of the fashion industry of the day. Even today the manufacture of clothing and carpets flourishes in the area. The city itself was an architectural gem and was also known for its banking and exchange facilities. Medical science flourished and world-renowned eyesalve and ear ointments were made there from the calcium deposits on the mountains. Destroyed more than once by the extensive earthquakes of the region the city was rebuilt on each occasion from its own resources without the necessity of appeals to Rome for material aid or funds.

However, the city was vulnerable militarily as it had no internal water supply. Its water was piped from mountain springs some six miles

away which meant that by the time it had run through the often ill-maintained aquaduct system and reached the city it had lost its freshness and was described as being virtually undrinkable, indeed “lukewarm”.

Of the seven churches chosen to receive letters from the risen Lord this is the only one of which nothing good is commended but much is condemned. It is therefore perhaps a fitting representation of what today, in many places, passes for a New Testament church.

Where the Lord  
is not first in the  
thinking of His  
people, Laodicean  
problems are  
inevitable.

## Introduction, v. 14

The name “Laodicea” is capable of a number of different translations but the emphasis is on the meaning of the word *laos*, i.e., “the people”. So we may assume that the church reflected the ideal of the city that “people come first”. We recall in Haggai 1 that the people who had returned from Babylon had, after initial enthusiasm, grown lukewarm in their efforts to rebuild the temple.

God complained that His house lay waste while the people put themselves, and the unnecessary beautification of their own houses, first. A similar situation prevailed in Laodicea. Where the Lord is not first in the thinking of His people, Laodicean problems are inevitable. The introduction to the letter does give the Lord first place as it describes Him in a threefold manner: i) *"the Amen"*; ii) *"the faithful and true witness"*; iii) *"the beginning of the creation of God."* The exclamation *"Amen"* means "it is true" or "so be it", and as such it suggests the deity and power of the Lord Jesus to bring to pass all His purposes in spite of the opposition of the enemy or the debility of His people. He is the God of the Amen (truth), see Isaiah 65:16. He is also *"the faithful and true witness"* and this would suggest His humanity and His faithfulness here on earth. He articulated to men, in words easy to be understood, His own relationship with the Father and their need of repentance for salvation. He is also *"the beginning of the creation of God."* This would indicate that He is the Head of all creation by virtue of the unsalable fact that He created all things and *"without Him was not anything made."* This introduction then is a convincing reminder to the Laodicean church of the real position of the One they had relegated to a low position in their thinking and service, and serves as a reminder to individuals and churches today that in all things He must have the pre-eminence.

### Commendations

There is none! The casual visitor to this church may have been able to identify some items for approval but the Lord in His review does not mention any. If the motivation is not right, then nothing is right. The

church members may have thought that judgment to be unfair but the reality is that the Lord of the churches does not commend any of their works though He knows them well.

### Condemnations, vv. 15-17

The Lord fully knows their works but does not detail them. He describes their condition as being *"neither cold nor hot."* The water that was available in the mountains nearby was icy cold and therefore most refreshing to drink or to bathe in during the very hot summer months. Water may also be heated to boiling point and is then good for washing

They reckoned they were *"rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing"*. Yet, said the Lord, *"thou knowest not . . ."*. We recall verse 15, *"I know"*, and contrast it with verse 17, *"thou knowest not"*. There was a blindness on the part of the believers as to their own condition but the Lord saw it very clearly and His view was that they were *"wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked"*. It is difficult to imagine how one could be all these things yet not know it...but such was the case. There was no doubt but that they were materially rich and were accumulating this world's goods but

Today we are in Laodicean conditions but there is a way back and that involves each individual believer in getting himself right with God.

clothes and vessels. Refreshment and cleanliness may be the thoughts here. On the other hand, some commentators see the cold water referred to as indicating a coldness in spiritual things, i.e., not saved, having no spiritual life and the hot water as one being *"on fire"* for the Lord. With either interpretation (and I prefer the former) lukewarmness is not acceptable. Indeed it is nauseating and fit only to be spued out of the mouth. The saints here refreshed no one and their lives were not as holy as they should have been. There was no enthusiasm for the things of God. This condition was wholly inappropriate and totally unacceptable and therefore the Lord speaks to them very strongly indeed. However, the self-assessment of the saints concerning their own spiritual and natural conditions was rather rosy.

to equate that with the pleasure of the Lord in their lives was just plain wrong. Indeed, their spiritual condition could not have been worse and the emotive words used to describe it need no exposition. There is still the possibility today that many believers and some assemblies may be prone to this same problem. We perhaps think that we are doing all right but in reality our condition is intolerable and an insult to the grace of God of which we have so freely tasted. Everybody else can see where we are but we continue to turn a blind eye. We, like the Laodiceans, need counselling and that is what the next few verses helpfully provide.

### Instructions, vv. 18-20

Getting things right with God was not going to be accomplished on the cheap nor without effort. The Lord





advises them to “buy” from Him. He immediately points out that contrary to their own assessment they do **not** have everything and there are at least three things they need to be restored. They need gold, they need white raiment and they need eyesalve. One might ask that as they were bankrupt spiritually how could they buy anything? God's gifts come freely through His grace but we need “to buy into them” in commitment. Apparently the word here used for “buy” is not so much to do with buying and selling but has more to do with trading and doing business. It involved exchanging the lesser for the greater. The first thing they needed was “gold tried in the fire.” That is, heavenly gold; cleansed of all earthly dross. They needed to understand that where their treasure was there would their hearts be also. They needed white raiment. The fashionable raiment of Laodicea was black but white is the colour of heaven. Clothed with this white raiment of righteousness it would be evident to all that they were different from their black-clad neighbours and were practicing good works which could not be spoken against. Finally, they needed eyesalve. As far as spiritual sight was concerned their eyes had been

blinded but a continuing application of heavenly eyesalve would enable them to see things the way God sees them. These spiritual necessities are available to us through the habitual reading of God's Word on a daily basis. Otherwise we will not properly be able to discriminate between the dangers of materialism and the opportunities of grace.

