



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

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

Volume 24
Issue 589

Divine Lockup

Part 3

Vanity

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

In our first two installments we saw that God temporarily has locked up humanity into unbelief and sin. We saw these as temporary acts for His greater purpose. In this third and final part we will now see that the divine bondage of mankind extends to vanity.



in subjection.” It is also defined as to “assign,”³ and “subjection to orders,”⁴ with the idea of “subordination.”⁵

So, the first thing to comprehend is that vanity has dominion over humanity. Like a king over his subjects, or a commander over his army, vanity rules over mankind. Though not as strong as the Greek word συγκλείω (*sugkleiō*), *hupotassō* nonetheless deserves our attention under this theme, as it has been declared that we have been “assigned” and “arranged” under vanity’s jurisdiction and control, and thus are subject to its “orders.”

HUMANITY’S LOCKUP UNDER VANITY

The creature was made **subject** to VANITY, not willingly (Romans 8:20, King James Version).

Unto VANITY, hath creation been made **subject**—not by choice (Rotherham Emphasized Bible).

To VANITY was the creation made **subject** – not of its will (Young’s Literal Translation).

For to VANITY was the creation **subjected**, not voluntarily (Concordant Literal Version).

The Dominion of Vanity

We will focus on three great truths found in this verse. The first thing that we will notice is found in the bold-type word “**subject**.”

The Greek word is ὑποτάσσω (*hupotassō*).¹ Thayer’s² definition includes, “to arrange under ... to put

The Meaning of Vanity

Our attention next moves to the word “*vanity*,” to which we have been made “*subject*.” It is the Greek word ματαιότης (*mataiotēs*)⁶ and is defined as “emptiness,”⁷ “seeking without finding,”⁸

3. Liddell–Scott–Jones Greek-English Lexicon.
4. A.T. Robertson’s Word Pictures.
5. UNDER-SET (Concordant Keyword Concordance).
6. Strong’s, G3153.
7. E.W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*.
8. B.W. Johnson, *People’s New Testament*.

1. Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, G5293.
2. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon.

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“unprofitableness,”⁹ and “inutility.”¹⁰ Oxford¹¹ defines inutility as “useless; pointless.”

Our English word “vanity” is defined as:

emptiness; lack of substance to satisfy desire; ... fruitless desire or endeavor; trifling labor that produces no good; ... empty pleasure; vain pursuit; idle show; unsubstantial enjoyment.¹²

According to Romans 8:20, God has *subjected* humanity to *vanity*, making us unfulfilled, unsatisfied, disappointed, disheartened, discouraged, frustrated, irritated, empty and hollow. We are all keenly aware of this state of subjection!

The words of vanity’s definition resonate. We are always *missing the mark*, even at our very best, and are falling short of satisfaction, fulfillment, and purpose.

“If we just had ...” “If we could just ...” “If we were just ...”

9. Jonathan Mitchell New Testament.

10. Strong’s.

11. Oxford English Dictionary.

12. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Dictionary*, 1828.

“... then things would be different and we would be complete.”

To contemplate more thoroughly that to which God has truly subjected us, thoughtfully consider the way “vanity” in Romans 8:20 is translated in the following versions:

- aimless frustration* (An Understandable Version)
- spoil* (Bible in Worldwide English)
- imperfection* (Montgomery New Testament)
- folly* (The Riverside New Testament)
- failure and unreality* (Weymouth New Testament)
- futility* (Moffatt New Testament)
- weakness* (New Life Study Testament)
- limitation* (Phillips New Testament)
- emptiness* (Mitchell New Testament)
- dissolution* [i.e., putrefaction] (Original New Testament)

Against Our Will

Our final focus is on the concept of unwillingness in Romans 8:20. This is a significant truth for us to apprehend. Humanity’s subjection to vanity was,

not willingly (KJV);

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Universal Reconciliation Questions & Answers

When approaching this subject from the Scriptures, many honest and sincere questions arise. This site is designed to be an interactive forum bringing members of the Body of Christ together in fellowship and study around the subject of Universal Reconciliation. We start with an initial list of 322 questions. These questions are taken from the New Testament, beginning in Matthew and working through Revelation.

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Look through the list of Answered Questions to find answers to your inquiries, or e-mail us for posting to the list.

For Those Who Have Answers
E-mail us for the list of unanswered questions and send us your answers for posting to the list.

not by choice (Rotherham);
not of its will (Young);
not voluntarily (Concordant).

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God (II Corinthians 3:5).

Be honest: none of us *want* to be identified with vanity. None of us volunteered for any of this. None of us asked to be in this condition. Plainly, we were purposefully created *deficient*.

