

It has been observed that the universal church is in view in Ephesians and the local church in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. And while that is true, it should not be pressed too rigidly. For we find there are complementary truths in both epistles. In particular the truths of the universal church found in Ephesians have a practical bearing on the life of the local church.

One of the driving forces of Paul's life and ministry was the revelation given to him (and the other apostles, Eph. 3:5) that God had brought both Jew and Gentile together in one body, the church (Eph. 2:11-22). Further, the church would be the means to educate and enlighten for all to see the '*manifold wisdom of God*' (Eph. 3:10).

Paul makes much of this truth and describes it as the '*mystery*', that is a revelation of something that could never have been discovered apart from miraculous divine revelation. Paul writes, '*...which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit...*' (Eph. 3:5) Later in the same chapter he writes, '*...which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God...*' (Eph. 3:9) Still further in this chapter we read, '*according to the eternal purpose...*' (Eph. 3:11).

*'Other ages not made known.... now revealed...from the beginning of the world hath been hid....the eternal purpose'* Paul's life and ministry was focused on big things of an eternal nature. He further tells us that it is by the church that God has chosen to

'make all men see what is the *fellowship of the mystery...*' (Eph. 3:9) In the KJV the word 'men' is italicized alerting us to the fact that it does not appear in the original. In other words the real sense of the verse is that by the church God is enlightening all, not just the world of men, but principalities and powers are included. The church displays to the world of men and angels truth about God. These truths which had been hidden from view are now on full display.

From these dizzying heights of thought we come down to earth and think. Each local church has a part in this purpose. All that is involved in the work of the local assembly furthers God's great eternal purpose. Our work may seem small and mundane. Our gift may seem unimportant, but it is anything but mundane or unimportant. We learn from Ephesians 4 and Romans 12 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12 and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4 that every gift is important in the functioning of the church.

We do not really know how the Lord chooses to use our local assembly. It may be in a large centre and communicate with large numbers. On the other hand we may be small in numbers and seeming ineffective. But we must remember our functioning is to display Christ not only to the world of men, but to the world of angels. This we are taught is the eternal purpose of God.

It follows therefore that discouragement should be dismissed immediately. Faithfulness to Christ is the order of the day.

It further follows that nothing is more important than the local assembly. While it is true that other things have a legitimate demand upon us, they should not crowd out our place in the local church. This means that life's decisions about education, career, work, marriage, where we live, and extra curricular activities are all governed by how it will impact my involvement in God's eternal purpose in the church. I need to be on guard in case lesser things begin to take over my life and circumstances so that I am spent on trivial pursuits and have nothing for the Lord. Now this does not mean that home and family and work are unimportant. On the contrary Paul instructs us in Ephesians 5 and 6 about our duties in the home and work life. They too are done unto the Lord. When done unto the Lord I will be able to keep things in proper balance.

The church has been blessed with faithful Christians who live their lives unto the Lord and are wholly committed to the work of the local assembly. However the church has also been deprived of what might have been from lives that allowed the world to set life's agenda.

Let us never forget that God has given us the privilege of being part of the eternal purpose! There is nothing more significant.

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**BRIAN GUNNING**  
St. Catharines, Ontario



# COUNSEL

TIMELY TRUTHS FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

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# Egypt to Canaan

## Part 6: Be Strong & Courageous • Kadesh-Barnea to Canaan Numbers 20:1-21, 32; Deut 32:48-52, 34:1-8; Joshua 3-5

Their wandering completed, the people arrived again at Kadesh (Numb 20:1). Despite their prior rebellion God had provided for their needs (Deut 8:3-5) and now a new generation would finish the journey to Canaan.

### **MOSES DISOBEDIENCE AT MERIBAH-KADESH (NUMB 20:1-13)**

Though in both cases God provided water there are major differences here with the one forty years earlier at Horeb (Ex. 17). There it pictured Christ judged while here it is Christ resurrected.

For example at Horeb the word rock implies a “rock of refuge” (Ex 33:21-22) while here it signifies a “lofty fortress” symbolizing Christ ascended.

As well Moses brought his rod to Horeb - the rod of judgment used against Egypt. Here he was asked to carry Aaron’s budded rod (Numb 17:7-11, 20:9) illustrating Christ’s current priestly ministry.

Finally God instructed Moses to strike the rock at Horeb typifying that Christ suffered once for sins (1 Pet 3:18) while here Moses was only to speak to the rock denoting that believers can now bring their requests to God in Christ’s name.

Angrily striking the rock twice Moses blurred these distinctions and in punishment God barred both him and Aaron from entering the land.

Considering his offence notice first that Moses attempted to glorify himself (Numb. 20:10) instead of hallowing God (1 Cor 10:31).

Second he spoke harshly against God’s people. Today let us refrain from speaking harshly against fellow believers because they are

His beloved children.

Third he dishonoured a type of the Lord Jesus. Conversely let us honour Christ through faithfulness to God’s symbols in the church (Acts 8:36-38, 1 Cor 11:2-34).

Finally there is a stricter judgment for all those who minister in the sight of the people (Numb. 20:12, Jam 3:1).



This incident also reminds us to pray for our leaders and refrain from testing them (Heb 13:17).

Second as we advance in age we must still watch and pray. Our enemy never quits and many faithful servants have failed in their later years (1 Kings 11:4).

Third our enemy will attack our strengths as well as our

weaknesses; here Moses’ greatest strength was tested – his meekness.

Finally the rock still produced water signifying that God’s blessing is never proof that we are in His will (1 Kings 19:5-8).

### **KING’S HIGHWAY (NUMB 20:14-21)**

Edom, Esau’s descendants, refused Moses’ request to pass through their land so Israel turned from their brother (Numb 20:14) and went around them.