Further, the Lord is gracious in explaining His apparently hard words. He surely does “love” them (v. 19). He “rebukes” them in order to help them identify their faults and “chastens” so as to guide them as to future behavior. He wants them to “be zealous” (hot) and to repent. If they do so, all will be well but should they not then testimony for God is

munion will ensue and God will be glorified and the individual believer richly blessed and so enabled to bless others also.

### Conclusions, vv. 21-22

To the overcomer, that is to any who do let Him in, is given perhaps the greatest incentive of all in these letters. He will be blessed in sitting with Christ on His throne during the millennial reign. Can there possibly be any higher honor than this? Similarly, Christ's reward for His victory at Calvary was to sit down in His Father's throne and now poor sinners such as we may share such glory. The hymnwriter put it this way, “Why should I share in His reward? I cannot give an answer!” Commenting on the matter Trench

We perhaps think that we are doing  
all right but in reality our condition is  
intolerable and an insult to the grace of  
God of which we have so freely tasted.

lost and Christ's name dishonored. Verse 20 spells out for us the road to recovery. It describes the Lord shut outside yet patiently standing and knocking in order to regain entrance into one's life. He who is the possessor of so many keys to so many doors will not force an entrance. The individual believer must be willing to invite Him in. In fact it takes only one to respond and to open the door so that the whole church may benefit. The Lord highly values individual devotion and commitment to Himself and especially so in these days of departure from truth. Once the heart's door is opened then a blessed time of fellowship and com-

says, “The highest place is with the reach of the lowest saint.” The final word of encouragement is from the experience of the Lord Himself as He acted alone on the behalf of others, “Even as I overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne”. All who have ears to hear are exhorted to do so! Today we are in Laodicean conditions but there is a way back and that involves each individual believer in getting himself right with God. We should go for it!

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**Roy Hill**  
Bristol, UK

# BUT GOD

I know not, but God knows;  
Oh, blessed rest from fear!  
All my unfolding days  
To Him are plain and clear.  
Each anxious puzzled “why?”  
From doubt or dread that grows,  
Finds answer in this thought:  
I know not, but He knows.

I cannot, but God can;  
Oh, balm for all my care!  
The burden that I drop  
His hand will lift and bear.  
Though eagle pinions tire,  
I walk where once I ran,  
This is my strength to know  
I cannot, but He can.

I see not, but God sees;  
Oh, all sufficient light!  
My dark and hidden way  
To Him is always bright.  
My strained and peering eyes  
May close in restful ease,  
And I in peace may sleep;  
I see not, but He sees.

— Annie Johnson Flint





Qumran Caves where Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

# The Dead Sea Scrolls

**D**uring the last three centuries B.C., and at least the first century A.D., a group of people historically known as the Qumran lived in remote desert areas, generally northwest of the Dead Sea, but close to that body of water. The Qumran were a sect of Israelites who were noted for their intense religious fervor. They were very devoted to Scripture, which we now possess as the Old Testament. Among the Qumran were many scribes, who meticulously copied ancient Scripture, and related manuscripts, onto leather scrolls (the books of their day). These copies were intended, apparently, for distribution, study, and use among the Qumran, and neighboring peoples.

The area where the Qumran lived has been populated, over more recent centuries, by Bedouin shepherds. Approximately 70 years ago, as the story goes, a goat belonging to a Bedouin wandered away from its master. The Bedouin shepherd went looking for the goat, and his search

took him some distance from his camp. His urgency to find the animal was apparently quite great. Ultimately, still in quest of his goat, he entered one of the many limestone caves in the area that overlooks the Dead Sea. Deep within the cave he came upon a cache of earthen pots, or bottles, that proved to be typical of the Qumran. Within these containers were found scrolls that had been copied and secreted away—evidently with the intention of long-term preservation—by the Qumran.

Other caves were explored, and many more such manuscripts were found that had been stored away for many centuries. Over 15,000 manuscripts and fragments have been gathered from these cache caves. Among those are more than 500

Scripture texts, and approximately 230 copies of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. The Scripture copies include every book of the Old Testament, except Esther.

Prior to the finding of these scrolls, the most ancient Old Testament Scripture texts available to scholars of the present were known as the Masoretic Text. The English language translations, which we hold and enjoy as our best copies of Old Testament texts, were derived from the Masoretic.

Reliably translated Scripture,  
which the Dead Sea Scrolls reaffirm,  
is the foundation of our faith.

However, the Dead Sea Scrolls proved to originate from a period about 1,000 years before the Masoretic; and were copied during an era approximately contemporary with our Lord's own ministry on earth. The Lord, of course, quoted several times from the Old





Testament; and the New Testament is rife with quotes and references from the Old. These quotations are such as to leave the Bible student in no doubt of the fact that the Old and the New Testament are linked; and that combined they are the inspired Word of God.

