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“They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.” (Heb 11:13–16)

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WILLINGLY ENSLAVED

If any of your people—Hebrew men or women—sell themselves to you and serve you six years, in the seventh year you must let them go free. And when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed. Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today....Do not consider it a hardship to set your servant free, because their service to you these six years has been worth twice as much as that of a hired hand. And the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do (Dt 15:12-15,18).

The passage above details a law regarding a particular kind of slavery. It is the kind of bondage that is all-too-common in our advanced and modern societies now; this law was regarding those so bound in debt, they were reduced to servitude as repayment. Under this Mosaic code of law, when a person had no other means to repay his debt—having no land, no capital or income to come out of his financial distress—he had this final option: to sell himself to be a slave to the one to whom he was indebted.

Mercifully, under this code of law, your debt would cancel after six years of servitude. You wouldn't be bound by a thirty-year mortgage, or hounded by debt collectors for decades on end. This principle of letting the debtor go free after six years was the first thing taught to the children of Israel after they received the ten commandments (Exo 21:1-2). In the New Testament, we see that after Jesus taught "the Lord's prayer," He also emphasized this same principle of forgiving those indebted to us. *"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors....For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (Mat 6:12,14-15).

There is a powerful message about forgiveness here: come to the seventh year. This seventh year can represent spiritual maturity. A mature Christian learns to let go of debts and sets the debtor free, whereas a Christian who hasn't come to his "seventh year" will yet hold his brother in bondage. The high price you pay for not forgiving your brother is to lose your forgiveness from God. *Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master handed him over*

to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (Mat 18:32-35).

There was a time when Israel made a covenant to free their brethren in slavery. Debts were canceled, and all was joy again. But then...they changed their minds, and enslaved their brethren once again. They didn't realize how serious God was about canceling those debts, and about forgiveness—and, thus, were made to learn the hard way. *I said, “Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrews who have sold themselves to you. After they have served you six years, you must let them go free.” Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight: each of you proclaimed freedom to your own people. You even made a covenant before Me in the house that bears My Name. But now you have turned around and profaned My name; each of you has taken back the slaves you had set free. You have forced them to become your slaves again. You have not obeyed Me; you have not proclaimed freedom to your own people. So I now proclaim “freedom for you,” declares the Lord—“freedom” to fall by the sword, plague and famine (Jer 34:13-17).* The cost of letting go and forgiving debts is much simpler than paying the price of incurring God's anger.

Lavishly Forgive

The Lord asked the Israelites to not simply free the indebted man, but to abundantly pardon him—furnishing him liberally from their flock, their threshing floor, and their winepress. *Do not send them away empty-handed.* Israel had been enslaved in Egypt, but when God set them free, they went out with silver and gold. When God forgave *us*, He did not just cancel our debt and bring us to zero balance. He showered us with riches of mercy and grace, and made us rich in Him. Those whom we, as mature Christians in the “seventh” year, forgive should not feel that they are merely “out of the red”, but they should be enriched by the forgiveness and love we show. *And the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do.*

Abundantly Pardoned

In the above-referenced parable that Jesus taught regarding forgiveness, our need to forgive our brother is highlighted by the way we were shown forgiveness by God. Moreover, this law of the Hebrew slave showcases our Father's heart in forgiving us. The songwriter says, “He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay...Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.” As each of

us is indebted to Christ, we all owe it to God to serve Him. “Saved to serve,” as the saying goes.

When God asked Moses to speak to Pharaoh, the message was “*Let My people go [from serving Egypt], that they might serve Me.*” Every last one of the children of Israel was redeemed by blood from serving Pharaoh, solely so that they might serve God instead. Likewise now, every Christian has a calling to serve God in some way, shape or form: present your bodies as a living sacrifice, which is your reasonable service.

So, as the children of Israel were indebted to serve their brother at times, we also are to give our lives in service to the One Who paid our debt. Yet, we have freedom to pursue our own personal goals, to seek our own ambitions and dreams, all within the framework of our service to God. Furthermore, our good God blesses us in our endeavors. We can do our six years service to God, as it were, and still have the rest of our lives to live as His freed children—to shine as lights in the places we seek to make our own.

Constrained By Love

Still, there were instances where some slaves did not take the offer of liberty when it was granted in the seventh

year. *But if your servant says to you, “I do not want to leave you,” because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his earlobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life* (Dt 15:16-17).

This man was a servant because he had a debt. Yet, his debt was now cleared by his six years’ service, and he was free to walk away—but he didn’t! *I will not go away from thee.* Why?! Why not jump at the opportunity to be free from this bondage of service, to be free to do as he pleased in the land of promise? *Because he loves you...and is well off with you.*

I will serve Thee, because I love Thee. You have given life to me. Before this man was made a slave in the house of his master, he had been drowning in debt, with no hope of recovering himself. He had made his choices as a free man, and exercised his rights and free will only to find inescapable bondage. He realized that his life was better as a slave in the house of his master than it was when he was a free man making foolish choices. Had this master not offered to take him as his servant for six years, the man would have perished in his debt. *My seventh year has come, and I’m free to walk away—but I don’t want to.*

Not The Blessings... But The Source Of Blessings

Consider: what would the Hebrew slave receive if he left? The best of severance packages: *And when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed. Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress.* The one who leaves his service is abundantly blessed: from the flock (souls), from the threshing floor (word of God), and from the winepress (anointing).

But if he chooses to stay? *Then thou shalt take an awl, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant forever.* Ouch! If he walks away, bless him; if he stays, permanently and painfully mark him. How much sense does that make?

For the one who leaves, bless him abundantly—because it's the last time you will bless him. Sure, he's walking away with the blessings given to him, but he's also walking away from the *blessor*. The one who stays, conversely, abides with the one who had blessed him with only good things for the last six years, the one who will now do so forever.

Six Years A Slave...?

This covenant to abide as a slave in the house of the master is made at the master's door. There was a time in Egypt where they had applied the blood of the pascal lamb to the doorposts for their salvation. Now, the slave's own blood would be shed at a door as well. When this same law is discussed in Exodus 21, it is mentioned that this piercing of the ear is done before the judges at the door. Others were there to confirm the man's decision to serve his master forever, strengthening this covenant all the more.

Let My people go that they might serve Me. All of Israel was set free to serve. But to that liberated nation God said, *Give Me the Levites.* Though all of God's people were to serve Him, the Levites were specially separated from the people of God to be completely dedicated to the Lord's service, and nothing else. Likewise, some children of God are called to serve more than their "six years of service." They are separated for God.