As well when we attempt to travel the King’s highway we will have potential conflicts. Wherever possible let’s live at peace with all (Phil 4:5) especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our brotherly love is a testimony to the world that we are His disciples and we please God by keeping the peace even if it means suffering loss (1 Cor 6:7, Phil 2:3-4).

### **BRASS SERPENT (NUMB 21:4-9)**

When the people complained against Him God sent fiery serpents among them. Upon their repentance God instructed Moses to make a brass serpent and put it upon a pole. All those bitten could look to it and live.

The brass, symbolizing judgment, was made in the image of the creature. Similarly Christ came in the likeness of men (Rom 8:3, Phil 2:7), was lifted up on a cross and judged for our sin (Rom 1:3, 2 Cor. 5:21, Heb 2:14). It is through the eyes of faith we look to Him for life (John 3:14-15).

### **SETTING EAST OF JORDAN (NUMB 32)**

Seeing that Gilead was an excellent place to raise livestock,

Reuben, Gad and later Manasseh asked to settle east of the Jordan River.

Concerned about morale, Moses felt that this could again discourage the people, but when they offered to fight alongside their brethren Moses acquiesced.

However to live separated from their people among hostile nations was not God's will and would exhibit a poor testimony to the world.

Similarly believers can sometimes choose the world's comforts over spiritual blessings. Instead we must remember that God's will is the safest place for ourselves and our families. In addition faithfully meeting (Heb 10:24-25) and battling together in prayer will encourage us, strengthen our unity and present a clear testimony to others.

#### **DEATH OF MOSES (DEUT 32:48-52, 34:1-8)**

Before dying Moses could only view the land from Mount Nebo. Demonstrating that the law could never bring us into our inheritance (Rom 8:3), Moses passed the torch to Joshua ("Jehovah the Saviour").



By God's grace it is only Christ that can lead us to victory and into our spiritual blessings (John 1:17).

It was also by God's grace Moses had the privilege of entering the land many years later in the presence of our Lord (Matt 17:3).

#### **CROSSING THE JORDAN (JOSHUA 3-4)**

Once the ark entered the Jordan River, the waters receded allowing Israel to pass through.

This illustrates our identification

with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. The twelve stones left in the river symbolize the death of our old life and the twelve memorial stones set up at Gilgal symbolize our new life in Christ.

Today believers are commanded to demonstrate this truth through public baptism (Acts 2:41).

#### **GILGAL (JOSHUA 5)**

God commanded Joshua to circumcise all men, this sign of God's covenant with Abraham having ceased in the wilderness. The reproach of Egypt (their failure to enter the land) rolled away; they now completely depended upon God while healing.

Concluding their preparation with the Passover they began marching courageously forward, trusting God for victory in every place they walked (Josh 1:3).

Similarly believers have a circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:28-29, Phil 3:3, Col 2:11) which is spiritual and involves the whole body. Abiding in Christ (John 15:4-5), putting no confidence in the flesh, let us resolve to enter into the spiritual blessings He has given us (Eph 1:3).

---

**GEORGE FERRIER**  
*Ottawa, Ontario*

“... believers can sometimes choose the world's comforts over spiritual blessings.”

Economic experts are expressing a growing concern that fiscal chaos now unfolding could soon spread to all of the world's big debtor economies. It begins to appear that such chaos could quickly bring the entire world into a state of economic paralysis. A glance at the economic map is most distressing. The world is aware that the United States

economic collapse. Present rumors indicate that the Euro is in real danger of total collapse, and that will ruin the economies of most of the European continent. Not long ago some were suggesting that the Euro could become the basic sustaining medium of exchange

all they can to keep their true situation confidential. It now appears, however, that the per capita debt of China at the present time could actually exceed that of the USA. Russia's economy is very weak. Put that all together and you have a world tottering on

# The World Chaos

economy is in deep trouble due to fiscal irresponsibility and mismanagement. The US debt load is unsustainable, and will get worse unless the US government can back away from the edge of the precipice very soon. Canada has a large national debt, occasioned largely by its health insurance program. Europe's economy is a mess. Several nations are tottering on the brink of total

for world business, replacing the US dollar. It is now obvious that the Euro has suddenly and seriously become much the weaker of the two currencies. The two largest economies in Latin America, Brazil and Mexico, are both in serious financial distress. Even China appears to be in trouble. Admittedly, the Chinese do

the brink of total economic chaos. What is the cause? Social democracy. Governments, in an attempt to buy votes, as they practice democracy, have given to the common man an excess assortment of "entitlements." Once a large population is given something free, it is extremely reluctant to relinquish that

benefit. But such benefits must be paid for. Governments have been guilty of granting entitlements that are not sustainable by the national economy. This is exactly what has happened to Greece, is happening in Ireland, and is spreading to other European countries. There is little hope of reversing this disease. A society that is burning the candle at both ends is sure

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and Ireland have already done with respect to the European economic union. But those sources of assistance are limited. Each gift to a weak economy weakens the giver. Ultimately, there will be no more candy in the bowl. What then? It is logical to assume that world leaders in the distress they will then be in, will be forced to consider a single world currency underlying a single world economy. Since that vast world economy must be carefully managed, it will, defacto, be a single world government. This is exactly what is foretold in prophecy, especially Daniel 7. The world will be ruled as a single entity, for a time, through economic bondage that will include "the mark of the beast." The world will likely not be brought into subjection to a single ruler via military conquest, but rather via economic

ultimate point of failure and concern that will likely lead to a single, centralized, human authority. And when that single human authority falls under the control of one wicked leader, that leader will be the man of sin. He will appear at the beginning of Israel's 70<sup>th</sup> week (Daniel 9) and the beginning of the tribulation. His reign will be brief, chaotic, cruel. He will come to his end at the hands of the Christ of Glory.