Moreover, scholars carefully compared the Dead Sea Scrolls with the Masoretic text, and found a startling uniformity between the two. Even when Dead Sea Scroll scriptures are re-translated from the Hebrew to English, by capable modern scholars, it is found that the translated product is almost word-for-word consistent with the Old Testament English language texts of the King James Version, upon which our faith and understanding of the mind of God generally rests. Often, the re-translated script is word-for-word consistent with our Bibles. Even where some words may differ, the meaning of the passage is always consistent. This is not only startling, but it is a strong reaffirmation of the accuracy and the authenticity of the Scriptures which we hold dear, in our own language.

Today, there are many who call themselves “Christian” who are

...When Dead Sea Scroll scriptures are re-translated from the Hebrew to English ... the translated product is almost word-for-word consistent with the Old Testament English language texts of the King James Version...

attacking the true Word of God. Both its substance and its meaning are being called into question. There is a plethora of new “translations,” many of which are nothing more nor less than perversions of inspired Scripture. It is amazing that so many people are taken in by modern books, translations, and preachings which directly challenge true Scripture. The generations of the recent past had no difficulty understanding, and placing their faith in, the English language text which has served the western world so well over recent centuries. Our modern generation professes a high level of education and understanding. Yet it is remarkable that there seems now, in the minds of many, to be a need for new translations and contemporary deviations from Scripture, which were never felt to be necessary, so far as our forefathers of the past few generations were concerned. If

our faithful forefathers did not need new translations, why do we need them? The lust for that which is not consistent with reliable Scripture is dangerous, and represents an inappropriate appetite.

Reliably translated Scripture, which the Dead Sea Scrolls reaffirm, is the foundation of our faith. If that foundation is questioned, or changed, or undermined by heresy, we lose the very base upon which our faith rests. We are exhorted to earnestly contend for the faith, and for the truth, which the Lord has so graciously given us. Let us approach any “new” manuscripts or ideas with a large dose of spiritual discernment; and embrace only that which is clearly consistent with the inspired Word of God, which we know to be basically accurate.

This writer does not claim any unique knowledge of the Dead Sea Scrolls, or of classical languages, or of historic manuscripts. The facts we present here are readily available from the State of Israel, certain well-known museums, and widely published contemporary journals. Our simple point is that the Lord has apparently graciously allowed modern man to discover the Dead Sea Scrolls as a means of reaffirming the absolute reliability of Scripture, which has been traditionally held as authentic by the Christian community for many generations. Let us hold to the truth, which the Lord has given us, which He quoted Himself, and which is consistent with that which the apostles taught to the early church.

---

**Doug Kazen**  
*Kirkland, Washington*

*“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberal-ity unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me. Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia. And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go. For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit. But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries. Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren. As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.” (1 Cor. 16:1-12)*

# Practical Lessons

## from 1 Corinthians 16

### Funds, Future Plans, and Fellow Servants

**F**ollowing the spiritually weighty matters of chapter 15, the Apostle Paul immediately brings us down to earth, not only in 15:58 but with the many personal and practical items mentioned in this final chapter of 1 Corinthians. The first matter involves the collection for the poor at Jerusalem (vv. 1-4), then details of his purposed visit (vv. 5-9), and finally commendations, exhortations, salutations, warning, and a closing benediction (vv. 10-24).

*“The chapter provides an illustration of the outworking of the great spiritual reality affirmed in 1:9 —namely, that believers are called ‘into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.’” (S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1259.)*

#### Directions about the offering (16:1-4)

In view of many needy saints in Jerusalem, this first section of the chapter centers on the offering that was to be taken by the Corinthian assembly for these poverty-stricken believers. What brought about their need? The precise cause is not known. Some have suggested that it was brought about by famine (Acts 11:28-30). Others feel that their material poverty may have resulted because of their testimony to Christ, causing them to be shunned, ostracized, and boycotted by their unbelieving loved ones, friends, and countrymen. This undoubtedly

brought many pressures to bear, including economic problems through the loss of jobs and businesses, all designed to try and force such to renounce their faith in Christ. Still others think it was caused, in part at least, by the experiments of Acts 2:44-45.

The words *“now concerning”* (v. 1) indicate that the subject of the collection for these needy saints had been mentioned in the Corinthians’ letter to Paul (1 Cor. 7:1). As he had instructed the churches in Galatia regarding this very matter, so now he instructs and exhorts the Corinthians to respond in the same manner.

Although the instructions of verse 2 had to do with this specific collection, there are three basic principles set forth which are of abiding value for all believers in this church age. They were to give:

1. Periodically (*“the first day of the week”*). Sunday, or the first day of the week, was the day believers met for worship. This is the earliest mention of this fact (see Acts 20:7), and it is strongly evident that believers no longer observed the Sabbath or seventh day as something they had to do as under the law.

2. Personally (*“let every one of you lay by him in store”*). All were to have a share in this spiritual sacrifice of their substance, the words *“by him”*



possibly being a reference to the individual home. This principle supplies still another—namely, that the Lord's work should be supported by the Lord's people.

3. Proportionately (*"as God hath prospered him"*). The closing words of verse 2 reveal that Paul wanted this matter taken care of before he arrived, thereby avoiding last minute pressure regarding the collection (see 2 Cor. 9:5). In the matter of Christian giving there should always be serious and thoughtful preparation of heart and mind (see Acts 11:29).

What a difference it would make if these basic principles were applied to today's churches!

