



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XIV
Issue 348

The Deity of God

Part 2 of 4

God's Will and Counsel

by — John H. Essex (1907-1991)

As we have pointed out, we get into difficulties whenever we use terms that are not in the Scriptures to describe scriptural matters, and we instanced the word “Trinity” as one such case.

Another term which is unscriptural, yet even more widespread in its use, is the term “fall” when applied to Adam and to humanity. Where do the Scriptures say that Adam “fell” when he disobeyed God? Yet we tend to speak of “fallen man” and “fallen humanity,” and to refer to the event which occurred in the Garden of Eden as “the Fall” (often with a capital “F” to emphasize it).

Another word which we should be very wary about using is “failure.” From one point of view, we may be correct in saying that humanity has failed – failed to keep the law – failed to live up to God’s standard; but never let it be said that humanity has failed to fulfill the purpose for which God created it. God’s purpose has been crowned with success from the very first moment of its conception to its ultimate conclusion. It is a success story from first to last. The Deity of God demands that it should be so.

God’s purpose is not a brilliant recovery from partial failure, but an unqualified success story throughout. It was just as much an essential element in God’s purpose that Adam should transgress as it was an essential feature that the last Adam should be crucified. The one was a prerequisite of the other.

Are we then saying that Adam had no choice in the matter? That he could not help himself? That he could not avoid missing the mark? Indeed, we are saying just that.

It is part of our human nature for us to feel and imagine that we have a considerable freedom of choice. From the moment when, as very young children, we learn to say, “Give me this,” or “I want that,” we are making decisions, and we tend to imagine that these decisions are entirely our own.

When we come to look carefully at the question of choice, we find how very few of the major factors that govern our lives can even remotely be considered to be of our own choosing. The main issues that have made us what we are, are not decided by us at all.

In the first place, *we* did not decide that we were to be humans. God has many creations – some spirit, some human, some animal. We remember being taught, when very young, a little bit of verse, which ran something like this, “I might have been a cow or a pig, and sold for beef or ham” and this particular stanza ended, “I’m glad I’m what I am.” Well, we are what we are only because *God* made us so, and not because we had any say in the matter.

Again, we had no choice as to whether we were to be male or female, and if we had been of the sex opposite to what we are, our whole lives would obviously have been entirely different. Nor had we any choice as to whether we were Jew or Gentile, black or white, prince or pauper; nor in what century we were born. We could go on listing other items in which we have had no choice whatever – our nationality, our parentage, our early home life and education.

Still we tend to think that we have the freedom to

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- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
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DEITY (continued from front page)

choose, and certain Scriptures *seem* to support that idea. “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve,” Joshua told the Israelites, “but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

One of the most forthright Scriptures seeming to support the idea of freedom of choice is that in Deuteronomy 30:19, where God says to the nation of Israel,

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

Therefore choose life? The fact of the matter was that not one in the nation was capable of choosing life. Why? Because of the inherent weakness of the flesh.

THE FIRST ADAM

Paul throws the whole position into proper perspective when he says, in his Roman epistle, that there was no fault whatever in the law which God gave to His people, yet it could not give life because of the weakness of the flesh. The law itself is holy, and the precept holy and just and good, yet the law was producing indignation from God because no one could keep it. Why was no one able to keep it?

This is the crux of the matter. In the past, we have tended to put all of the blame for human failure on Adam. If only Adam had not transgressed, we say! We are suggesting that the cause of human failure is much more basic than that. The vital Scripture which gives us the clue to the whole matter is in I Corinthians 15:45-46. Read them carefully, and weigh every word.

If there is a soulish body, there is a spiritual also ... The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam a vivifying Spirit. But not first the spiritual, but the soulish, thereupon the spiritual.

The first man, Adam, “became a living soul.” In that statement lies the explanation for all of our problems. When God made Adam a living *soul*, He put into him all of those soulish tendencies that would make it impossible for him to please God.

Man was created for a purpose, and that purpose was that he might provide a form of creation in which death could operate, in order that God's Own Son might come in human form and suffer death for the whole of creation.

“What is man?” asked David (Psalm 8:4); and we have connected it with the reply given by the writer of Hebrews where, in the second chapter, he repeats the question and then goes on to enlarge on the answer:

Yet we are observing Jesus, Who has been made some bit inferior to the messengers, because of the suffering of death (Hebrews 2:9).

The creation of humanity was made in order to pave the way for the crucifixion of the Firstborn of all creation.

Man was created a living soul. That is, he had placed within him those senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and feeling which, in themselves, evoke passions which are opposed to God, and which can be kept subject only by the Spirit of God.