Job Dissatisfaction

Even now, among God's people—Christians who have been "saved to serve"—there are those whose hearts cry, *I*

am doing what I can as a Christian to serve God, but I feel like this is not enough. For all that You've done for me, can't I do something more?

Simon, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me more than all these? Feed My lambs. Jesus was speaking to Simon Peter, the once-fervent disciple who had backslidden the day before to return to his fishing boat. After a frustrating night of not catching anything, God blesses his business, and now there were 153 great fish flopping on the shore. You've walked away from serving Me, Simon, and now I'm blessing your work outside of My service. But is this really what you want? Or do you truly love Me more than all these? If you love Me, the only thing that will bring you satisfaction is to serve Me by looking after My church.

Do you really love the Master
more than anything?
What will you be holding on to,
when you stand before your King?
Why not give Him everything
within your heart
while you are here
So that nothing else will hinder,
as He draws you ever near?

There is a calling upon some of God's people, perhaps some reading this article now, such that they will only be "well" with the Master: *"he is well with thee."* You won't feel you belong, you won't truly fit in anywhere else. You're a Christian, loving God, actively serving Him in different ways—but deep down you know your only satisfaction is with the Lord in His house. *One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord....Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house* (Psa 27:4; 65:4).

Scarred For Life

No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the Master
shall the servant be
And pierced are the feet
that follow Me
But thine are whole;
can he have followed far
Who hast no wound or scar?

It was initially a painful experience to stay with the Master; the servant's ear was drilled through at the doorpost, and now two "scars" would testify to that. His ear, of course, had been pierced; and the door also bore the mark of his piercing. Any time the thought would come to walk out that door, its scar bore silent witness: "You belong here; just look at your ear." The judges who had witnessed his decision would remind him of the choice he had made: *Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses* (1Tim 6:12).

If that servant did leave the house, he was a marked man; all would know that he didn't belong anywhere else. *Go back to the house where you made your covenant.* Peter tried to pretend he wasn't a disciple of Christ. He tried to make himself comfortable with the servants of the high priest, some of whom would go on to beat Jesus. He was trying to hide the borings, trying to ignore the obvious: that his ear was pierced. But the testimonies rang out, from young maidens to grown men: "You're one of them! You even talk like one of them!" Peter tried to change the way he talked, went to cursing and swearing. *No, we can tell from your accent: you don't sound like you were born here. You sound like you were born in Zion. You're not one*

of us, you're one of them—you belong in the house of your Master.

*And of Zion it shall be said, "This and that man was born in her": and the Highest Himself shall establish her. **The Lord shall count**, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there"* (Psa 87:5). You're already written in Zion's census. You've been counted in that 144,000. *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, Who hath enabled me, for that **He counted me faithful**, putting me into the ministry"* (1Tim 1:12).

Order Of The Pierced Ear

This ear that had been bored through—dug open—is seen in a few places in scripture. All of Jesus' sheep should hear His voice and follow Him. Yet, some of those sheep are supposed to enter their seventh year, where they would have their ear pierced to hear His voice and follow on another level.

The psalmist writes a testimony which resonates with us all: of having been in a horrible pit, sinking in miry clay, but then rescued and set upon the Rock with a new song of praise (Psa 40:1-3). Later on, he begins to understand a little of God's thoughts towards him, God's plans for him (v.5). Then the revelation becomes crystal clear: *Doing*

something for You, bringing something to You—that's not what You're after....You've opened my ears so I can listen. So I answered, 'I'm coming...' (vs. 6-7 MSG).

The psalmist understood God had something more for him. “Lord, You’ve opened my ear: I realized You don’t want my animal sacrifices and grain offerings—You want *me*.” The word in Hebrew translated here as the “opening” of the ear is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the digging of a well or of a grave. In the Messianic psalm of crucifixion (Psalm 22), the word is used as following: “*they pierced My hands and My feet*” (v.16). As Christ shows, the one whose ear has been pierced knows that the Lord is not asking for bigger tithes and offerings—the harvest is plentiful, but the *laborers* are few. All the silver and gold, and the cattle on a thousand hills are His already, all at His disposal. Are we?

The ear that has been pierced is an ear that has made a covenant to hear and to do. That servant tells his Master, *I will not go away from Thee...Lo, I come...I delight to do Thy will, O my God*. The pierced, opened ear has made the decision to say yes before the question is asked: “*Here am I; send me*.”

The Pierced Master

Isaiah prophesies much of Christ the Servant of the Lord, Who sets the pattern for every servant who would follow Him. One such prophecy starts out describing a wonderful ministry: *The Sovereign Lord has given Me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens Me morning by morning, wakens My ear to listen like one being instructed* (Isa 50:4). This “wakened” ear gets the right word in the morning itself, and that word has a power to encourage the one who is ready to give up. However, the Father was not finished speaking...

The Sovereign Lord has opened My ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. I offered My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting (vs.5-6). This “opened” ear (the Hebrew can give the idea of an ear that has been engraven) will hear things that are not so pleasant, but will not draw back from obedience.

It was one thing for Jesus to hear the Father say, “Feed the multitudes, heal the sick, preach the good news”—that was a blessed ministry to perform. His ear was open to hear the harder parts of ministry as well: “Be rejected by

Your own, be ridiculed and scorned, become an offering for sin.” Only an ear that had been truly opened, the pierced ear, could continue to listen and obey when hearing those difficult words.

Popular Ministry?

Yet, there are many who desire a ministry that keep people happy, that keep people coming to church. And there are churches filled with people seeking such a ministry. Popularity, or men’s approval, however, is not always the sign of God’s approval. “*This is My beloved Son,*” the Father cried; “*Hear ye Him!*” But in the end, they didn’t listen to Jesus. The one whose ear is pierced is not listening for the plaudits of men; his commitment is to please the One Who has called him.

Again, the servant whose ear was not thus pierced—the one who leaves after six years—he is blessed, and abundantly so. However, he received those blessings at the loss of a deeper consecration to follow the One Who had blessed him.

Covenant At The Door

Jesus humbled Himself as a Servant, and was obedient unto death. He did not turn back when His hands and

feet were pierced with nails, when His brow was pierced with thorns, when His back was shredded at the whipping post. His ear was pierced already, and nothing else could change His mind.