Verses 3-4 call attention to the care that should be taken in the handling of church funds. It was left up to the local assembly as to who would carry the money to Jerusalem. When they chose these messengers, Paul said he would write letters to take with them, probably as an introduction to the Jerusalem saints whom they knew. If it was decided that it would be best for the apostle to also make the journey, then he says, *"they shall go with me,"* his words probably expressing his authority in the matter (see Rom. 15:25). Some think the words, *"if it be meet"* (v. 4), refer to the size of the gift, yet such a thought seems utterly unworthy of Paul as a guiding principle in the matter.

### **Disclosures about future plans (16:5-9)**

Paul's Anticipation (vv. 5-8). The apostle wanted to spend time with the Corinthians, so he planned to travel through Macedonia first rather than go immediately to Corinth. This resulted in a change of plans, for which he was later criticized (see

2 Cor. 1:15-17). The end of verse 6 in no way implies the idea of the Corinthians giving money to him (see 1 Cor. 9:14-15). Paul never made any pleas for money for himself, either to the Corinthians or to any other believers. He was already at Ephesus when he wrote and planned to winter there (v. 8).

Paul's Attitude (v. 7). He always planned his pathway with a view to God's will, consistently recognizing a will above his own (see Phil. 2:19, 24). It is not wrong to make plans; this is part of life. The wrong comes in when we do not plan subject to God's will.

## **He always planned his pathway with a view to God's will, consistently recognizing a will above his own.**

Paul's Advantage (v. 9a). The apostle speaks of having a splendid opportunity of witness in Ephesus (see 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3).

Paul's Adversaries (v. 9b). Where there are great opportunities there are generally great adversaries. So it was in Ephesus, and this may have been a motive for his staying on through the winter (see 15:32; Acts 19).

Verse 9 is certainly the unchanging summation of Christian service.

### **Details about Timothy and Apollos (16:10-12)**

Timothy (vv. 10-11). He might have difficulty getting to Corinth (see 4:17; Acts 19:22), but Paul states that Timothy might visit them, and if so, he wanted him to be with them without any fear. He was still young and evidently on the timid side (see

1 Tim. 4:12; 5:21-23; 2 Tim. 1:6-8; 2:1, 3, 15; 4:1-2). Nevertheless, he was a faithful servant of Christ, and Paul could hardly have paid him a higher compliment than the one at the end of verse 10, *"for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do."* The brethren were not to look down on him, but rather do all they could to help him on his way, since Paul was looking forward to seeing him again with the brethren.

Apollos (v. 12). Though urged by Paul to visit Corinth, the gifted Apollos did not feel that it was God's will to do so at that time. Rather, he would visit Corinth when it was convenient.

To Paul, this brother was a respected fellow servant, not a rival, and he recognized that Apollos' gifts would be beneficial to the Corinthians, such an attitude revealing the great character that Paul was. This verse also reveals to us something of the love and respect that prevailed among the servants of Christ at that time, as well as the liberty of service that they had. Not even Paul had the authority to tell Apollos what to do (see Rom. 14:4).

Reflecting on 1 Corinthians 16:1-12, W. Graham Scroggie has stated: "How we handle money is a fair test of our Christianity."

To be continued.

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# Hezekiah Part 4

## 2 Chronicles 31

Taking the divine comment upon the progress made thus far in the revival initiated by Hezekiah, chapter 29:35 says, *“So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order”*; then in chapter 30:26 relative to the celebration of the Passover we read, *“Since the time of Solomon the son of David King of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.”*

In thinking of those steps we might notice that in chapter 29 the focus is upon the *“house of the Lord”*, so in verse 15 reference is made to cleansing the temple. When we come in to chapter 30, though the temple is still to the fore, there is nevertheless an emphasis now upon *“the city”*, so in verse 13-14 we read about the removal of the altars that were in Jerusalem. But when we come into chapter 31 the circle of blessing widens out further, the people are leaving Jerusalem and moving out into the kingdom, or as verse 1 expresses it, their own cities. We see a similar progress of thought in the content of the three books that follow 2 Chronicles. In Ezra the focus is upon the house of God, in Nehemiah on the city, while in Esther it is upon the kingdom, and we should notice that whether thinking of the days of Hezekiah, or those later three books, in each case the blessing began at the house of the Lord, the place where God had been pleased to set His name, and then moves out into the city and the kingdom. Ideally that is how it should be in regard to assembly testimony.

Returning to the days of Hezekiah, in chapter 29 matters had been set in order relative to the service of the house, in chapter 30 the king was concerned to see a return to the old paths, how it was in the days of Solomon, the man who built the temple. But having attained that, still Hezekiah would not rest, but in chapter 31 he is exercised about the continuance and maintenance of the testimony, something that should surely be of concern to the people of God in every age.

As chapter 30 opens the celebration of the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread have concluded and verse 1 says, *“Now when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake*

are touched by it, practical changes that have taken place in consequence of it?

In their response they removed everything from their lives that was inconsistent with their remembrance of the deliverance from Egypt. The rejection of those things was total, the images, altars, groves were *“utterly destroyed”*. Has that been so in regard to the practical details of our life, or are there things that really belong to Egypt that we are still holding on to? (See Col. 3:5 and 1 Jn. 5:21).

Now what steps were taken with a view to the maintenance of the temple service? We shall think first of what Hezekiah did, and then what the people did.

In their response they removed everything from their lives that was inconsistent with their remembrance of the deliverance from Egypt.