It is remarkable that the events of just the last couple of years is so clearly foreshadowing the one world government that will form in the name of "globalism." Since Scripture is clear that the day of grace will end, and the true church called home to Heaven before the tribulation begins, how clearly these events should arouse Christians to the reality that we will be called home to Heaven now at any

**The fact is that man in his sin cannot govern himself effectively.**

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with the realities of  
democracy.

What will world leaders ultimately do? The major economies of the world are entrapping themselves in the situation we have described here, with no way out. Reduction of entitlements leads to violence and serious objection by the electorate. As national economies fail – if they do – they turn to one another for help, as Greece

control. We are rapidly racing toward the point where this central authority and central control will become the ultimate and only alternative for human economic chaos.

The fact is that man in his sin cannot govern himself effectively. God is allowing the present course of human events so that the world, as it practices according to its own lusts, will reach the

moment. Are you ready to go? Are you ready for the judgment seat of Christ? Are you ready to meet Him who purchased you with His blood and is your Lord and Savior?

---

**DOUG KAZEN**

*Kirkland, Washington*

Storms at sea are never pleasant. Awesome, frightening, but hardly enjoyable. Yet the lessons learned in the storm can be of significant value for another day and another circumstance. Almost the whole chapter of Acts 27 is devoted to the events surrounding a storm. There are lessons we may learn from this storm. God knows that each of us at some time or other must pass through our own deep waters. It is not "If thou passest through the water," it is "When..."

One lesson is that God allows

from the common trials of life... not yet. The fallacy of the false gospel that declares, "God wants you healthy and God wants you wealthy" has driven many a simple soul into despair when they suffer pain and poverty. If it was preached instead, "God wants you holy," that would be in harmony with the Word.

Another lesson we may learn is the Christians in the same circumstance may have quite different reactions. Luke writes, No sun...no stars...no small tempest...no hope (v.20). He was

downcast while the other was delighting in the promise of God and cheering others.

God often blesses unbelievers because of the presence of His people. God was not only going to save faithful Paul, but also fearful Luke. More than this, He was going to save the faithless sailors. This was for the sake of His servants on that ship (v.24) How little at times do unbelievers realize what they owe to the Lord's people among them. Their preservation, their provision, perhaps their very paycheck is



# STORMS

His people to suffer alongside the ungodly in the circumstances of life. God's servants were in that storm because the sailors would not believe the words of Paul. Many of the Lord's people must suffer because of the attitude of those who will not believe. Salvation of the soul is no escape

consumed with the power of the storm and what he seemed to have lost. Was the sun extinguished? Were the stars switched off? Above the storm they shone as ever in their place. What about Paul? He was up on deck, shouting above the gale, "Cheer up...all is well." In the same storm one was

the result of the prayers and the presence of some unappreciated believer in their midst.

In the storms of life, God shows through His people who is really in control. Paul was only one of about 250 prisoners on board. But when the circumstance reached

crisis proportions and the sailors and master of the ship were at a loss to know what to do next, it is Paul who steps forward and on the basis of God's sovereign control brings some hope and order to things.

How good to be assured in every circumstance that it is "Jesus Christ: who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him" (1 Pet. 3:21-22). Things may get out of our control, but nothing ever gets out of His control.

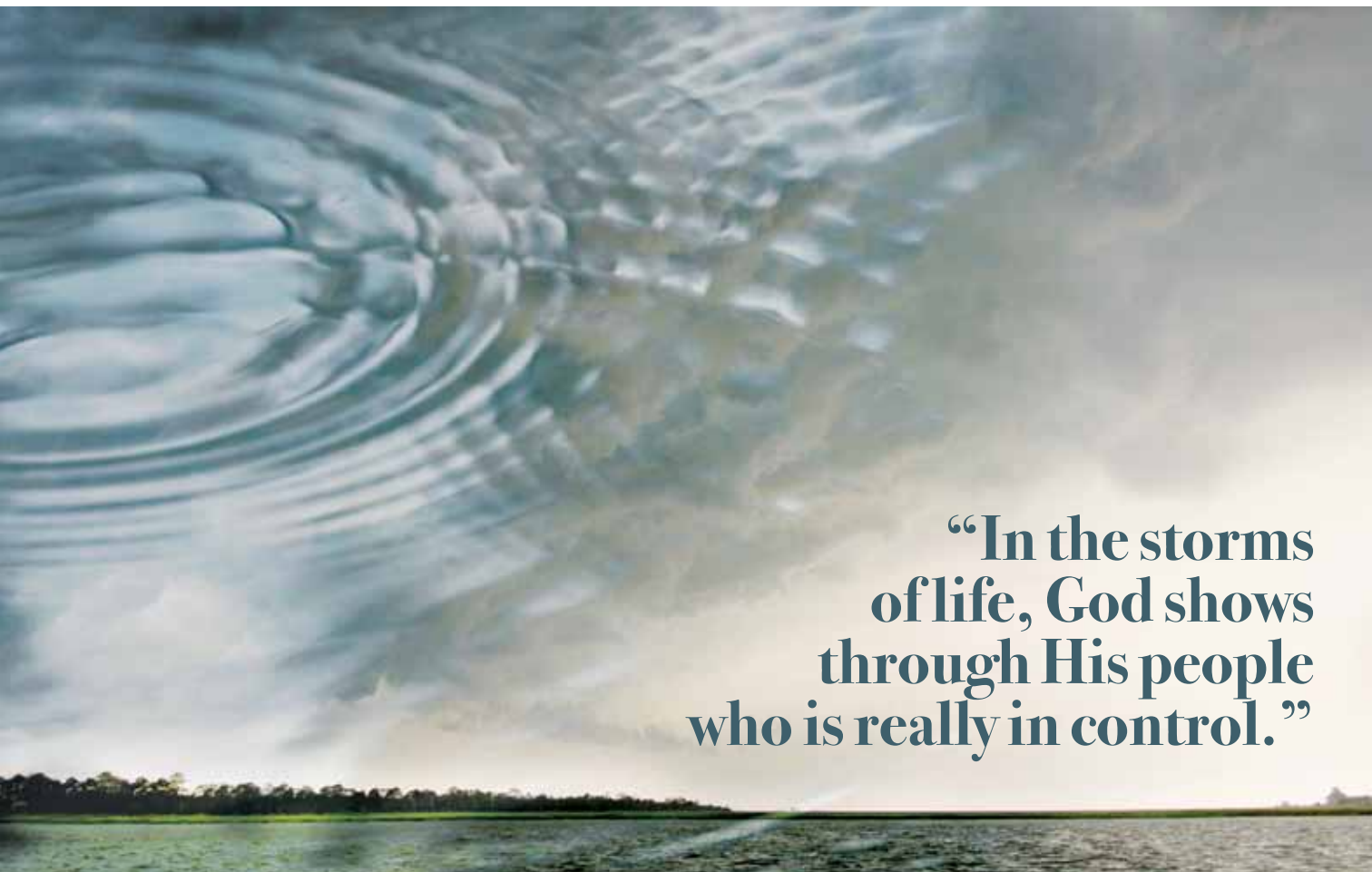
be darkness and despair.