The servant who wants to continue in his Master’s service makes his covenant to serve when his ear is pierced at the door. Jesus said, “*I am the Door*”; to be pierced at the Door is to be crucified with Christ. This not a decision made just at one point in our lives; it’s a daily way of life. *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.* That is the language of a pierced servant. How can one walk away from the preciousness of the fellowship of His sufferings, of being crucified with or nailed to Christ?

Pierced Ear, Prepared Body

Can you make a promise never to say no to Jesus? This is the covenant of the pierced ear. But I don’t know if I can do that. I don’t know what I’m going to want ten years from now! How do I know I won’t change my mind later on?

When the writer to the Hebrews quoted Psalm 40, the phrase “*mine ear hast Thou opened*” is translated to “*a body hast Thou prepared me*” (Heb 10:5). When we dedicate ourselves to hear what the Lord asks of us, He prepares

our body to do what He says. How could Jesus give His back to the smiters, and His face to shame and spittle? Because of His pierced ear, His body was prepared to do the Father's will; and now, *we* are called to be that Body of Christ. As we dedicate ourselves to hear His voice—not with the intention of getting greater revelations, but with the intention to obey what we hear—our bodies are made ready by God to fulfill all that is in His heart.

Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do Your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second (v.9). When the pierced ear responds to the call of God, the first covenant is set aside—the law, and the new covenant is established—grace. For the one who dedicates himself, for the one who is pierced at the door, crucified with Christ daily, serving the Lord will never be a service under the weight of laws and restrictions, but rather a delight in the abundance of His grace.

Seventh-Year Servants

God is calling some to enter their seventh year, a perfect service. Will you be crucified with Christ? Will you allow Him to mark you as His for life—yea, for eternity? There are those who tell the Lord, *"For all that You have done for me, it would be a crime to say my six-year service*

*is enough to repay the debt. I cannot expect You to be satisfied with the little I have done in Your service. Besides, nothing else satisfies me, but to serve You in Your house for all my days. **Pierce my ear at Your door.**"*

*And it shall be, if he say unto Thee, "**I will not go away from Thee**"; **because he loveth Thee...because he is well with Thee**; then Thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be Thy servant **forever**. Delight in Him, be well with Him: and one day you will hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"* ◻

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In the last article, we studied the first five books of the Bible called the Torah or the Pentateuch. God gave these books of Law and Teaching to His people that they might wholeheartedly follow and please Him. However, not all received the law with a heart to obey. We will consider Israel's infancy in the promised land: initially under her various judges, and then under her first two kings.

In this first segment, we look at the three books which follow the Torah, which document the early history of the Israelites after their forty years in the desert. Although the authorship is different for each book (at times unknown, even), the overarching question posed throughout is still the same: to obey or not to obey?

Joshua

While Moses lived, Joshua was his servant; when Moses died, Joshua was his successor. Moses had led Israel for most of their journey, but Joshua brought them into the land of promise. The first century Jewish historian Josephus writes in *The Jewish*

Antiquities that Joshua was exactly eighty-seven years old when he succeeded Moses. Yet, in spite of his age, he was a great conqueror, and continued to bring the people great victories, just as he did under Moses. The Conquest of Canaan was not, however, an overnight process; it took years for Israel to inherit and possess the land that God promised. This book covers a period of around twenty-five years. Just as it began with the death of Moses, it ends with the death of Joshua and includes his farewell address.

Upon examination, there are many similarities seen between Joshua and our Lord Jesus. The names themselves are very similar and have similar meanings: Jesus—יֵשׁוּעַ (*Y'shua*) is a variation of the name Joshua—יְהוֹשֻׁעַ (*Y'hoshua*), which means Jehovah is salvation. With Joshua, the people of God crossed over the Jordan and entered Canaan. **Similarly, with Jesus, we as God's people can face death and enter our heavenly Canaan.** Just as Joshua completed the deliverance of Israel, Jesus perfected salvation for all.

Now, Moses can represent the law, but Moses could only bring the Israelites to the border of Canaan. The Law makes nothing perfect; it can only bring man to a wilderness of hardship and conviction. However, Joshua (Jesus) can represent grace. Grace does what "the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh," and takes us on to the heavenly Canaan (Rom 8:3 NIV).

Before conquering the seven nations and thirty-one kings, God gave Joshua the secret of victory: “this book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth...then thou shalt have good success” (Jos 1:8). When Joshua met the Captain of the Lord’s hosts, His sword was drawn. We also in our battles must know how to use the Sword of the Spirit—the Word of God. When we spend time in reading, meditating and applying the Word of God, we can also have good success as Christians.

Comparatively, the early history of Israel is similar to the early history of the Church, the New Testament people of God. Israel marched quietly around Jericho for seven days, and the disciples waited in prayer in Jerusalem for ten days. Israel then marched with shouting and praising on the seventh day on to Canaan, and the disciples received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost—a spiritual experience of milk and honey. The sweeping revivals in and around Jerusalem, Samaria, Antioch, etc., are reminiscent of the conquests of Joshua over the different regions of the land. Furthermore, a parallel of Achan’s sin is seen with Ananias and Sapphira’s deceit in the New Testament.

Later, Caleb gives a thrilling statement that shows why he and Joshua were the only two of the original group that made it through the Promised Land: they “wholly followed the Lord” (Joshua 14:8). What happened to Moses, the leader and

deliverer of Israel? What happened to Bezaleel and Aholiab and all the men in whom God put wisdom and understanding and who were the architects, so to speak, of the tabernacle of God? They all perished in the wilderness. Only Caleb and Joshua, who wholly followed the Lord, entered Canaan and were able to enjoy it. The book of Joshua is a good reminder for all Christians that what matters in the end is not how we began, how we were called or what gifts and talents we have. Rather, the outcome will depend completely on how much we follow and obey God.

Judges

Judges opens up where Joshua left off, at the death of another great leader of Israel. It accounts for the history of Israel as a nation in a new land, specifically during the period of most of their judges: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah/Barak, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson. Eli the priest is also recorded as having judged God’s people for forty years. Samuel was recognized as God’s leader for the people after the death of Eli and his sons; however, when he appointed his own sons to take over for him, the people requested a king instead. Samuel is considered to be the author of the book of Judges.