*the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their own cities.”*

The celebration of the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread had a very practical affect on them. They did not leave as they arrived. What of the Lord's Supper? Is there any evidence in our lives that we

### What Hezekiah did

(1) Appointing the courses of the priesthood—see verse 2. Three things seem to stand out here relative to the priesthood. First attention was given to the order of the priests and Levites, and in this appointment Hezekiah no doubt followed the pattern of 1 Chronicles 23-26. Next there was a recognition of distinctive spheres of service. Finally there was an emphasis upon giving God His portion, suggested by the burnt offerings, and also an emphasis on fellowship, suggested by the peace offerings.



These are instructive details that readily find an application when we come to think of conditions relative to the assembly. Read through 1 Corinthians 10-11 where we might suggest these matters are dealt with in reverse order, chapter 10 has something to tell us about fellowship; 1 Corinthians 11 about giving the Lord His portion; 1 Corinthians 12 about the recognition of gifts; 1 Corinthians 13-14 about doing things in order.

(2) Appointing the king's portion—see verse 3. From his own resources he provided for the service of the house, and notice how it embraces what was daily, weekly, monthly and annual according to the directions of Numbers 28. In his action he was not only setting a practical example to the people but he also did that before he instructs the people regarding their responsibility in verse 4.

(3) Commanding the people—see verse 4. He reminded them of their responsibility to support the servants of the Lord, as recorded in Numbers 18:8-24. It surely would remind us of Galatians 6:6 and our own duty in this, *"Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things"*.

(4) Administering the tithes—see verses 11-19. It is delightful to see how organized and open this was, both in the gathering and the distribution of the tithes. Those who had responsibility in these matters are specifically named. In verse 16 lists were kept of those who qualified for the distribution, so that none were overlooked. Those engaged in this work are commended for their faithfulness (vv. 12, 18). The admin-

istration of the finances and affairs of an assembly should be equally marked by order and openness, and a similar faithfulness and devotedness should mark those who have responsibility in these matters.

Again it is interesting to see how those tithes are described in verse 14 as the *"freewill offerings of God, the oblations of the LORD, and the most holy things."* The offerings of the saints today should not be viewed with any less sanctity. Verses 20-21 give us a delightful summary of the work of Hezekiah. In verse 20 he did what was right in God's sight, in verse 21 he did it with all his heart.

## Are there things that really belong to Egypt that we are still holding on too?

### What the people did

In verses 5-7 the tithes were brought in, the fruits of the field and vineyard (v. 5), also of the cattle and the flocks (v. 6), from *"the third to the seventh month"* (v. 7), the period of Israel's harvest and vintage. They responded immediately, *"as soon as the commandment came abroad."* They gave abundantly, *"the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly."* It was done spiritually, giving to the Lord His appointed tithe.

We do not have directions concerning tithing today, but we are

not without guidance in regard to the matter of giving to the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 16:1 Paul speaks about *"the collection for the saints"*, in context, the poor saints at Jerusalem, and in verse 2 he lays down some basic principles: *"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him."* Embraced within that text there is instruction for giving regularly, systematically and proportionately.

Finally, we should notice the outcome verses 8-10. There was praise to the Lord, *"And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD, and his people Israel"* (v. 8). Those tithes being viewed as the fruit of His blessing (v. 10) compare to 2 Corinthians 9:11-13. There was sufficient provision for the priests and Levites, *"we have had enough to eat"* (v. 10). Since they had enough, they were able to devote themselves entirely to the work of the Lord without distraction. Sadly, we find occasions when the appointed tithes were not given and in consequence the Levites had to leave their ministry (Num. 13:10). There were stores for future needs, *"a great store"* (v. 10). It is not wrong to retain funds for use should a needy situation arise amongst the saints or with servants of the Lord. But this was surplus to immediate needs. There was blessing for the people as there will always be when they willingly give to the Lord (see 2 Cor. 9:8-9). Paul said to saints who had sent him a gift, *"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 4:19).

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# The Local Assembly Commitment or Convenience?

*“And they were continuing  
stedfastly in the teaching of the  
apostles, and the fellowship,  
and the breaking of  
the bread, and  
the prayers.”*

Acts 2:42  
(Strong)

In the New Testament there is only one church, and all who by faith are in Christ Jesus are in the church, and as such are members of Christ's body (Eph. 1:22-23). However, there are local expressions of the church, or local assemblies of called-out believers. These local assemblies are to reflect the truth of the One Body, and thus they are to function according to the New Testament Scriptures, gathering only to the Name of Christ (Matt. 18:20; Acts 13:1; Rev. 1:4).

Clearly the local assembly is to be a fellowship of believers. It would be contrary to Scripture for Christians to be “in fellowship” with those who are outside of Christ (2 Cor. 6:14). It thus becomes incumbent upon the local assembly to know those in the local fellowship.

Sadly, many saints do not truly understand what it means to be “in fellowship.” They see fellowship as something they “do.” To many it speaks of the good times of fellowship around the meal table, or in some other social activity.



While such things are certainly proper for Christians, fellowship in a local assembly is far more than this. In Acts 2:42, the word “fellowship” is a noun. In the original language

is to be a place where he is cared for, edified, encouraged, comforted, and protected. It is a partnership in which the corporate body cares for the individual saint.

be by physical labour, or it may be in spiritual labour. In whatever way they contribute they are to do it as unto the Lord for the good of the local assembly of believers (Col. 3:23).

The assembly is to be a place where the believer is cared for, edified, encouraged, comforted, and protected. It is a partnership in which the corporate body cares for the individual saint.

the verse read, “the fellowship,” by Strong’s translation as shown previously. It is a place as well as an activity. “*The fellowship*” was where the saints continued stedfastly!