Those of Christ Jesus, crucify the flesh together with its passions and lusts (Galatians 5:24).

These passions and lusts are not the outcome of Adam's transgression, though they may well be increased as a result of death working through us from Adam; but they are the basic passions and lusts that are *inherent* in a fleshly creation. In Romans 8:6-8, Paul tells us that,

The disposition of the flesh is death, yet the disposition of the spirit is life and peace, because the disposition of the flesh is enmity to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither is it able. Now those who are in flesh are not able to please God.

Adam was in the flesh and, as such, was *not able* to please God. Yet God had declared, when He had created Adam, that he was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). What do we understand by this? Adam (like all of the rest of creation) was very good in the sense that he was exactly what God required at the particular stage in His purpose when he was created. Humanity has a vital function to play in the purpose of God, but it is a function which requires it to be first *soulish* (with all of the evoking of God's displeasure that this involves), and then *spiritual*.

Adam was created soulish, and,

The soulish man is not receiving those things which are of the Spirit of God, for they are stupidity to him, and he is not able to know them, seeing that they are spiritually examined (I Corinthians 2:14).

See again how the writings of Paul illuminate the picture. Adam was soulish, and his very soulishness obstructed his freedom of choice, the same as it has done with all humanity since. Jesus emphasized this when He said,

No one can come to Me if ever the Father Who sends Me should not be drawing him. ... No one can be coming to Me if it should not be given him of the Father (John 6:44, 65).

The power of God is needed to draw anyone to Christ. The flesh, of itself, tends to oppose Christ, and prevents us from choosing Him.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, this conflict between flesh and spirit is one of the main themes, and in the seventh chapter the apostle describes how this conflict was operating within himself. He willed to do one thing, yet the flesh was continually pulling him back, so that he was putting into practice things that he was not willing to do. The important point was that *the flesh was winning* – so much so that, in despair, he asks,

What will rescue me out of this body of death?

Thank God that there is an answer: *Grace!*

I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Consequently, then, I myself, with the mind, indeed, am slaving for God's law, yet with the flesh for Sin's law (Romans 7:24-25).

The flesh was created for Sin – it was created to miss the mark, to fall short of God's glory, to fail to please God – and Adam, created fleshly, a living soul, could not help but fall short of God's requirements.

Neither could Israel help but fall short, as regards the God-given law. Not one of them could keep the law because of the inherent soulish qualities of the flesh that prevented them from attaining to God's standards.

Neither can we help but fall short of God's standard of righteousness because of the same inherent soulish qualities of the flesh. Without exception, in the flesh, all have sinned and are wanting of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). How charitable we should be to each other!

THE LAST ADAM

There has been One Who has come in the likeness of sin's flesh, yet Who was not soulish but Whose being

was completely controlled and dominated by the Spirit of God.

The last Adam was a vivifying Spirit (I Corinthians 15:45).

For the One not knowing sin, He makes to be a sin offering for our sakes that we may be becoming God's righteousness in Him (II Corinthians 5:21).

The flesh was made for Sin, and the flesh fulfilled its most vital function in God's purpose when it became the vehicle in which God's Own Son could become Sin for the sake of those who had been created through Him and for Him.

The first man, Adam, was soulish, and as such could not please God. It was not Adam's fault; it was how he was made. The last Adam was quite different. He was a vivifying Spirit; and, though He came in the likeness of sin's flesh, He was, in fact, the One in Whom God was well pleased – in Whom He delighted. The first Adam walked according to the flesh; the last Adam walked according to spirit.

THE OLD AND NEW HUMANITY

Humanity as a whole continues to walk according to the flesh; man remains soulish, and as such cannot understand the things which are of the Spirit of God, for they are stupidity to him, and he is not able to know them, seeing that they are spiritually examined (I Corinthians 2:14).

The majority of men have not, as yet, been given God's Spirit to discern His ways. They will receive of His Spirit later on, when the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14); but for now, the Scriptures are speaking of those who are chosen and called to be believers. These are truly in a privileged position, for they are, in God's sight, delivered from their bodies of flesh in which they cannot please God, into a new humanity – a new creation, in which God can take delight. Let us note Paul again in II Corinthians 5:16-18.

*So that we, from now on, are acquainted with no one according to flesh. Yet even if we have known Christ according to flesh, nevertheless now we know Him so no longer. So that, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the primitive passed by. Lo! there has come new! **Yet all is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ.***

The primitive passed by! The fleshly discarded! The soulish ignored! That which is displeasing to God is finished with.

Nothing, consequently, is now condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. Not according to flesh are they walking, but according to spirit, for the spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus frees you from the law of sin and death. ... You are not in flesh, but in spirit, if so be that God's Spirit is making its home in you (Romans 8:1-2, 9).