This deficiency is in ourselves, so we would of necessity be required to find our *sufficiency OUTSIDE of ourselves*. Yet, humanity looks in the wrong places for their completeness. This is our natural bent.

Mankind can't find fulfillment outside of God. Our ultimate purpose is to be "*complete in Him*" (Colossians 2:10). The word translated "*complete*" is πληρόω (*plēroō*),¹³ meaning to "satisfy,"¹⁴ "to fill to the brim."¹⁵

Even those of us who have been granted eyes of faith to see this paramount truth will always be tested as to its reality. Vanity constantly has its illusive fulfillment pulling on us.

THE ANSWER TO SUFFICIENCY

Paul knew well the answer to his own lack of sufficiency.

Though in our humanity we are lacking, in Him we find our sufficiency. Though in our humanity we are weak, in Him we find our strength (II Corinthians 12:10). Though in our humanity we are nothing, in Him we find our "all" (as it is He who is "*All in all*," I Corinthians 15:28).

THE ANSWER TO PERFORMANCE

Let's look again at Paul's words:

... for to will is present with me; but how to **perform** that which is good I find not (Romans 7:18).

Many struggle in their attempts to *perform* what has been put before them as the model "Christian life." Even Paul, within himself, was unable to "*perform*" what he perceived as "*good*." He was self-deficient and incomplete. He learned the divine lesson that the *performance* of his life was outside of himself.

Note carefully what Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6 and how it contrasts what he wrote in Romans 7:18.

*Being confident of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will **perform** it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Let's enumerate what Paul had come to learn:

1. We are God's work;
2. God began the work in us;
3. It is God Who is performing the work in us;
4. God will continue to perform the work until the end.

Paul knew that he was not the one who had made himself who he was, for he was God's "*workmanship*" (Ephesians 2:10); he was God's "*achievement*" (*Concordant*).

Paul knew that God, having started the work in him, would be faithful to perform that work all the way to its completion: "*until the day of Jesus Christ.*" ►

13. Strong's, G4137.

14. Strong's.

15. Thayer's.



ALL in All: The Goal of the Universe

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)
(#6269) 219 pages, Paperback
(See order form.)

This publication is a compilation of the writings of A.E. Knoch on human destiny. The author examines three major theories on this topic current among students of Scripture. The striking phrase "All in all," which pertains to the vivification of all mankind in I Corinthians 15:28 and relates to the reconciliation of the entire intelligent creation in Ephesians 1:23, is discussed at length. Two extensive appendices are included, exploring the usage of the terms "eon" and "eonian" in the Scriptures.

He knew that Christ alone was the “Inaugurator and Perfector of faith” (Hebrews 12:2, *Concordant*).

Paul couldn't “perform” – but not to worry, as it wasn't even his job to perform. The performance belongs to God alone: HE “will **perform** it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

VANITY WITHOUT VANITY

Although in our humanity we have been subjected to vanity, in Christ we are able to find purpose, fulfillment and completeness.

*Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is **not in vain in the Lord** (I Corinthians 15:58).*

Solomon wrote concerning vanity,

Vanity of vanities; all is vanity ... What profit has a man of all his labor which he takes under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3).

When Solomon writes of vanity, he, too, speaks of emptiness, meaninglessness, pointlessness, purposelessness and futility – that relentless cycle of humanity. He specifically means “labor” in regards to “vanity”:

*What profit has a man of all his **labor** which he takes under the sun?*

“Vanity” is thus the lot of those on earth, *and even*

our labors are vain. Yet for those of us who have been granted a *realization*,¹⁶ quite another view of labor can prevail. Instead of our labors being bound to such emptiness, they can rise to heights of divine life.

Solomon's perspective showed the vanity of labor from the purely human-viewpoint, “*under the sun*” – a vantage-point apart from God. However, Paul, our apostle, gave us a divine perspective, revealing the true purpose found in labor, which can be found only in the divine viewpoint:

*Your labor is **NOT IN VAIN** in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58).*

Those of us who know God as the Sovereign Placer and Subjector of our days have a completely different approach to life and labor. Instead of being human and vain, it is divine and meaningful. It is *He* who transforms futility into value, emptiness into fullness, and the mundane into the divine. For us, “*all things*” – even the apparently routine and commonplace – become significant in the sphere of the divine.

Our final focus is on the concept of unwillingness in Romans 8:20. The life of God in us makes all things sacred. The circumstances of our earthly lives bear

¹⁶. A realization of Him (Ephesians 1:17);
A realization of the Son of God (Ephesians 4:13);
A realization of God (Colossians 1:10);
A realization of the secret of God (Colossians 2:2);
A realization of the truth (II Timothy 2:25; Titus 1:1).
(All references above are from the *Concordant Version*.)