What a lesson for us in this day of drift and confusion. The sailors did not want to hear some cute anecdote, some eloquent, honeyed sermon, some cold analysis of Scripture. They would have despaired if all Paul had to offer was some new "method" of doing things. What they needed and what they got from the servant of God was the only thing that mattered – a message from God.

Lost sinners today can be "excited" by light and frivolous methods. They can be amused by interesting

Then let us "Preach the Word...for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their on lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Storms today may sweep us,  
But the Lord will keep us  
We shall have His presence ever  
nigh;  
He is here beside  
To uphold and guide us-  
Endless joy is coming by and by.



**“In the storms  
of life, God shows  
through His people  
who is really in control.”**

When things are at their darkest, the Christian still has hope and God uses His people to present the hope to the perishing. Apart from the promise of God, there is no hope. Apart from the saving message from God, it must only

anecdotes. They can be impressed by eloquent dissertations. They can be influenced to give money, time, and effort. By none of these is the urgent need of their souls met. They need a word from God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Editor's Note: J. Boyd Nicholson was the former editor of Counsel Magazine. This has been taken from his book, "The Watered Garden"*

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**J. BOYD NICHOLSON**

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The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is one of the weightiest and most important doctrines of Scripture. Although the word "sovereignty" is never used in the English Bible, other synonyms such as "majesty", "almighty", and "greatness" are used many times. God's sovereignty is expressed in one way or another on nearly every page of the Bible. In describing the sovereignty of God, it has been said, "God in His love wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His majesty He has the power to bring it about." For some believers, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is a difficult doctrine to embrace. They ask why did God give Peter 3,000 souls on the Day of Pentecost, while faithful Stephen received 3,000 stones? It is in the difficult times of life that God tests our faith. Obeying God is worked out within well-defined boundaries of God's Word, while trusting God is worked out in an arena that has no boundaries. This poses the question: How can we trust and love the sovereign God? Surely the answer lies in knowing the character, attributes, and doctrine of

the sovereignty of God.

### ***DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD***

The Bible presents God as both infinitely all-powerful and interminably good. God's goodness, justice, mercy, and His other attributes meet together to superintend His sovereign actions. God's sovereignty may sometimes involve testing in the form of calamity and trials, but never without love, faithfulness, and compassion. His sovereign will may appear for the moment to be without purpose, yet His ways are always perfect. He is a God whom we can trust, love, and worship for His sovereign will. While sovereignty is surely to be believed by all who love sound biblical doctrine, it must be understood that it is not to be exercised in conflict with God's attributes, such as love, justice, and immutability. Some have erred in this respect and have raised sovereignty to such a level that all other attributes of God have become secondary. The sovereignty of God is never exercised at the expense of His divine nature, which is love (1 Jn. 4:8). Concerning this conflict, Dr. James Orr, general editor of the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,

writes, "Calvin exalts the sovereignty of God, and this is right, but errs in placing his root-ideas of God in the sovereign will rather than in love."<sup>1</sup>

### ***DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND THE GOODNESS OF GOD***

The biblical principle that God is good and does good applies to His sovereign actions. God's attributes and His purposes cannot be divorced; God will not act contrary to His holy nature. Scripture reveals that God's mercy, goodness, grace, and compassion all under gird His sovereign purposes and will. Abraham echoed this very principle when he said, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). Even when affliction and suffering are God's divine will, it too is ruled by His "compassion and unfailing love". Jeremiah the prophet explained, "Though He brings grief, He will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men" (Lam. 3:33). Theologians have called this linking of God's sovereign rule with God's infinite goodness the doctrine of providence. Providence is His divine care and sovereign rule over creation



# sovereignty of God

for His glory and the good of man. God never pursues His glory at the expense of His people, nor does He ever seek our good at the expense of His glory. He has designed His eternal purpose so that His glory and our good are inseparably yoked together.

## **DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND THE WISDOM OF GOD**

All God's sovereign actions are also rooted in His infinite wisdom. God's wisdom enables Him to direct every act that occurs upon the world stage into a perfect plan that accomplishes His divine purpose. God is the master of every situation. Man can be frustrated by circumstances outside of his control, but this is never true of God. There is never a situation or difficulty which can ever frustrate the wisdom of God. "Great is our God, and of great power: His understanding is infinite." (Ps. 147:5). His ways are infinitely perfect. No act of God is flawed, marred, or suspect. No decision of God can ever be improved upon. We may not understand the ways of God, yet they remain rooted in perfect wisdom. It is not our place to raise doubts about the "God only wise", but rather to bow in worship.