Joshua is seen as a book of great victories and military exploits. However the conquests were not because of Israel’s

numbers, skills, or Joshua's experience and generalship. Rather, the triumphs of Joshua's time were because Joshua served God with his entire house (Jos 24:15). The book of Judges is quite the opposite. After Joshua's death, there was no proper, stable or sustained leadership to guide the nation in the counsel of God. As a result "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jdg 17:6). Even some of the judges were self-willed (like Abimelech and Samson).

Thus, the time of the judges is regarded as the dark ages for the Israelites. The people forsook God, so God forsook the people (Jdg 2:13-14). Still, Professor William G. Moorehead summarizes Judges as "**seven apostasies, seven servitudes to seven heathen nations and seven deliverances.**" Whenever God's people cried out to Him because of their bondage, God raised up deliverers and there was a respite.

The book of Judges, as a whole, teaches us that God allowed His people to fall into the hands of the enemies from time to time so that they might learn from their mistakes and turn to God to serve Him. How much easier it would be to continually serve and obey God, as Joshua and Caleb did, rather than waiting for something bad to happen to turn us back to Him? May we wholeheartedly follow the Lord in obedience to what He has spoken, so that we may avoid the unnecessary trials and chastening.

Ruth

As the entire nation of Israel continually fell away and turned their backs on God, the book of Ruth sheds light on one Moabite woman's dedication to the God of Israel. We can understand how God's heart was blessed by her love and devotion, in that a book of the Bible attests to her legacy. It is one of only two books dedicated to the story of a woman (Esther being the other). Ruth's story is an inspiration and encouragement to all who read. Although authorship is disputed—no one knows exactly who wrote it, when or where—most conjecture that Samuel wrote it.

Ruth's consecration and determination is certainly unmatched. While Abraham was also someone who left his own country and people to go to Canaan, he left as an elderly man and had a direct revelation from God (Acts 7). Ruth left as a young widow, with no known personal encounter with God—only the poor example of faith seen in her mother-in-law's life. Abraham delayed his journey, spending long years in Haran and also turning to go to Egypt. To contrast, Ruth never turned back to Moab once she entered Israel and never even thought to leave. Abraham at least had his wife and nephew in addition to great wealth and servants. Ruth had nothing and no one, only an ex-mother-in-law that tried to convince her to go back to her father's house.

How did Ruth respond to Naomi's pressure to go back? "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also if ought but death part thee and me" (Ruth 1:16-17). God certainly rewarded her loyalty and resolve during her lifetime, and this young widow found refuge, provision, and love under the wings of her kinsman redeemer. Her marriage to Boaz began the lineage of King David and, consequently, the family that Christ was born into. Her story is a beautiful shadow of a Gentile church being redeemed by Christ to be His Bride.

God faithfully gives us His Word and His commandments so that we might live life to the fullest and reap the rewards of obedience. However, it is up to us to choose daily who we will serve and to what extent. In a generation when even Christians are wishy-washy about following God, the Lord is looking for people like Caleb, Joshua, and Ruth—people who will dedicate their lives to God and obey Him wholeheartedly.

In this segment, we consider how, politically, the nation of Israel evolved from being a loose confederacy of tribes with no stable leadership to having a strong central monarchy. On the outside, it looked as if the Israelites were getting settled into the

land they had conquered under Joshua, and, thus, were becoming as "legitimate" as the nations surrounding them. However, Israel often rose and fell according to the state of her king. Each king reacted differently to the unique crises and challenges that arose during his reign. Would the leader of God's people actually turn to God? Would he dedicate himself and his people to the Lord and recognize him as the true King of Israel? Would he remain steadfast once the problem was solved?

The period of the judges ends with Samuel's story, while the story of Israel's royal line was quietly introduced as the book of Ruth came to a close, tracing the lineage of David. However, the one chosen by God to rule would first be preceded by the choice of the people. Overseeing the anointing of both the people's choice and God's choice, was the man of God Samuel, after whom the next two books of the Bible are named.

1 Samuel

In the Hebrew text, 1st and 2nd Samuel were originally one book. However, when the Hebrew *Tanakh* (the Old Testament Scriptures) was translated into the Greek Septuagint, these books could not be contained in one single roll, since words in Hebrew are usually shorter than words in Greek. Although this book is named after Samuel, it is not clear as to whether he actually wrote it. It is thought that Samuel, Nathan or Gad might

have written this book, or all of them could have shared a portion each (1Chr 29:29). Samuel was the last of the judges, and his leadership was a time of transition for Israel as they underwent political change. Samuel was God's kingmaker and it is during his time that Israel's history became royal.

The three major personalities in this book are Samuel, the last judge and first major prophet; Saul, Israel's first king; and David, the king-elect who would go on to succeed Saul. 1st Samuel begins with the birth and dedication of Samuel. God first called Samuel when he was living in the house of God amid a corrupt and backslidden priesthood. The situation was so bad, the only one at Shiloh to whom God would speak to was Samuel—not even the high priest Eli had that privilege (1Sam 3:21). By the time Samuel became the leader of Israel, the view had not improved; the Ark of the Covenant was captured by enemies and the people were suffering defeat at the hands of the Philistines. But despite how terrible the circumstances and the sins of the people were, when they repented, God brought confusion to the camp of the enemy and became their Ebenezer. Of Israel's judges, Samuel was the most outstanding—he was a priest, prophet and judge; no other single leader of Israel had ever held as many offices.

In spite of the great victory that God graciously gave to Samuel and the people, the Israelites thought it wise to “plan

ahead” since Samuel was aging and his sons were almost as bad as Eli's sons had been. The people wanted “permanent” leadership like everyone else around them—they wanted a king. What they could not understand was that God was exactly that for them. Judges came and left but God was their Rock, their “Stone of Help” who had helped them from the beginning until that very moment (8:7-8).

Because God knew how stubborn the people were, He let them have their way, and Samuel chose Saul to be king. Israel's first king began his life in great humility; even when there were rebels that refused his authority, he merely kept silent (10:27). After his victory at Jabesh Gilead, he did not punish the rebels even when they were brought out before him (11:12-13). However, Saul ends his reign in pride and disobedience both to God and to Samuel. As a result, God regretted His original decision to make Saul king (15:11).

It was after this rejection that God asked Samuel to anoint a new king over Israel and this is when David comes into the picture. Unlike Saul who was a head taller than other men in Israel, David may not have been as tall as his older brothers. Even Samuel thought the older sons would be chosen, but God had to remind him that He looks at the heart, not merely the outward appearance (16:7). David was anointed, and God's Spirit came upon him—so much so that even the king's servants noticed

the anointing in his musical abilities and chose David to play before Saul. His anointing was so strong, it could drive away the evil spirit that tormented Saul.