The word fellowship comes from the root word translated “partners” in Luke 5:10. James, John, and Peter were partners in the fishing business. The “*fellowship*” in Acts 2:42 was in reality a “partnership of believers.”

When one is taken into a partnership it is because he has common beliefs and goals. So it should be in a local assembly of believers. An assembly should know who they are receiving into “the fellowship.” Now this may be by the report of others, such as with Phebe (Rom. 16:1-2), or it may be by two or three witnesses hearing the testimony of those desiring to come into the fellowship. With the increased pressure for numerical growth these steps may be easily by-passed.

When an assembly accepts a believer into the fellowship it takes on added responsibility. The assembly

However, coming into fellowship involves a commitment of the individual believer to the local assembly. Since he is identified with the local testimony his daily life is not to bring shame upon the fellowship and its testimony for Christ. He is to be involved in the partnership. The assembly does not merely exist for the convenience of the saints. It

Just because you attend some of the gatherings does not mean you are in the fellowship of believers. To be “in fellowship” means you are convinced and convicted of the same truths as the assembly and are committed to the local partnership of believers.

is not a supermarket to which customers come at their convenience to obtain their needs and leave.

Those in fellowship are to contribute to its operation as the Lord enables. It may be financially. It may

Partners also have the responsibility of being at the gatherings of the local fellowship of believers. Those who attend inconsistently, or attend only a small percentage of the gatherings, barring illness of course, could hardly be considered partners in the work—at least not faithful partners!

Are you in fellowship or do you simply attend the activities of a local fellowship at your convenience? Just because you attend some of the gatherings does not mean you are in the fellowship of believers. One can easily attend meetings without being in fellowship. To be “in fellowship” means you are convinced and convicted of the same truths as the assembly and are committed to the local partnership of believers.

Is your assembly a commitment or a convenience to you? Are you a partner or simply a partaker?

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# Was God Incarnate One of Us?

*“Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh...” (1 Tim. 3:16).*

In recording this truth for us by the pen of Paul, the Holy Spirit is obviously emphasizing the inscrutability of the person of our Lord.

It is a “mystery” and we need to hold it as such by faith. The union of God and man in one glorious person is a divine mystery that transcends human comprehension. Just as darkness cannot comprehend light (Jn. 1:5). During His earthly ministry the Savior Himself said “No man knoweth the Son but the Father” (Mt. 11:27). Thus showing how it is impossible for any human to fully comprehend the mystery of godliness.

This clear scriptural teaching however has not stopped men from trying to explain the humanity of our

But was the Christ of God indeed one of us? The Scriptures do not leave us in any doubt as to the clear distinction and the vast difference between His unique sinless humanity and our own, even in the unfallen state.

## HIS INCARNATION

*“Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).*

For the Great Redeemer to become our Kinsman, He had to take part of flesh and blood, that is to say, to take on humanity to Himself.

Indeed He entered the human race through the gateway of birth as all

partakers by a common lot, they had no choice what kind of nature they inherited from their fallen progenitors. On the other hand, the Redeemer took part (Gk. *Metecho*) which means that He took part voluntarily of something outside of Himself. So while the entire human race shares that Adamic fallen nature He stands alone in the perfection and sinlessness of His humanity. Nevertheless His was a true humanity apart from sin. Thus the Scriptures clearly safeguard the matchless humanity of our Savior.

The rest of this verse shows how he was indeed born to die, and in so doing He could destroy him that had the power of death. Yet death had no claims on Him as it does

In continually doing the will of the Father, He showed the obedience, devotion and loyalty of the Servant. Thus bringing delight to the Father’s heart.

blessed Lord. Some would try to equate it with our sinful humanity. Others have tried in vain to draw parallels between Adam’s humanity before the fall and our Lord’s perfect sinless humanity, thinking that Adam in innocence was perfect. Yet the truth is that far from being perfect, the fall has shown him to be fallible and capable of sinning.

other humans yet His holy birth was indeed unique. Having no human father meant He never inherited anything of Adam’s fallen nature.

This truth becomes clearer if we were to consider the precision with which the Holy Spirit chose the words of this verse. The children are said to be partakers (Gk. *Koinoneo*). The original word means they are

have on all sinful men (Heb. 9:27). His own death was voluntary since He laid down His life of His own accord and no one else could do so (Jn. 10:18). His was a substitutionary death; the just for the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18). Furthermore, His death resulted in victory over His own enemies (Col. 2:15). And now He lives by the power of an endless life (Rev. 1:18). He continues to be a man at



the right hand of God. Who among men can compare with His wonderful humanity?

### HIS HOLY NATURE

*"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8).*

Here again is another example of precise wording of the truth designed to guard against the intrusion of the human mind into what it cannot comprehend.

The word translated "form" is the original Greek word "morphe" from which we get the word morphology. It means both the inner essence (or nature) and the outer appearance. As our Saviour persisted (being) in the form of God this word serves to confirm Him as having the essential nature of God co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Moreover, He never ceased to be God even here on earth.