I Choose! Living Life to Its Fullest

Forty-Eight Daily Thoughts on Divine Life

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

This book shares the message of real, meaningful life – Divine life; life that can be lived and enjoyed daily!

The simple fact is that we are alive! Yet not just alive, but alive with the very life of God! But questions arise in our minds: What about the past? What about the future? We mustn't allow our “*What if ...*” imaginations of the past or the future to lay claim to *the present* that God has given us.

Each of us must allow the objective, unchanging truth of who God has made us in the Lord Jesus Christ to transform our minds. This is the spiritual message and journey of “*I Choose.*”

185 pp., PB

See order form.

the apparent context of vanity; however, they are but the backdrop of divine workmanship. We are His achievement, and our lives are the stage for the Master Workman.

No matter what the circumstances of life are around us, regardless of our apparent bondage to sin and vanity, God is actually operating a far superior reality of perfection and purpose.

More often than not the context of our lives and labors can have the appearance of a monotonous, daily routine. Yet the very life of God running its full course in our day-by-day circumstances will make our lives anything but monotonous and routine.

While we considered a portion of Romans 8:20 at

our start – that humanity has been subjected to vanity – now let’s read it all.

*For the creature was subjected to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him Who has **sub-jected the same in hope** (Romans 8:20).*

Our lives and labors are *anything* other than vain, for our Creator subjected us not only to vanity but also to hope – a confident expectation!

*Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that **your labor is NOT in vain in the Lord** (I Corinthians 15:58).*

(to be continued)



I really enjoy all of your dailies and other works that you have made available to us. ... Thank you for your generous spirit. – MA

I feel like I have been walking the path in your leadership. I think breaking down pride to show true emotion with tears is what I have learned from you. You and I are exactly the same. I was just resistant to really express myself until I saw you do it with love and passion. I applaud you for that brother. Thanks

for teaching us – not just with your words but with your actions. – MI

The Daily Email Goodies are my daily inspiration and I enjoy reading the Bible Student’s Notebook. – OH

I cried through much of your 3 videos The Greatest Truth I Know as I had a feeling of peace. I’m not always aware that God is in charge and I try to manage and force things to go the way I want them to go, but looking in retrospect, I see all kinds of signs that God made events happen all along. I frequently lose sight of God’s hand in my life. I watched those 3 videos again and am able to find peace at least for a while. I wanted to let you know how powerful your message is. Thank you from the depths of my heart! – CA



100 Scriptural Proofs that Jesus Christ Is the Savior of All and 150 Reasons for Believing in the Final Salvation of All Mankind

by — Thomas Whitemore & Erasmus Manford

108 pp, PB
See order form.

This reprint of two historical works from the 19th century examines Scripture passages taking the reader through a logical train of thought proving universal reconciliation.



Editor's Desk

Awake, O harp and lyre, I will awaken the dawn!
(Psalm 108:2, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*).

Among the many divine roles of David was that of psalmist. He was one of the composers of Israel's sacred music. God had this masterful musician and songwriter up early; his job, as it were, was to "awaken the dawn."

For decades I've had an affinity with David. Although, unlike David, I've no musical or lyrical abilities, it's quite common for me to awaken hours before dawn with a pressing sense of divine urgency and purpose. With no clock beside me, and without any alarm, I'm up, fully awake, passionately eager for what Father has in store for the day.

Though not awaking each morning at the same time, today I was up at 3:30, and yesterday, before 4:00. My early rising has little bearing on the time of my evening retirement. I can normally be quite productive throughout the day on as little as four hours of sleep.

Funny thing, after all these years, by bedtime on some nights I tell myself, "I'll rest a little longer in the morning."

Regardless, I regularly find myself up early – thankful and excited to begin the day.

I share this with you so that you may know a little of who Father has made me. If this was not part of the norm built into me by God, I can't even imagine where I'd be today. The many years of morning solitude have been graciously granted to me as invaluable time to study and write. Without these added hours I wouldn't have a hint concerning the many wonderful truths Father has taught me over this journey that I began as a zealous young churchman so many years ago. Neither would there be the numerous books I've written, nor the many volumes of this *Bible Student's Notebook*. I've come to be extremely grateful for the very cycle of my days – a truly humbling experience.

Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way? (Proverbs 20:24).

A man's heart devises his way, but the Lord directs his steps (Proverbs 16:9).

I remain your servant,

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will 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 in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 1:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:

- total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
- union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);
- adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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