Even though David knew he was going to be king, he submitted himself to Saul, and God used him to bring another victory for Israel against the Philistines and their “champion,” Goliath. Even with Saul’s childish jealousy, his deception and continuous attempts to murder David, David always honored Saul as king and never used his own anointing or calling against Saul.

Saul’s vengeful actions had detrimental reactions. His sons were killed in a fierce battle with the Philistines (31:2). In the same battle, Saul’s attempt at suicide failed, so he was instead killed by a young man of Amalek, the nation God had commanded Saul to destroy years before (31:4; 2Sam 1:10). Finally, Saul and his sons’ bodies were beheaded, stripped of armor, and fastened to the wall in public humiliation (31:9-10).

The first king failed miserably. How could he lead God’s people to follow after God when he could not? The Israelites wanted a king to lead them into battle but their first king cowardly attempted to kill himself out of fear of the enemy. Now, Samuel was dead, Saul and his older sons were dead and the Philistines had won. These events only highlighted the idea that having a king was not the answer to Israel’s problem. Yet,

despite the political turmoil, God was still in control of the situation and would fulfill His plan through the second king of Israel.

2 Samuel

2nd Samuel predominantly describes the kingdom of Israel during the reign of David. With the last two leaders of Israel dead, it was finally time for David, who had waited patiently to come to the throne. While David’s ascent to the throne should have been easy, the Bible tells us that “there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker” (2Sam 3:1). Abner, Saul’s uncle and the commander of his army, had made Ishbosheth, Saul’s younger son, king over Israel for two years, and only David’s tribe Judah followed David, the rightful king (2:8-11).

David remained king in Hebron for seven and a half years before he became king of Israel. Even when David learned of the deaths of his enemies, he did not rejoice or reward those who bore the seemingly good news. David was a man after God’s own heart who loved his enemies, and this love was manifested in action. He sought out someone from the house of Saul to whom he might show kindness, in spite of all that Saul had done to him and had put him through.

David can certainly be taken as a shadow of Jesus Christ, the King who would come from David's line. David began to rule at age 30, and Christ began his ministry at 30. David ruled for 33 years over all Israel and Judah, and Jesus lived 33 years upon the earth. Furthermore, a central episode in this book is the capture of Jerusalem and Zion which became the city of David and the city of God, respectively. Likewise, God has set Christ as King upon the holy hill of Zion (Psa 2:6).

David had many roles in addition to being king and many of the humble experiences of his youth had prepared him for the calling God had upon his life. He began as a faithful shepherd of his father's few sheep (1 Sam 17:28) and was now chosen to shepherd Israel (Psa 78:70-72). He began his military career by slaying the lion and the bear which came after his lamb (1 Sam 17:34-35, 37); now, God used this brave boy to deliver the entire nation out of the hand of the Philistines and other nations that had come against them. He began as a humble musician who played the harp (lyre) but would soon lead the entire nation back to the true worship of Jehovah.

David wanted God's presence so much that he did not return the Ark to its original resting place (Shiloh), instead choosing to bring it to Jerusalem. David truly was the great king of God's choice. He was not perfect and committed grievous sins

out of pride and lust, but that wretched sinner was also a man of a broken and contrite heart, which God did not despise.

Through the examples of Samuel, Saul and David, we can see what true devotion to God looks like—and also what pride and self-will can do to destroy that. Samuel heard God's voice at a time when the nation was spiritually backslidden, and instituted a revival and return to Jehovah. Meanwhile, Saul had humble beginnings but his end was far from glorious because of his own pride and disobedience. But unlike Saul, David was faithful to the very end, loving God with all his heart and setting the true precedent for what a godly king should be. The chronicles of the kings that followed measured them by the standard of their devotion toward God originally set by David. God also remembered David, and the Davidic covenant was not broken. In the next issue, we hope to look at the continuation of the Hebrew monarchies and their spiritual significance upon God's people. □

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Your Adversary: The Devil

PART 10 — SATAN'S SELFISH & HINDERING NATURE

“Be sober, be vigilant; because **your adversary the devil**, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1Pet 5:8).

In our last few studies in this series about our adversary, the Devil, we have listed several of the “**works**” of Satan. We have seen that his desire is to tempt man to sin against God, in any of a great number of ways. “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy **the works of the devil**” (1Jn 3:8). In our last study we studied many verses which revealed that Satan’s desire is to distract the children of God from their heavenly calling by using the world and the things of this world. Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of this world, but Christ wisely refused worldly greatness, treasures and pleasures, in order to offer Himself without spot on the cross of Calvary as a sacrifice for our sins and to “deliver us from this present evil world.”

A Selfish Life

We shall now consider two other “**works of the devil.**” One work of Satan is to try to make us live a **selfish and self-centered life.** We have already seen in previous studies that the fall of the devil was due to proud and selfish motives. All human and angelic beings were created to serve the perfect and benevolent plans of a loving Creator. “*All things were created by Him, and for Him*” (Col 1:16). “*For in Him we live, and move, and have our being*” (Acts 17:28). The angels were created first to serve God (Job 38:4-7), and also to serve the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:14). The angels, having been given free will, were to live in harmony with, and in service to, the loving Creator, who had bestowed manifold blessings and everlasting kindness upon them. However, many of them left their first estate and calling and rebelled against God. Lucifer showed his **selfish egotistical nature**, when he said in his heart, “*I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High*” (Isa 14:13-14). The creature exalting himself against the creator is known as the “mystery of iniquity” (2Th 2:7). Motivated by a **desire for position and power**, even to set their thrones above the throne of God, these great angels fell

and became corrupt devils. Now these fallen angels only exist to do evil against God and man. The serpent wanted man to fall from God's grace, and therefore tempted Adam and Eve, by essentially telling them that God did **not** have their best interests in mind, when He prohibited them from eating of the tree of life (Gen 3:1-6). Satan tempted Eve with selfish desires to do her will and not God's will.