## **THE BIBLICAL SCOPE OF DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY**

The doctrine that God is sovereign is a truth that must be believed by all Christians. That God is sovereign means that He is the highest and greatest, exalted above all. He is omnipotent and controls everything, working everything according to His eternal plan and purpose (Eph. 1:11). Since God is infinite, His rule must be absolute. His rule must involve total control of everything in His creation—every circumstance, every situation, every event. God's sovereignty means that He either directly causes or consciously permits all that happens. God claims full responsibility for establishing and removing human rulers. God, according to His holy character, has the right to do those things that please Him (Ps. 115:3). God is in complete control, and yet He does not manipulate people like mere puppets. He gives them the dignity and freedom to make decisions and holds them responsible for their choices. Those decisions may bring to pass untold misery and suffering, yet God allows it. However, through this divine omniscience, God knows every choice that

man will make, and through divine sovereignty He takes those choices and uses them to serve His purposes. In this way, God has complete control over every decision and action, and man has the freedom to make decisions. However, where divine wisdom deems it best, He will overrule man's decisions in order to accomplish His own matchless purposes.

## **DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND THE SCOPE OF MAN'S FREE WILL**

Some have wrongly concluded that since God is absolutely sovereign, then man does not have a free will. Scripture emphasizes that God has sovereignly granted to man the ability to make free choices. This is not man usurping God's role in the world, but this is God's sovereign design for man. This principle is expressed by our Lord Himself in His interview with Pilate. Pilate charges the Lord, "Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and have power to release You?" Jesus answers, "You could have no power at all against Me, except it were given to you from above..." (John 19:11). Pilate thought that his ability to make free decisions was a

personal right. Our Lord rightly corrects Pilate and states that the ability to make free choices is from God—"it is given from above." God exercises sovereign control in the world; but within this control, He permits certain events and purposes others. The Word of God carefully sets forth both the infinite sovereignty of God and human responsibility. To detract from either of these truths is to detract from the fullness of the Word of God. A proper biblical balance between the two must be rigorously sought and maintained. A. W. Tozer strikes a proper biblical balance, when he writes: "God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it. If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give limited freedom, who is there to stay His hand or say, 'What doest Thou?' Man's will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so." <sup>2</sup> C. H. Spurgeon adds: "Man is a free agent, a responsible agent, so that his sin is his own willful sin and it lies fully with him and

*never with God, and yet at the same time God's purposes are fulfilled, and His will is done even by demons and corrupt men—I cannot comprehend it : without hesitation I believe it, and rejoice so to do, I never hope to comprehend it...I worship a God I never expect to comprehend." <sup>3</sup>*

Finally, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God must never provide man with excuses. For no man can deny full responsibility for his actions by claiming that he was irresistibly led by God; God never does violence to the free will. God's sovereignty and man's freedom dwell side by side in such a way that the former does not force itself upon the latter. How can this be brought to pass? It is only by and through a sovereign God who is characterized by infinite power, wisdom, love, and goodness.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 292

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (New York, NY: Harpers and Row Publishers, 1961), p. 118

<sup>3</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 16, (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), p. 501

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**DAVID DUNLAP**

Land O' Lakes, Florida

## AN ALL INCLUSIVE SERVICE

Once we receive Christ our daily activities are to take on a different character. We may be doing the same things as before but our motive is to be different. The word for us now is, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17). That is a charge to all who believe and it embraces all things. We have to realize that we have not only been pardoned but purchased; bought with a price beyond measure, the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18,19). We are under new ownership from the moment we are saved. A false idea, one no doubt sponsored by the deceiver, is that we may take Jesus as our Saviour today and consider inviting Him to be our Lord tomorrow. But we forget who we have welcomed into our hearts; a Lord who saves and a Savior who lords. His person is not divisible. Christian development is only possible as we "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour" (2 Pet. 3:18). And Christian service is not something to be separated from the secular; it embraces and transforms all that we might once have

considered commonplace, even our eating and drinking (1 Cor. 10:31).

### BY LOVE CONSTRAINED

I have met Christians whose own words revealed that they conceived of the “ministry” or becoming a “full time worker” in the same way that most people choose to pursue medicine or take up carpentry; it was one of the alternatives that faced them when they thought of earning a living. Happily, I also know of at least one such person who judged their initial motive and later was constrained to devote most of his energies to teaching God’s word for a higher reason. All who trust Christ are called to serve Him, but the way their needs are supplied while they do so is a separate issue and may vary from time to time.\*

### DIVINELY APPRAISED

The yardstick to measure the worth of any service is not in our hands. We are to “*judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.*” (1 Cor. 4:5). Yet while while Paul thus discounts our ability to arrive at a final analysis of the worth of our service, or that of others, he does say in the previous verse that he “*knows*

*nothing against himself*”. He lived and served with a good conscience; so should we.

True service will not always be recognized and understood by others. The more spiritual it is, the less it may be appreciated. The good work that Mary performed did not meet with the approval her contemporaries, they judged it unnecessary waste; Moses took too much upon himself; Jeremiah and Paul were supposedly unconcerned for the welfare of their fellow citizens and so on. Those criticized will be tempted to forsake a work which makes them like the Master who is our model as a Servant, and adopt roles that will find more general acceptance. That would be a great mistake; we are to serve “*...as to the Lord and not to men*” (Col. 3:23) and to always abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that “*your labor is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Cor.15:58).