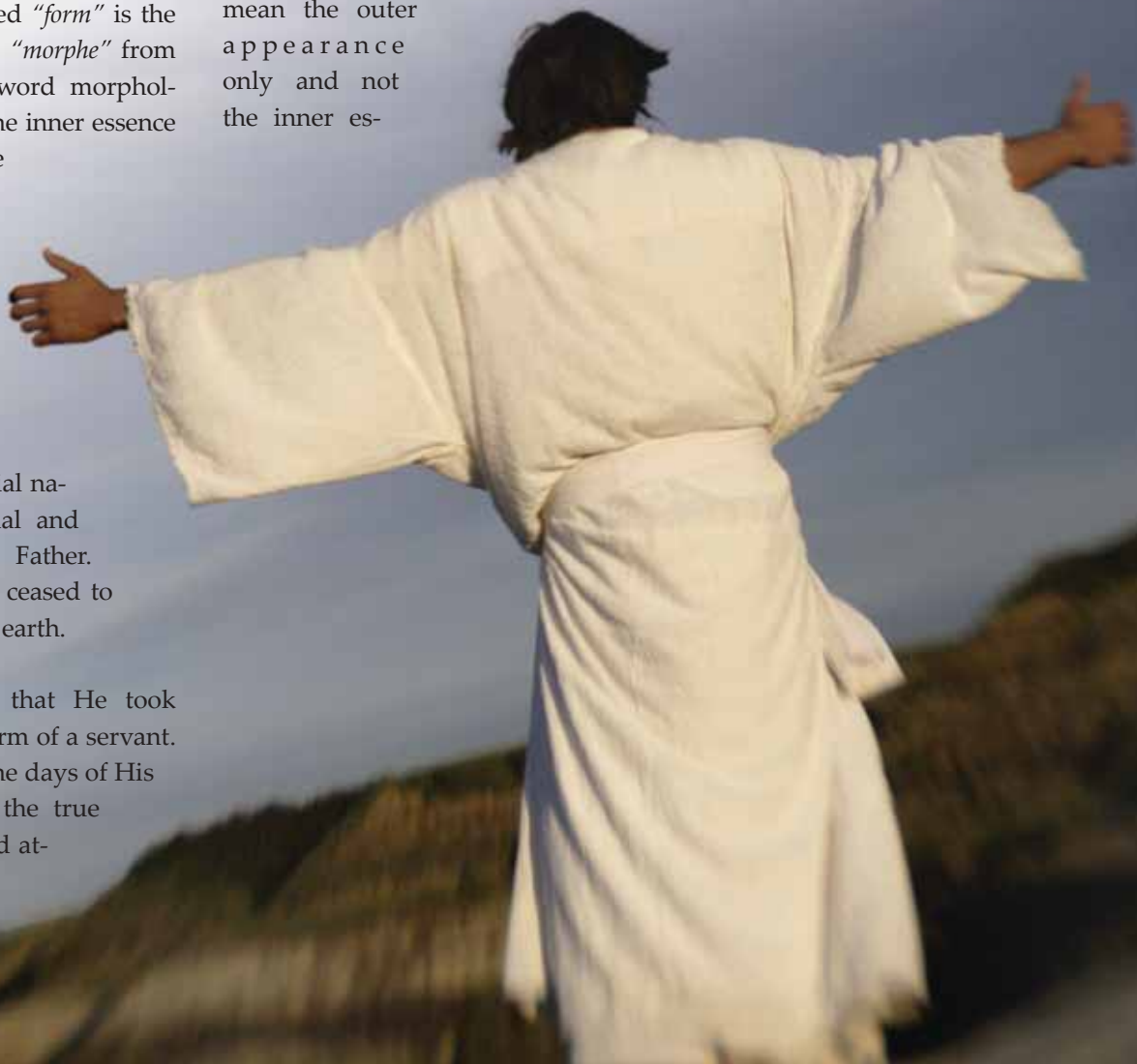
We read further that He took upon Himself the form of a servant. This means that in the days of His flesh He exhibited the true nature, character and attributes of

the perfect Servant of Jehovah. Who came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). In continually doing the will of the Father, He showed the obedience, devotion and loyalty of the Servant. Thus bringing delight to the Father's heart, (Isa. 42:1). It is remarkable that we never read in the Scriptures that the Savior took upon Him the "form" of man, because had He done so He would have shared the fallen nature of Adam. We need to be careful when using the word "form" in relation to His holy person.

The other two words in the verse are "likeness" (Gr. *Homoionoma*) and "fashion" (Gr. *schema*) both of which mean the outer appearance only and not the inner es-

sence or nature. These words are therefore used to describe the Lord's humanity. *"He was made in the likeness of men."* *"And being found in fashion as a man."* If we were to look at the Saviour, in the days of His humiliation, as to His outer appearance we would see a man. But He was not just a mere man. Nor did He share the fallen nature of man though His humanity was real.

We have another example of the care with which the Holy Spirit handles the Saviour's humanity in Romans chapter 8. There we read, *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"* (Rom. 8:3). Note that He



did not say in the “form” of sinful flesh because the Holy One of God had no sin in Him. For He was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.

### HIS KNOWLEDGE

Was the Savior omniscient in the days of His flesh? Or were there limitations on His knowledge of all things?

These are questions which arise because of either unbelief or unholy curiosity in the mind of the academic.

It is a scriptural truth that the Saviour as the perfect Servant of Jehovah has voluntarily put Himself in the place of the learner (Isa. 50:4). And as the dependant Man He had all His resources in God. Therefore we often see Him spending many hours praying to and communing with the Father. But you only have to search the Gospels to see how they testify to His unlimited knowledge and confirm His omniscience.

The Gospels show Him knowing the thoughts of men before they express them—followers and enemies alike. He predicted His betrayal by a follower and the method of His death

all men and what is in man (2:24-25). He knows His sheep (10:14, 27). He knew the hour of His departure back to the Father (13:1-3). He knew all things that should come upon Him (18:4). And in the last chapter of the Gospel, Peter describes Him as One who knew all things (21:17). That is to mention just a few examples.