A EULOGY OF FAITH

It is stated of Enoch, in Hebrews 11:5, that "he is attested to have pleased God well." Yet, in reality, it is not Enoch as a descendant of Adam that is being praised, but rather Enoch as a man of faith, and in the very next verse it is affirmed that "apart from faith it is impossible to be well pleasing." Faith is a spiritual quality, given by God.

The whole chapter is, in fact, a eulogy of faith, not of people. None of the characters is being praised for what he does in the flesh; on the contrary, they are headed by Abel, whose name means "vanity," and this indicates again the vanity of all that the flesh stands for.

Those in flesh cannot please God, and Abraham, for example, is not commended for his journey into Egypt to escape the pangs of famine, nor is Moses commended for his anger in striking the Egyptian. It is when the Spirit of God is being manifest in their actions that they are recorded as examples of faith, for then they are acting in full accord with His will, and at the prompting of His directions.

FREE CHOICE?

So, coming back to the question of free choice, and to sum up what we have been saying, we are suggesting that what appears on the surface to be a genuine freedom of decision is in reality not so, but is in fact governed by hidden forces within our very natures – forces that were put there by God Himself when He made humanity what it is – when He created us soulish. A man's heart may devise his ways; but, when all is said and done, it is the Lord Who directs his steps (Proverbs 16:9). This direction may be unperceived at the time, but is there nevertheless.

It was there in the case of Jacob and Esau, whose future actions were decided *before they were born*, in order that God's purpose might "remain as a choice, not out of acts, but of Him Who is calling" (Romans 9:11).

It was there in the case of Pharaoh who, unknown to himself, was roused up for the specific purpose that God might display His power in him (Romans 9:17).

It was there in the case of humanity in general – vessels of indignation, made by God for dishonor, and adapted by Him for destruction. It is the Divine Potter Who makes them thus (Romans 9:21-22).

It is there in the case of the ecclesia, vessels of mercy, made ready before for glory, in whom God is operating "both to will as well as to work for the sake of His delight" (Romans 9:23; Philippians 2:13).

It is there in the case of creation itself, subjected to vanity, "not voluntarily, but because of Him Who subjects it" (Romans 8:20). Creation cannot help itself that all of its achievements are futile because of the slavery of corruption, but we take immense comfort from the fact that, in spite of all of its present "groaning and travailing," it was subjected to vanity in *expectation* of the eventual realization of that glorious freedom which is now already being enjoyed by the children of God.

It is in the prison epistle of Paul to the Ephesians that we find the most absolute expression of the Deity of God in relation to the points we have been considering. Here we find the phrase which puts all other Scriptures into their perspective:

*According to the purpose of the One Who is operating **all** in accord with the counsel of **His** will (1:11).*

God is the captain of the ship of the universe; all of His creatures are its passengers. He is guiding the vessel across the ocean of time from the port that is called "All in God" to the haven that is termed "God in all."

The passengers have wills of their own, but only as much freedom of choice as their Captain permits, which, in the absolute sense, is no freedom at all, since at all times He remains in full command. He may allow them to wander seemingly unhindered about the ship, but even so there are parts of the vessel where they are not allowed to go, and many things which they are not allowed to do. All of the time they are being carried along inevitably wherever the ship takes them – that is, wherever the Captain directs. When the ship goes wherever they want to go, they feel free, but the moment that it starts to move toward a place where they do not want to go, they know immediately that they are not free at all. Yet, since they are on the ship, they are under the absolute control of the Captain. ►

So it is with creation. It had no choice even as to which ship it should join, or whereabouts on the ship it would find itself, nor has it any say in the direction the ship is taking. For much of its journey it is allowed to think that it is working out its own destiny, but sooner or later it is brought inexorably to the conclusion that God is in control and “*is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will.*” Thus it eventually grows into a “*realization of God.*” Blessed indeed are those who grow into this realization sooner rather than later.

“*All is of God,*” says Paul in Corinthians. “*The One Who is operating all,*” he says in Ephesians. If God is operating *all* in accord with the counsel of *His* will, can there be another free will in the universe? Can there be two Gods?

“*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,*” wrote Moses at God’s dictation (Exodus 20:3). “*To us,*” says Paul, “*there is one God, the Father, out of Whom all is*” (I Corinthians 8:6).

When we have fully grasped the importance of these great truths, we shall no longer say “I,” or “I and God,” or even “God and I,” but simply and solely, and majestically, “God.” His Deity will then be fully recognized and acknowledged.