A Selfless Life

On the other hand, we see how Jesus personified the "**mystery of Godliness**" (1Tim 3:16), by being born into this world as a man, and **humbling** Himself to serve His earthly parents for thirty years. He lived in obscurity and was simply known as "the carpenter's son" (Mat 13:55). Jesus, being God in human flesh, willingly took such a humble position, far lower than even the great angels who fell, were willing to take! After obeying the counsel of God, and receiving water baptism from John the Baptist, He stepped forth to live the greatest life of ministry for mankind that has ever been known. His earthly years of service to man consisted of teaching the masses, healing the sick, and delivering those that were captive to demons. He fed the hungry, went everywhere doing good for others, and never pleased Himself (Rom 15:3). **He pleased the Father in every word and deed** (Jn 8:29). Finally, to complete

His earthly mission, Jesus offered His sinless life as the "Lamb of God," to suffer in our place upon the cruel cross and to shed His blood to bear our sins. Jesus' life was a perfect exemplary **life of self-denial** from beginning to end. While fasting for 40 days, He refused the temptation of Satan to use His divine power to turn the stones into bread and satisfy His own hunger.

Pity Thyself

Near the end of His life there is a particularly revealing incident that reveals again to us the efforts of Satan to tempt Jesus to seek His own will and pleasure. "*From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall **not** be unto thee.'* But He turned and said unto Peter, '*Get thee behind me, **Satan**: for thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men*'" (Mat 16:21-23). This again, in a curious way, shows us how Satan tempts man to live selfishly. The actual Greek translation of verse 22 has Peter saying to Jesus, "**Pity thyself.**" That is something that Jesus never did! It is curious here that Jesus did **not** call His disciple "Peter," but

rather “Satan.” Although the words came from Peter’s mouth, the selfish inspiration behind those words was Satan!

The triune God is now preparing the bride of Christ, a perfect and overcoming church, that will be placed on His throne with Him eternally (Rev 3:21). His bride, like Christ Himself, is denying herself in this world, and offering herself as a **“living sacrifice”** (Rom 12:1) to the One who died for her and is returning for her. The bride of Christ can readily say, as Jesus said, **“not my will, but thine be done”** (Mat 26:39). She says, as did the Apostle Paul, **“not I but Christ”** (Gal 2:20).

The Selfish Antichrist

After the bride is caught away in the rapture, Satan will empower a man who will dominate the events of this world for seven years. He is known in scripture as “the beast” or the antichrist. The **self-will** of Satan will be exemplified perfectly in him. He will forbid humanity from serving the true God. He *“opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God”* (2Th 2:4). This event will apparently occur in the middle of the seven year great tribulation, when the Jewish people will once again have a temple in Jerusalem. It is to be noted about the antichrist, that He will halt all sacrifice and service in that temple to the one true

God. Apparently, the antichrist will take away the daily sacrifice in the Jewish temple (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Satan is so filled with self-will and hatred for the true God and his disciples that he will demand the worship and sacrifice of man all for himself. Instead of serving the heirs of salvation, he will make war with them and make martyrs of them. For that reason, the Lord Jesus urges us to pray always to escape these things that will come to pass, and stand before Jesus when the rapture takes place (Lk 21:34-36).

Opposing The Servants Of God

A second “work of the Devil” is his effort to **oppose and hinder the servants of God**. Perhaps the most sacrificial life that one can live, would be the life of a fully consecrated servant of the Lord (Lk 9:23; 14:26, 33; Mk 8:35). The Lord ordains His servants to **serve the people** in this world. They should lead them to Christ during this earthly pilgrimage and to help them to reach the eternal throne of God (that the Devil lusted after). Therefore, Satan **despises** and works against the servants of the Lord. When Jesus called disciples to join in His ministry, He made it clear to them that there were many sacrifices to be made to properly fulfill the ministry. These chosen disciples forsook their professions, possessions and even family members in order to follow in the footsteps of Christ and to

do the ministry of the Lord. One servant of God in America who was called to serve Christ, had a very vivid dream of a demon appearing to him and saying “I don’t want you to serve God!” He came out to serve God anyway! If you are chosen by the Lord to serve Him full time, **Satan may try to hinder you**, but the Lord will help you to **fulfill His great calling on your life**. May God raise up many more servants of the Lord in this eleventh hour, to take up their crosses, deny their own wants, desires, and plans, in order to walk the path of Calvary in this world and stand on Mount Zion with Christ eternally (Rev 14:1-5).

There is little doubt that when a servant of God follows the humble and sacrificial life of Jesus, that Satan has a great hatred for him or her. As the servants of God labor for the Lord to help prepare the bride of Christ, Satan may see that his works are being “destroyed,” and that the bride will soon be with her Savior on His throne. When the first disciples went forth to do their ministries, they came back rejoicing at the fruits of their labors. Then Jesus said unto them, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Lk 10:17-21). This may refer to Satan’s original fall, but also to devilish powers being defeated, as the ministers of God served the people. So Satan has a special desire to **defeat** the servants of God and **hinder** their ministries. The Apostle Paul noted this in one place where he

said, “*But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.*” (1Th 2:17-18). Here we are given to understand that Paul desired to do some ministry among these souls, but Satan worked to hinder Paul from doing so. Paul also spoke about a thorn in the flesh, which was “the messenger of Satan, to buffet” him (2Cor 12:7). It is possible that Satan may try to make the servants of God **sick**, in order to hinder them from doing the work of the Lord. May the good Lord, “which hath pleasure in the prosperity (health) of His servant,” give healing to all of His laborers so that they may do their work for the Lord (Psa 35:27).

Resisting The Work Of God

Also, with regard to Satan’s opposition to the ministers of God, there are other notable scriptures to consider. “*And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him*” (Zech 3:1). Thanks be to God for **rebuking Satan** and helping His servant (v.2). In the last half of the great tribulation, God will have two faithful witnesses. Their ministries to the Jews will anger Satan that he ultimately kills them. But even then, the Lord raises them up in a glorious resurrection for all to

see! (Rev 11:1-10). Jesus warned Peter, the servant of the Lord, about a request that Satan had with regard to Peter. *“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren’”* (Lk 22:31-32). It would seem, just as Satan appeared before God to request that Job be tested, that Satan must have been requesting God to be able to **attack** Peter as well. Jesus knew this and forewarned Peter of this battle. May God strengthen His servants at this hour to be “good soldiers” of the Lord Jesus, to overcome in their battles, and to strengthen the souls under their care. “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20). ◻

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Disciplined or Hungry?