*\*In Acts 13:1-3 we are given the example of two men who were separated for a special type of work to which God had called them and commended to the grace of God by a local church. One was an apostle but that did not mean he thought it was unfitting to work with his own hands if circumstances required it (20:34). Supporting himself and his colleagues in this way he set a good example for all to follow.*

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# Notes On Christian Service

## ITS MEANING

The English word 'humility', and its adjective 'humble', are derived from the Latin word 'humus', which means 'ground', 'earth', or 'soil'. It reminds us all that God formed us from the dust of the ground. After Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, God said to him that he would die, and that, since he was just dust, his body would return to dust again. This is a sobering thought, and one which indicates to us our true condition and position before God. In fact, in Genesis chapter 18 verse 27 Abraham described himself as 'dust and ashes' before the Lord when he was interceding for Lot in Sodom. Likewise, the patriarch Job, at the end of his traumatic sufferings and the Lord's revelation of Himself to him, simply said that he abhorred himself and repented of his rash words against God 'in dust and ashes', Job 42:6. The Hebrew word most frequently used for 'humility', or 'being humble', has the idea of being 'low'. It is sometimes used of low-lying land, but most frequently has the metaphorical sense of being humble, or humbled by others. The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament uses the same word to translate this Hebrew word as the Greek New Testament uses to express the idea of 'humility', and 'being humble'. It, too, basically means 'low-lying' physically, but, again, is most often used in a metaphorical sense to mean 'lowliness of mind and attitude'. It is the opposite of being high-minded, proud, or arrogant. Scripture everywhere commends humility as being a thoroughly right attitude to take towards both God and other men and women around us.

## ITS IMPORTANCE

The ancient Greek philosophers tended to despise humility as being very mean-spirited, but the Lord reverses this opinion and emphasises the absolute importance of behaving in a humble way at all times and to all people. In our society today also, humility is not thought to be good form or even always advisable. We

made', this is no reason for pride in ourselves, but for worshipping God our Creator for making us so. In the final analysis, what have we that we did not first receive from God? We really have nothing to be proud about. And, besides this, we are all just sinful mortals in desperate need of God's gracious forgiveness.

# The True Grace & Greatness of Humility

live in a 'me first' culture, where everyone competes with others to gain superiority over them. In the world of business the aim is always to be a manager, not a servant, so that there are frequently too many bosses supervising too few people doing the essential work. The original sin of Lucifer in heaven was pride against God. He exalted himself and wanted to be like the Most High God, forgetting that he was simply a creature. And through Adam we, also, have imbibed something of this obnoxious spirit of pride. Scripture constantly warns us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but soberly and realistically. A humble man or woman acknowledges their true position and condition before God, and also has a very high view of the character and attributes of God. Although we are 'fearfully and wonderfully

Too often we manifest pride in our own achievements, and the achievements of our family members, or friends, when we should simply be humbly thanking and praising God for giving us both the ability and opportunity to achieve what we have. God says that He will not ultimately give the glory due to Himself to anyone else; for He alone is God. So our pride impugns God's glory, and that is serious. That is why the Lord says in Proverbs chapter 16 verse 5 that, *'Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination' to Him, and will not go unpunished.*" On the other hand, we are encouraged to learn in Isaiah chapter 57 verse 15 that the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity dwells *'with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit'*. So our relationship with God depends on our having a truly humble attitude towards

Himself and others. That is how important humility is in our characters.

### *ITS SUPREME EXAMPLE*

Paradoxically, the supreme example of humility is none other than Jesus Christ Himself, God manifest in the flesh as the only Perfect Man who ever lived. He perfectly exemplified true humility on a number of occasions during His earthly life. In John chapter 13, during the evening before He was crucified, Jesus graphically illustrated humility to His disciples when He girded Himself with a towel as the lowest slave would have done, and washed His disciples' feet. None of them volunteered to do the same. But the Lord ended His object lesson by commanding His disciples to perform this act of feet-washing to one another. A little while previously, He had corrected their self-seeking argument with one another about which of them should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and sit beside Him, by taking a child and setting him before them as another object lesson in humility. Disciples should manifest the humble attitude of a child, if they wish to become great in His kingdom. In fact, all who come to trust in Him must be *'meek and lowly in heart'* like Himself, their Master. In Philippians chapter 2 we have the inspiring account of the Saviour's voluntary self-humiliation and obedient submission to the death of the cross given to us today as the supreme example of selfless humility which we should follow in all our personal relationships. We, like Christ, are to think of others as being better, or more important, than ourselves and even be prepared to sacrifice ourselves for them, as He did

for us. This is true humility of mind and heart. He was prepared to receive much less than His rightful due in life, and so should we be. Yes, humility involves self-denial and self-sacrifice at times, and trusts God alone to vindicate us in His own time and way; for He has promised to do so.

### *ITS REWARDS*

The rewards of cultivating a meek and humble spirit are ultimately many. But we may need to wait until eternity to receive all of them. In this life we can expect only what our Lord and Master received, namely, reproach, rejection, and shame from our fellow-men and women. Both Peter and Paul, who wrote about the virtues of humility in their letters, as well as manifesting it abundantly in their service for their Lord, died martyrs' deaths in the mid-60s AD. But Peter promised the suffering believers to whom he wrote that, if they were to humble themselves under God's mighty disciplining hand, He would

ourselves and claiming what we perceive to be our rightful due, what is the present reward for remaining humble before the Lord and others? It is surely the daily companionship and fellowship that the Lord has always promised to those who 'walk humbly with' their 'God', Micah 6:8. The Lord gives special grace to the humble among men who follow Him consistently, grace needed to bear the sufferings brought to them because they are identified with their rejected Lord. But rewards will follow in eternity, and make the sufferings of this little while between pale into insignificance in the light of the glory that will be revealed in us in the day of the Lord's coming and kingdom. Our reward is ultimately Christ Himself and the fellowship of His sufferings. So, are we all prepared to be humble like our Lord and Saviour? For only so will we enjoy His unclouded fellowship both now and hereafter.

Let us, therefore, like the

We, like Christ, are to think of others as being better, or more important, than ourselves and even be prepared to sacrifice ourselves for them, as He did for us. This is true humility of mind and heart.

exalt them in due time. For some this may have happened later in this present life, but for many this would have had to wait until the Judgement Seat of Christ, when they received the martyr's crown of life. So, if this is our ultimate reward for being 'clothed with humility', rather than asserting

hymnwriter, be *'Content to fill a little space, if Thou be glorified'*! Yes, the grace of willing and self-forgetful humility is the secret of true greatness of character.