Admittedly, however, there are some passages in relation to this that are hard to be understood which

meant suffering. A lesson that was so new to Him, yet He chose to do the Father's will at the cost of laying down His life. Thus through suffering, because of obedience, He became perfect (complete) (Heb. 5:9).

Secondly, Mark 13:32 says, “*But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels who are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father*” So the critics right away conclude that the Son was unaware of that particular

The Holy One of God had no sin in Him.  
For He was holy, harmless, undefiled  
and separate from sinners.

some wrest unto their own destruction. We will look at two of these.

First, in Hebrews 5:8 we read “*Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.*” Some people would use this verse to suggest that it is a proof of the Lord's need of learning. The fact of the matter, however, is that the blessed Son throughout all eternity

time, while the Father was. We see this in a completely different light; most certainly the Father has put certain times and seasons in His own power (Act. 1:7).

This has to do with the grand scheme of God's plan for the ages, where every person in the trinity has powers related to His area of administration. In accepting His place of humility, the Son would not disclose except what the Father would tell Him to do and that without any loss of equality or any intimation of inferiority. As the perfect Messenger sent from God, He would not speak but what the Father taught Him (Jn. 8:28). He said to the Jews who doubted His teaching, “*For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father, who sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting; whatever I speak, therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak*” (Jn. 12:48-49).

Having no human father meant  
He never inherited anything of  
Adam's fallen nature.

and His resurrection on the third day. He directed His disciples where the fish were in the sea (Lk. 5:4-5, Jn. 21:6). The Gospel of John specifically portrays Him as the all-knowing One. He knew where Nathaniel sat before He saw him (1:48). He knew

past has experienced no suffering. He lived in the love, joy and glory of perfect communion in the Father's bosom (Jn. 17:5, 24). Coming into this world that rejected and crucified Him, He would find out for Himself that obedience to the Father's will



In Old Testament times when the Lord sent Ezekiel the prophet to the exiled people, He struck him dumb at the beginning of his ministry. That was to make sure that Ezekiel will not speak except divinely given words (Ezek. 3:26-27). Later on God opened the mouth of His servant to speak only as the Lord directed him (Ezek. 24:24-27; 33:21-22). Such restraint was necessarily put on Ezekiel as a mere human vessel. But Christ needed no such restrictions. His self-renunciation was so complete, that He would only disclose what the Father told Him to. How different from us is His total submission though He is Lord of all.

### HIS WILL

It could be said of our Lord Jesus as the second person in the trinity, distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit, that He had His own will. For to have a will is an essential attribute of being a person. We see Him exercise such will during His earthly ministry. To the leper He said, *"I will; be thou clean"* (Matt. 8:3). To His Father, *"Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be where I am, that they may behold My glory"* (Jn. 17:24).

In the eternal counsels of the Godhead, there has ever been perfect communion and total harmony between the persons of the trinity.

We hear the Son by prophecy saying, *"Lo I come, in the volume of the book, it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart"* (Ps. 40:7-8). This is the language of One who in eternity past would in essence say, *"Here am I, send Me."* And when the fullness of the time was come, we hear Him say, *"Then said I, lo I come (in the vol-*

Coming into this world that rejected and crucified Him,  
He would find out for Himself that obedience to the Father's will meant suffering. A lesson that was so new to Him, yet He chose to do the Father's will at the cost of laying down His life.

*ume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God"* (Heb. 10:7).

He would say to the Jews *"All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will but the will of Him that sent Me"* (Jn. 6:37-38). We see that His glorious ability to save to the uttermost those that come to God by Him is directly linked to His submitting His will to the will of the Father. Could it be even thought possible that there was any conflict of wills between the Father and the Son? Is it at all conceivable that the blessed Son came into the world against His own will? Perish the thought! There was nothing between them but perfect harmony of will and purpose as He said, *"I and My Father are one"* (Jn. 10:30).

Unbelief raises its ugly head to ask what about Gethsemane? What took place there? Why do we hear Him requesting the cup be passed from Him? Is not that a conflict of wills? We say not in the least. It was the shrinking of His holy soul from the prospect of being made sin for us. He was in full acknowledgement of the cause for which He came into the world (Jn. 18:37). He

fully knew that there was no other way but death even that of the cross (Phil. 2:8). Yet as the load of our sins was weighing heavily on Him and the enormity of the task became so close and so real, the request, *"If it were possible"* comes out of His lips, as an expression of the deepest agony. Yet it was soon followed by the clearest expression of total submission to the Father's will: *"Nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done."*

How great is the difference between Him and us; rebellious, disobedient and self-willed creatures that we are.

When we see Thee in the garden,  
In thine agony of blood  
At Thy grace we are confounded  
Holy Spotless Lamb of God  
J. G. Deck

No, beloved, God manifest in the flesh was not one of us though we doubt not His true sinless humanity. Blessed be His Name.

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## A Closer Walk With God

O for a closer walk with God,  
A calm and heavenly frame;  
A light to shine upon the road  
That leads me to the Lamb!  
Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His Word!  
What peaceful hours I then enjoyed,  
How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill.  
Revive, O Holy Dove, revive,  
Sweet messenger of rest;  
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,  
And drove Thee from my breast!  
The dearest idol I have known  
Whate'er that idol be;  
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,  
And worship only Thee.

—William Cowper