On the final night of a Bible conference, Penny stood up in front of the group and explained her problem with reading, meditating and studying the Word of God: “My problem is that I’m just not disciplined.” Janet replied, “Penny, can I say this to you in the most loving way? And I mean it with all my heart. What if I said to you, ‘You’re so disciplined in eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner every single day. You rarely miss a day.’” Penny agreed, “Most of us could say that.” Janet explained further, “But you would also say, ‘No, it’s not discipline. I’m hungry!’ And so I would say to you, it’s not that you are lacking discipline: it’s that you are not hungry.”

And in that moment God gave Penny a teachable heart, and she said, “You’re right. Thank you.” And so what we all decided as a group was that our prayer would not be “God make me disciplined,” it would be “God make me hungry. Make me so hungry for God’s Word that discipline is not the issue.” *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart”* (Jer 15:16).

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Perspectives!

One day, a financially comfortable father decided to take his son to the country, with the purpose of showing him how poor people live, so that the son could understand the value of things, and realize how fortunate they were. They stayed at a very humble family's farm for one day and one night. As the trip ended, and during their return home, the father asked his son: "So what did you think of the trip?" "It was great, Dad!" The father replied, "Did you see how poor and needy some people are?" "Yes," the son exclaimed!

"I saw that we have one dog in the house, but they have four. We have a huge swimming pool, but they have a river that never ever ends. We have imported lamps in the patio and they have the stars. Our backyard ends at the fence, but theirs goes on and on into the horizon. Especially though, Dad, I saw that they have time to talk to each other and live as a family. You and Mom have to work all day, and I hardly see you both!" As the conversation ended, the father remained silent, and his son added: "Thanks Dad, for showing me how rich we could be!" What is your perspective of life?

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*"Shew Me a penny. Whose **image** and **superscription** hath it? They answered and said, 'Caesar's'" (Lk 20:24).*

Jesus had a way of stopping the mouths of those who sought to trap Him in His words. On one such occasion, His enemies asked if it were lawful to pay tribute to Caesar. To say "Yes," would be to support the oppressive Roman Empire, but to say "No," would be tantamount to rebellion against them. All awaited Christ's response. Jesus called for a penny and asked them whose image and superscription it bore. They were speechless as He went on to say, *Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's*. It was not only to coins that Jesus was directing them, but also to their own lives. We who have been made in the image of God, who bear His name, should be given to Him: and not be conformed to the image of this world, lest in the

end, we remain with this world when Christ comes for what belongs to Him.

Image Of God

When God created man he was created in the *image* of God (Gen 1:26-27). However, after the fall of man Adam begot Cain in his own (fallen) image (Gen 5:3). All mankind subsequent to that were born with this fallen image where sin, with its disobedient nature, and death reigned (Rom 5:12). The *superscription* depicts ownership. The word of God says that to whom you yield yourself to obey, his servant you will be (Rom 6:16). Jesus told the Pharisees, *You are of your father the devil* since they were doing the things of the devil. Hence with the fall of man the ownership too passed on from God to the devil. It was not until Jesus came and ransomed (bought back) mankind that those who believed in Him could become the children of God. When one receives the Holy Spirit, God makes that person part of His body, and they become His temple. As such we are not our own but bought with the price of Jesus' blood, and God requires us to glorify Him in our body and spirit (1Cor 6:19-20). We are *sealed with the Holy Ghost* of promise unto the

day of final redemption, that of our body at the rapture (Eph 1:10; 4:30; Rom 8:23). That seal now shows God's ownership of His church.

New Creation In Christ

Many who are thus sealed with the Holy Ghost, however, will not make Him theirs. Though their lines may have fallen in pleasant places, they instead make their choice like the two and a half tribes of Israel that chose an inheritance on the nether side of Jordan, not accepting their full God-given inheritance. Others, however, will say *the Lord is the Portion of my inheritance: I am my Beloved's and He is mine* in a love relationship that will culminate in them becoming His bride (Psa 16:5-6; Song 6:3). The superscription upon this bride, the new Jerusalem, will be the superscription of His new name, demonstrating eternal ownership (Rev 3:12).

The glorious gospel hidden in God's mind was designed to take man from his fallen image to the image of His Son step by step. In the words of Charles Wesley's well-known Christmas hymn, *Adam's likeness now efface / Stamp Thine image in its place*. The full gospel changes man to the image of the last Adam. Christ is known as the last Adam since He, together with the first Adam, were the only two men created without the nature of sin. While the first Adam disobeyed

and passed on that disobedient nature of sin to all mankind, the last Adam obeyed and gave mankind victory over sin's effects (Rom 5:19). Paul tells Titus that we who were once disobedient are now saved, regenerated through water baptism and renewed by the Holy Ghost, justified by grace and become an heir (Tit 3:3-7). This is the experience of a new creature in Christ (2Cor 5:17). With water baptism one is empowered to put off the old man's nature and begin to put on Christ's nature (Gal 3:27). It is at water baptism that one is regenerated and created in righteousness and true holiness—the very image of God (Eph 4:22-24).

By The Power Of The Holy Spirit

Paul tells the *Colossians*, in the third chapter of his epistle to them, what this means to be **renewed in His image of righteousness and true holiness** (v.10). It requires one to put to death the works of sin from the body (vs.5-7); the natures of sin from the soul (vs.8-9); and even distinctions in the mind or spirit (vs.11). The new man's natures that one should then put on are then laid out for us (vs.12-15). Stamping these new man natures can only follow after one receives the Holy Spirit. As a little leaven placed in the three measures of meal (body, soul and spirit), the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit begins to "leaven" the three parts of the regenerated

man (Jn 14:17, 20). Infusing His nature to the extent that man cooperates and receives with meekness the engrafted word, written in his heart and mind, he is changed in his character, in the inner man, from glory to glory (Jam 1:21). He is changed to the very image of God in ever increasing glory (the nature of Christ) (2Cor 3:18). Paul states that even as we have borne the earthly (fallen) image through Adam we will also bear the heavenly image of our last Adam from above (1Cor 15:45-49). The last man Adam is a quickening Spirit. Receiving continuously and living by the words of spirit and life engrafted within us by the Holy Spirit will enable us to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Money Changers

The effacing of Adam's image and stamping Christ's image can be seen in shadow through an incident in Jesus' ministry while on earth. *Jesus came to the temple and found money changers and drove them out, overturning their tables together with them that sold oxen, sheep and doves* (Jn 2:13-19). These money changers would change the Roman money which was in circulation to the temple money or shekel. Allegorically they represent compromises that the saved make in body (oxen), soul (sheep) and spirit (doves)

against the truth of God. All such compromises will result in making one a hypocrite whose face (image) is disfigured (Mat 6:16).