GIVING GLORY TO GOD

In our studies of the Scriptures, we frequently come across such expressions as “*giving glory to God,*” or “*to God be the glory.*” Peter, in one of his letters, uses the phrase, “*that in all God may be glorified,*” and Paul presses his readers at Corinth to “*do all for the glory of God.*”

Let us consider together some of the ways by which men, in spite of their fleshly weaknesses and sinning propensities, ought still to be glorifying God, and in particular, how we as believers should be doing so, especially in view of our deeper appreciation of His Deity.

One method is by attributing to God all that is rightly His, and by thanking Him accordingly for all the benefits received from Him. This has been stressed in previous studies and is most important. It is the Creator’s demand of His creation.

We are today surrounded on all sides by indifference to God. We are living in what is largely a pagan world. Paul’s great indictment of men as a whole (in Romans 1) is embodied in the phrase that, “*knowing God, not as God do they glorify or thank Him*” (Romans 1:21).

It is not that they do not know Him. They cannot plead ignorance of His existence. The evidence of God all around, in the things that grow and the things that move, leaves them without excuse. Because of this and because they refuse to glorify God and thank Him, they become subject to His indignation.

GIVING THANKS TO GOD

The glorification of God lies in the creature’s appreciation of Him as the Source from Whom all blessings flow, as well as the Power through which all is sustained; the expressions of thanks are evidences that such appreciation is there, and is genuine. That is why Paul lays such emphasis on our being thankful:

In everything be giving thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (I Thessalonians 5:18).

Everything, whatever you may be doing in word and in act, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God, the Father, through Him (Colossians 3:17).

Be filled full with spirit ... giving thanks always for all things, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, to our God and Father (Ephesians 5:19-21).

Superabundance of thanksgiving is the Apostle’s constant plea.

In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6).

Let us note that our thanks should precede, or at least accompany, our requests to God. We can always thank Him again when our requests are granted.

Thanks are not necessary to God, but they gratify His heart. They are necessary for us, and for several reasons. They remind us constantly of His goodness. They acknowledge Him as the Giver. They help to convince us of our utter dependency on Him. They inculcate in us a true spirit of subjection, and in all of this we glorify Him.

We glorify Him because we acknowledge Him as the Deity. We know Him and add to that knowledge by our recognition of Him *as God*. This is the meaning of the Greek word, *epignosis* (ON-KNOWLEDGE). In Romans 1:28 it is translated “*recognition.*” In Colossians 1:9-10 the same word is translated “*realization.*” This is a further stage of “*knowledge.*”

Mankind as a whole does not have any recognition of God as the Deity; blessed indeed are we if we are growing into a full realization of Him. The greater that this realization becomes, the deeper will be our thanks to Him Who creates it in our hearts.

There are several cases in Scripture where people are recorded as glorifying God by giving thanks for favors and blessings received. There is for example the case of the Samaritan leper, recorded in Luke 17. He was one of ten who were healed by Jesus, but the only one who, perceiving that he was healed, returned “*glorifying God with a loud voice*” (Luke 17:15). He fell on his face at the feet of Jesus to thank Him. How typical is this of conditions today! For every one who acknowledges God and thanks Him, nine (or perhaps ninety-nine) accept gifts from His hands and take them all as a matter of course.

Another instance, mentioned in Luke 18, concerns the blind beggar outside of Jericho who was given sight by Jesus. In :43 we read that he followed Jesus, glorifying God, and that the entire people perceiving it gave praise to God. Our actions in glorifying God, by thankfully acknowledging Him as the Provider of all the blessings we enjoy, may influence others to perceive their own indebtedness to Him.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

The two instances just quoted were the result of miracles performed by Jesus when He was on earth, but there was one miracle of His in which God was particularly glorified, and the account of this contains so many wonderful and instructive points that it is well worthy of frequent examination. We refer to the raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-4.

Now there was a certain infirm man, Lazarus from Bethany, of the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Now it was Mary who rubs the Lord with attar and wipes off His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was infirm. The sisters, then, dispatch to Him [Christ], saying, “Lord, lo, he of whom Thou art fond is infirm.” Yet Jesus, hearing it, said, “This infirmity is not to death, but for the glory of God.”

What? Can God be glorified in infirmity? Are *our* infirmities also to the glory of God? Let us read on, and see what happens in the case of Lazarus.

This infirmity is not to death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God should be glorified through it (:4).