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*"He chose David also his servant and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands." Psalm 78:70-72*

Leadership is a subject of intense scrutiny today. In every sphere and at every level of our society

Israel' History from Zoan to Zion Psalm 78 is the first and longest of the Historical Psalms. According to the superscription, Psalm 78 is a "Maschil" poem, that is, a contemplative poem written to direct the meditations of faithful hearts. Its author, Asaph was, according to 1 Chronicles 6, 9, 15, 16, a minister of sacred music during King David's reign. It was Asaph's intention to inspire

wickedness and rebellion (78:17, 32, 40, 56). As a result of the nation's repeated transgressions, the Lord stepped back and gave His people over to the sword in judgement (78:62-64). Asaph then writes, *"The Lord awaked as one out of sleep"* (v.65) and used this as a poetic description for the end of God's inactivity on Israel's behalf. In his "reawakening", the Psalmist identifies three things that God chooses, a tribe (Judah - 78:67, 68), a city (Zion - 78:68, 69) and a leader (David - 78:65-72).

God blessed His people with a leader, a shepherd-king to shepherd and lead them though they did not deserve the gift.

### **THE DAVIDIC LEADERSHIP MODEL**

The presentation of David's leadership is the climax of Psalm 78. In spite of Israel's repeated rebellion against God, He was faithful. His crowning grace to His people was the gift of a leader under whose reign the people would realize the hopes that God had for them, hopes of holy living and respite from their enemies. David was the one appointed to execute the will of Israel's Rock and Redeemer (78:35). A godly leader is a gift to the local assembly who inspires those to whom God has given charge to godly living and gives them a vision of everything they can be in Christ.

After the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Judah no longer had a Davidic king but the hearts of the faithful were, through God's Word, pointed to the future messianic age when a descendant of David would reign in perfect righteousness, *"a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a Branch shall grow out of his roots"* (Isaiah 11:1-9). Of the many lessons that can be gleaned from David's example, it is that David's leadership is a type of future messianic leadership. By application, the summary of his leadership found in the closing verses of Psalm 78 provides a paradigm for all would



it seems there is a great crisis in leadership. Leadership is a critical subject in any organization but nowhere is it more critical than in the local assembly of believers. It is a fact that cannot be dismissed; the spiritual health and success of any assembly is directly proportional, to the quality and spirituality of its leadership. The concluding verses of Psalm 78 give wonderful insight into the essence of David's leadership and lessons for today's leaders of God's people.

each subsequent generation to set its hope in God and not forget His works (78:6, 7). The psalm provides a panoramic view of God's dealings with Israel from her deliverance out of the Egyptian fields of Zoan (78:12, 43) to God's choice of Zion as the place for His sanctuary on earth (78:68, 69)

### **GOD "AWOKE" AND MADE THREE CHOICES**

After its opening verses (78:1-8), Psalm 78 develops with a cyclical series of recitations about Israel's

be shepherds of God's flock, the church.

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

God 'chose' David His servant and "took him from the sheepfolds" (78:70). The word chose is from the Greek, "hairtizo" which means to take, the implication being that what is taken is eligible or suitable. This indicates that God Himself raises up qualified men to lead His people and the responsibility of the assembly is to recognize those amongst them who meet the scriptural qualifications for leadership.

One of the most common images in the Bible is that of the shepherd and his sheep. It figures prominently in leadership career of David. Shepherding is an image that pertains to governance, to a leader exercising authority over a group of people, His flock. The biblical image of a shepherd caring for his flock, standing long hours ensuring its safety, guiding it to fresh pasture and clean water, carrying the weak, seeking the lost and straying, healing the wounded and sick is a precious picture of a church elder. The image is characterized by intimacy, tenderness, care, skill, hard work, suffering and love. This image is so incredibly rich that it is used repeatedly in the Bible to describe God and His care of His people (Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34).

David's leadership training took place within the sheepcote where he learned these characteristics and developed patience, compassion, courage and responsibility. David spent time in the royal courts, on the battlefield as a part time armour bearer and as a court musician for King Saul but from Scripture's perspective God's primary preparation of David to rule took place in the sheep pastures outside Bethlehem. The place of training was surprising even to David's father Jesse and to the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-13). It is important to remember that leadership in the assembly is not developed in the business world but within the assembly and in the family home (1 Timothy:

4-5). When David volunteered to fight Goliath, King Saul doubted David's ability to prevail since he was only a teenager and the giant was a seasoned warrior. David did not remind Saul that he was an armour bearer but responded by rehearsing a time when he rescued his father's flocks from a lion and a bear with his bare hands! (1 Samuel 17:36) While serving in the pastures, David leaned on the deliverance of the Lord and it emboldened him for the challenges of kingship.

### LEADERSHIP LESSONS

From David's leadership career we can glean three significant lessons for elders:

#### 1. Acknowledge your people belong to God

That the people belonged to God and not David is made clear in Psalm 78:71 as they are declared "His people". Elders must remember that those they have responsibility for belong to God, that they are His people, His inheritance (1 Peter 5:2, 3) thus the elder must view his leadership as a sacred trust and that he is the steward of a precious treasure. In a future day the elder must give account to the Chief Shepherd as to the faithfulness in care for His precious flock.

#### 2. Demonstrate Integrity

Asaph concludes Psalm 78 by summarizing David's reign in terms of the "integrity of his heart" and the "skilfulness of his hands":

Integrity – speaks of completeness or wholeness. It is often associated with honesty, maturity and reliability. It is a heart that is oriented and fixed on God and as such fosters trust in the people led. It is also courage, the courage to face and meet the demands of truth and reality, a courage that upholds doctrinal and ethical standards regardless of the intensity of the opposition. To discipline sin, confront internal strife and stand against false teaching requires integrity of the highest order.