The compromise in the body is that the grace of God is changed to lust (Jude 4). Where the power of God's Spirit works, however, the manner of life reflected in the body will be as though one is living, by His power, in heavenly places (Phil 3:20-21). Correspondingly, such a mind will be armed to suffer in the flesh (1Pet 4:1).

The compromise in the soul is to change the glory of God to that of a created being or thing (Rom 1:23). In other words, idols in man's heart take the place of God's glory. Where the transforming power of God's Spirit works, however, understanding that it is Christ-in-us that is our hope of glory, one will constantly labor by the mighty power to put on Christ's nature, by humbling and receiving the law written in the heart and mind (Col 1:27-29).

The compromise that is made in the spirit is to change the truth of God into a lie (Rom 1:24) i.e. not accept the hidden truths God has ordained for our glory (1Cor 2:7). Where the mighty power of His Spirit is allowed to work, He will open the eyes of understanding to grant a spirit of wisdom and revelation of the knowledge of Christ to know our calling

to become the bride (Eph 1:18-20). Clearly it will not be by might or by power that man will be changed to His image but by His Spirit.

Work Of The Holy Spirit

Those who, therefore, want to run this race to obtain the prize of winning Christ as their Bridegroom are exhorted not to resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). Neither should they, by giving room to the old man natures, grieve the Holy Spirit whereby they are sealed against that day of redemption (Eph 4:30-32). Last of all they should not quench the Holy Spirit by ceasing from praying and giving thanks under all circumstances. God Who freely gave us His Son, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Rom 8:32). For those who have been regenerated as new creatures, areas where we fall short of Christ's character, we could ask the Father and receive the transformation freely.

While the image of God, created in righteousness, is achieved through obedience to the indwelling presence of the King of righteousness, the Holy Spirit, true holiness is worked in one through separation from wrong fellowships in the fear of God. There are seven separations needed for every individual believer (2Cor 6:14-17) as God seeks to set apart the godly unto Himself (Psa 4:3). *These separations*

are closely aligned with growth in salvation. Only those who separate themselves from these things can fulfill God's will, perfect holiness in the fear of God and win Christ as their Bridegroom. As we progress unto final salvation, a greater separation unto God ensues.

Work Of Separation

Firstly, when we are born again, God separates us from sin and sinners. Secondly, at water baptism we are delivered from the disobedient nature of sin. Thirdly at the baptism of the Holy Spirit we are delivered from self (unclean thing) (Isa 64:6). The fourth step of salvation is divine healing where we understand that we are bought with a price that included Christ bearing stripes and being marred more than any man for the healing of His people. We remain faithful to trust Him for the healing of our body, soul and spirit. The fifth step of salvation is being set apart from the world, its rudiments, and traditions to be able to set our affection on things above. The sixth step of salvation is being set apart from all darkness, permitting one to be entirely sanctified: the five senses of *the body* possessed in sanctification; *the soul*, being the seat of character, changed to the image of Christ; and *the mind or spirit* made free from all defilements, and from reasonings that are strongholds against God's truth. The

final step of salvation requires a separation from idols where we may partake exclusively at the Lord's Table to will and do of His good pleasure. Coming against this objective are carnal ties (Mat 10:34-38), earthly possessions (Lk 17:31-32), reputation (Mat 16:22-23), and our own will against suffering in particular (Jn 12:24-25). The overcomers will not love their lives even unto death (Rev 12:11). Let us run so that we might win Him, the prize of the high calling of God. □

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A Generous Business Partner

One day, a very wealthy man was walking on the road and along the way he saw a beggar on the sidewalk. The rich man looked kindly on the beggar and asked, "How did you become a beggar?" The beggar replied, "Sir, I've been applying for jobs for a year now but haven't found any. You look like a rich man. Sir, if you'll give me a job, I'll stop begging." The rich man smiled and said, "I want to help you. But I won't give you a job. I'll do something better. I want you to be my business partner! Let's start a business together." The beggar blinked hard. He didn't understand what the older man was saying. "What do you mean, Sir?" The rich man replied, "I own a rice plantation. You could sell my rice in the market. I'll provide you the sacks of rice and I'll pay the rent for the market stall. All you have to do is sell my rice. At the end of the month, as business partners, we'll share in the profits." Tears of joy rolled down his cheeks. "Oh Sir," he said, "you're a gift from Heaven. You're the answer to my prayers. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

He then paused and said, "Sir, how will we divide the profits? Do I keep 10% and you get the 90%? Do I keep 5% and you get the 95%? I'll be happy with any arrangement! The rich man shook his head and chuckled. "No, I want you to give me the 10% and you keep the 90%." For a moment, the beggar could not speak. When he tried to speak, it was gibberish. "Uh, gee, uh, wow, I mean, huh?" He couldn't believe his ears. The deal was too preposterous. The rich man laughed more loudly. He explained, "I don't need the money, my friend. I'm already wealthy beyond what you can ever imagine. I want you to give me 10% of your profits so you grow in gratitude." The beggar knelt down before his benefactor and said, "Yes Sir, I will do as you say. Even now, I'm so grateful for what you've done for me!"

However, as time passed, the beggar began to forget where the blessings came from. Each day, the beggar now dressed a little bit better, operated a store selling rice in the market. He worked very hard. He woke up early in the morning and slept late at night. Sales were brisk because the rice was of good quality. After thirty days, the profits were astounding. At the end of the month, as the ex-beggar was counting the money, and liking very much the feeling of money in his hands, an idea grew in his mind. He told himself, "Why should I give 10% to my business partner? I didn't see him the whole month! I was the one who

was working day and night for this business. I did all this work! I deserve 100% of the profits!” A few minutes later, the rich man was knocking on the door to collect his 10% of the profits. The ex-beggar opened the door and said, “You don’t deserve the 10%. I worked hard for this. I deserve all of it!” And he slammed the door.

If you were his business partner, how would you feel? Friend, this is exactly what happens to us. God is our business partner. God gave us life: every single moment, every single breath, every single second. God gave us talents: ability to talk, to create, to earn money. God gave us a body: eyes, ears, mouth, hands, feet, heart. God gave us a mind: imagination, emotions, reasoning, language. Paul said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1Cor 15:10). May we realize that all we have is from the Lord and all that we are is because of His grace. Remembering this, let us always have a heart of thanksgiving and an attitude of gratitude!

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