Here, a new factor is brought into the picture. It is not infirmity, for infirmity’s sake, that glorifies God, but that some facet of the Divine character or purpose should be displayed through it. In this case it is the power of God’s operations in Christ; on a later occasion it would be the power of God’s operations in Paul (II Corinthians 12:9). Here Jesus was being given the opportunity of demonstrating beyond any peradventure that He was indeed the Son of God, with power over death and the grave. Thus, as we read on, we find that Jesus remained where He was for two days after hearing the news, although it is specially stressed that He loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

In the meantime we find from :19 that Martha and Mary were not lacking in visitors. Many Jews came to comfort them concerning their brother, but the One they wanted most and Who could help them most stayed away with seeming indifference. When eventually Jesus did arrive – tardily as it seemed to them – each sister reproached Him in turn with identical words,

Lord, if Thou wert here, my brother would not have died (:21, 32).

The same theme was also taken up by some of the crowd, who said,

Could not this One Who opens the eyes of the blind man, also make it that this man should not be dying? (:37).

How often we, too, think like that! We are living in the days of expectancy of His coming, and all around us our friends are falling asleep. “If only the Lord would come, and gather us to Himself, we need no longer remain in our infirmities! If only the Lord had come sooner, this brother or that brother need not have died.” Or again, “Is there any necessity for all of the mounting sorrow that there is in the world? If God would only hasten His purpose and cut short this evil day!” Such are often the burdens of our complaints; but God’s purpose will not be hurried. Our infirmities are for His glory, and creation’s travail is also for His glory.

Which gives the greater glory to God, the healing of the sick? or the rousing of the dead? Which is the greater manifestation of His power? Had Jesus not tarried, Martha and Mary might truly have been spared two days of sorrow, but neither they nor we living nearly two thousand years later would have had that demonstration of the resurrection power of God which was provided by the calling forth of a dead Lazarus ►

from the tomb. Neither would we have known that Jesus could weep!

“*Jesus weeps*” (:35) is one of the shortest, if not the shortest, statement in Scripture, but one that reveals much. The heart of the Son of God was touched. Though Jesus knew that He had come to conquer death, the immediate plight of humanity created in Him a tremendous bond of sympathy. We are not to assume that He was really indifferent during those two days that He had delayed His coming. Doubtless His heart ached to be with the sorrowing sisters in their distress, but He held back in deference to the greater need of a supreme demonstration of God’s glory.

In all of this Jesus mirrors His Father. God is not indifferent to all of the suffering of humanity, nor to the afflictions of those who are His chosen ones. He rejoices with us in our joys, and sympathizes with us in our sorrows.

Brother A.E. Knoch has a beautiful comment on the matter:

Why does God allow evil? Why does He not hasten to remove it? All that is needed is His presence. But He delays. His delay confirms the great truth that evil as well as good is from Him. It is the necessary foil for the display of His glory.

It would seem from a careful reading of the context that, though Jesus indeed tarried, the sisters of Lazarus were not left without consolation. When Jesus eventually arrived, Martha made a remarkable declaration of faith. “*Yes, Lord,*” she said, “*I have believed that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, Who is coming into the world*” (:27).

Now, when Peter made a similar declaration on another occasion, Jesus responded by saying,

Happy are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, seeing that flesh and blood does not reveal it to you, but my Father Who is in the heavens (Matthew 16:17).

Did Martha’s conviction come from any less exalted source than Peter’s? Surely, to her, it was a Divine revelation as well! With her assurance came an expectation, and in holding fast to that even in affliction and distress, she glorified God.

We, too, though surrounded by a world of suffering, and often suffering in ourselves, have a yet more glori-

ous expectation than Martha’s, which enables us to rise above our environment and to glorify God in seeing beyond present experiences. If it but knew it, the entire creation, groaning and travailing together until now and subjected to vanity, not voluntarily but because of Him Who subjects it, has an expectation, too – an expectation of,

Being freed from the slavery of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:21).

Would that creation was aware of its wonderful future!

Comparatively little is told us about that happy family of Bethany, and yet all that is said is both interesting and significant. Martha, in spite of that one rebuke from the Lord about her over-worry concerning temporal things (a rebuke which many of us could equally justly apply to ourselves!), was a very lovable character with an exceedingly strong faith.

We have seen that both sisters used identical words in upbraiding Jesus for His delay in coming to their succor, but whereas Mary was content to say,

Lord, if Thou wert here, my brother would not have died (John 11:32).

Martha supplemented this by adding,

But even now I am aware that whatever Thou shouldst be requesting of God, God will be giving it to Thee (:22).

Following this declaration by Martha came that intimate conversation between her and the Lord, which ended by Jesus asking,

Are you believing this? (:26).

Martha replied,

Yes, Lord, I have believed that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, Who is coming into the world (:27).

Truly, Martha glorified God in believing, and one of the ways in which we can most truly glorify God is in believing also.

(To be continued.)