#### 3. Practice Discernment (Skilfulness of Hands)

"Skill" is an inner moral compass that directs one's actions (hands). Discernment comes from a disposition that is in tune with God's will and seeks to accomplish His purposes. Discernment cannot be developed or practiced apart from God's Word and speaks to the primary function of an elder to "feed the flock" (2 Samuel 5:2). Everything depends on the proper feeding of the flock. Unless wisely fed the sheep become emaciated, sick and stray. Elders protect, guide, manage, nourish, comfort, educate, battle for and heal the flock by teaching and preaching the Word of God. Failure of elders to do so is the chief reason doctrinal error floods the church today. David exercised "skilfulness of hands" and Israel loved him for it. He led them to battle, got them back home and made the right decisions by the Word of the Lord.

### LEADERSHIP GOD'S WAY

God's gracious gift to his people was a leader who was shaped and moulded in the sheep pastures and who ruled with "integrity of heart and skilfulness of hands". He was not perfect. David's leadership however points to One who will reign perfectly in a future day – the Lord Jesus. In Him is the perfect example and model for the elder today. "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). Before the Good Shepherd ascended to heaven He provided for the ongoing care of His flock by raising up men as undershepherds (John 21:15-17, 1 Peter 5:14). May God bless His church with elders of this character and may He soon send His Son, King David's descendant who will inaugurate the future kingdom with perfect leadership.

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## Renewal Notice

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## God Knoweth Best

Sometimes God, who knoweth best,  
Gives us joy and peace and rest,  
Sometimes days glide swiftly by  
Filled with sunshine from on high.

Sometimes God, who knoweth best,  
Sends us sorrow as a test,  
Sometimes He doth wound a heart  
Greater sweetness to impart.

Of a heart bowed down in grief  
Looks to Jesus for relief,  
Seeks the Saviour's loving care,  
Learns to have more faith in pray'r.

Well we know whate'er betide,  
If we let the Spirit guide,  
Will but prove God knoweth best,  
Then fear not, though hard the test.

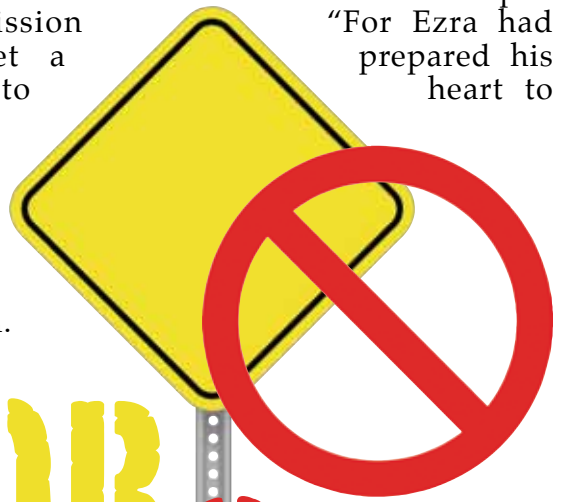
So we leave in His dear hand  
All we cannot understand,  
While our God with heart of love  
Leads His own to heights above.

- Emily Donaghy

While reading a commentary recently I was struck by a comment that emphasized that since Christians are not under the law but under grace that the commands of the N.T. are instruction or advice, not law. Is that true? Now it is true that believers today are not under the law of Moses as a basis for salvation. "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom . 3:21, 24 NKJ)." We are saved through faith in the Lord Jesus and His finished work on Calvary. We glory in the grace of God and the gift of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). But believers acknowledge Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9-10). He is our Sovereign, our King. A man in the army does not view his officer's commands as advice which he feels free to ignore. It is sad that

on the Mount, Jesus quotes the Ten Commandments and then goes on to affirm that the thought of sin as well as the action will be judged by God. He speaks with the authority of God Himself. His followers looked to Him for direction and obeyed Him. In the Great Commission Jesus told them: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Their commission was not only to get a profession of faith but to see converts begin to conform their lives to the teaching of Christ. "...you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Rom.

things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord"(1Cor. 14:37). These are not just Paul's ideas conditioned by the culture in which he lived. Paul speaks with the authority of Moses as he came down from Mt. Sinai, carrying the Ten Commandments. This is not simply instruction or advice; they are the commandments of a holy God. As disciples of our Lord Jesus read the Word of God it should be with an eager desire to learn—and to obey. Follow Ezra's example. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to



# ADVICE OR COMMANDMENTS?

too many who profess to be Christians take the commands of our Lord simply as advice which they may choose to follow or to ignore. Many marry unbelievers, ignoring the warnings of Scripture (2 Cor. 6:14). They divorce freely, disregarding Jesus' warnings (Matt. 19). They trample under foot the verses which stress moral behavior and holiness. In the Sermon

6:17). The Christian life is to be molded and formed by the teaching of God's Word. God's Word and His commands are to form, not only the individual's life, but also that of the local assembly. After giving much practical teaching to the church in Corinth, Paul stated strongly, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the

seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel"(Ezra 7:10). "But to this one will I look, on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Is. 66:2). Let us not water down the commands of God and treat them as advice. They are divine commands to be obeyed because we love the Lord.

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# COUNSEL

## *In Quietness* *Isaiah 30:15*

In quietness let me abide  
When light is growing dim,  
From earth's distractions would I hide,  
Shut in alone with Him.

In perfect peace then let me turn  
My thoughts to heights above,  
And there anew life's lessons learn  
From Him who speaks in love.

There, while I in His presence wait,  
He makes the storm a calm,  
And on my heart so desolate  
He pours His healing balm.

He gives me grace to persevere  
New courage to go on;  
His love dispel the clouds of fear  
And fills my heart with song.

-Grace E Troy

# COUNSEL



*Hid in God...  
Now Revealed*

**The World Chaos**

**Storms**

**Advice or  
Commands?**

*July - October 2011*