

God's Will and Counsel

I pointed out in the last article under this title that 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 chary 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. But let us look into this question of choice for a moment or two.

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.

For instance, you who are reading this article, all decided to have a look at "Unsearchable Riches" at this particular moment. You could have picked up the magazine, or you could have chosen something else to read. Or could you?

Did you pick up this particular magazine to read, rather than something else, simply and solely because you decided to do so, or was it because God was operating in you to will as well as to work for the sake of His delight (Phil.2:13)? If you claim that the decision was solely yours, then you are refusing to admit the power of God's Spirit operating in you.

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, colored or white, prince or pauper; nor in what century we were born (and we may well remind ourselves that we could not be of that ecclesia, which is the body of Christ, if we had lived and died before the crucifixion). So the time of our coming into the world is very important, yet we had no say in the matter. And so 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.

But still we tend to think that we have the freedom to choose, and certain scriptures seem to support that idea. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve," Joshua told the Israelites, "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! But 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. But why was no one able to keep it?

This is the crux of the matter. In the past, we have tended to put all the blame for human failure on Adam. If only Adam had not transgressed, we say! But 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 1 Corinthians 15, verses 45 and 46. Let us 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 our problems. When God made Adam a living soul, He put into him all 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. We have discussed this in earlier articles, where we have considered the question, "What is man?" asked by David in Psalm 8, 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 upon the answer, "Yet we are observing Jesus, Who has been made some bit inferior to the messengers, because of the suffering of death. . ." The creation of humanity was made in order to pave the way for the crucifixion of the Firstborn of all creation.

And 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 only be kept subject by the Spirit of God. "Those of Christ Jesus," says Paul, in Galatians 5:24, "crucify the flesh together with its passions and lusts." 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, 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."

And 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" (Gen.1:31). What do we understand by this? Adam (like all 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 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." This is Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14. See how again 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," and "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. And 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, though it is omitted from the King James (Authorized) Version: Grace! "I thank God," says the apostle, "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" (Rom.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. And 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. And 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 (Rom.3:23). How charitable we should be to each other!

THE LAST ADAM

But 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. Though He came in the likeness of sin's flesh, He knew no sin; yet He became Sin for our sakes that we might be becoming God's righteousness in Him (2 Cor.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 THE 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 (1 Cor.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 (Hab.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 2 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" (Rom.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," but, 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 (Prov.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" (Rom.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 (Rom.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 (Rom.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" (Rom.9:23; Phil.2: 13).

It is there in the case of creation itself, subjected to vanity, "not voluntarily, but because of Him Who subjects it" (Rom.8:20). Creation cannot help itself, that all its achievements are futile because of the slavery of corruption, but we take immense comfort from the fact that, in spite of all 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 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. And all 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. But, since they are on the ship, they are under the absolute control of the Captain.

And 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. "To us," says Paul, "there is one God, the Father, out of Whom all is."

When we have fully grasped the import 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.

Written by John H Essex - From part 3 of the 6 part study titled: "The Deity of God"

Blessed be the Lord God and Father of our Lord,
Christ Jesus.

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