

A Teachable Spirit

Just before my grandpa (Vance Ferrell) passed away, he discovered what he considered to be the key to salvation. I will share a quote that highlights what he shared with me:

“The true mark of Christian character is plainly set before us. In spirit the Christian is to be gentleness itself. He is not to strive for the highest place. ‘Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child,’ Christ declared, ‘the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven’ [Matthew 18:4]. Man is to humble himself. No other soul can do this work for him. It is the work of his own heart to cultivate the submission of a little child. The lack of this heart-work is the reason why there is so much dissension [disagreement leading to conflict] and strife among Christians.”—*13 Letters and Manuscripts, Manuscript 165, par. 6 (1898).*

The purpose of this newsletter is to do some digging on what it means to have the submission of a little child. What does the Bible say about submission?

Submit to God

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”—James 4:7.

The most important being for us to submit to is our Heavenly Father. If we have not humbled ourselves to do as He commands, we have no hope of salvation. We must perform every humbling action. We can never safely submit to something that Christ has forbidden; for then we would have false humility. Paul, in Colossians, tells the believers that we dare not be subject to the vain ordinances of man.

“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding [pushing himself into a situation without permission] into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.... Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”—Colossians 2:18, 23.

We are not to submit to what others tell us that God requires. It is a sin to control the consciences of others. All who submit their consciences to be controlled by another are cursed:

“Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.”—Jeremiah 17:5.

If we submit to the Word of God, making Christ

our salvation, we will not seek to establish our own righteousness through the vain traditions of man.

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”—Romans 10:3.

Submit to Governments

We are told to submit to the authority of governments.

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”—1 Peter 2:13-15.

We are to be in subjection to governments for the Lord’s sake. It is the will of God for us to put to silence the ignorance of man. In times past, God’s people were often considered a wicked, rebellious people, seeking to overthrow their government. This charge did not hold up to scrutiny because the Christian was commanded to submit to the government God had given power to.

Let no man think, for a moment, that the government they are under is not of God.

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”—Romans 13:1.

This was written to the Romans who had quite a history of bad leadership. We are to submit to God first, then governments; this means that, if a government passes laws that require us to submit to them rather than God, we must show whose citizenship we respect more. This is Christ’s words:

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s.”—Luke 20:25.

We are given an understanding that some things do not belong to authorities. These things are listed in the first four commandments, which speak of our relationship to God. If the government commands us to do things contrary to the Word of God, we ought to render to God the things that are God’s.

Biblical Examples of Those Who refused to Disobey God, No Matter the Consequences

* When Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all newborn Hebrew boys, they disobeyed and

2 saved their lives, fearing God instead of the king (Exodus 1:15-21).

* Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to a golden image decreed by King Nebuchadnezzar, even when faced with the threat of being thrown into a fiery furnace. (This story is in Daniel 3).

* King Ahasuerus had promoted Haman and commanded the king's servants to bow down and pay homage to him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage (Esther 3:2-3). As we read in verse 3, the servants asked, "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" (This story is in Esther, chapters 1-8.)

"To secure popularity and patronage, legislators will yield to the demand for Sunday laws. But those who fear God, cannot accept an institution that violates a precept of the Decalogue.... Today, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will vindicate His truth and His people."—*Prophets and Kings*, 606 (all of pp. 605-606); *5 Testimonies*, 451 (all of pp. 450-453).

Submit to Church Leadership

God expects us to submit to those in authority in His church:

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."—Hebrews 13:17.

We are to be in submission to those who have watch over our souls. We can weary them like the children of Israel wearied Moses, and Satan took the opportunity to tempt him to sin. It is not good for us to wear out the leadership's patience.

"I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth."—1 Corinthians 16:15-16.

("Achaia" refers to the southern province of Greece, where Corinth, the city where Paul was writing to, was located and where Stephanas' family members were the first converts to Christianity.)

Those who have joined themselves to the ministry and are laboring as men who are accountable for our souls should be respected and submitted to. Let no man deceive himself into rebelling against God's structure. Jesus taught respect for spiritual leadership:

"Then spake Jesus...saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."—Matthew 23:1-3.

After Jesus said these things, He described, in

detail, those whom He just commanded His followers to submit to, with a long list of rebukes. The Greek word that Jesus used for "observe," indicates watchfulness and observance (obedience). Everything our church leaders speak against deserves our attention, but it is left with us to work out our own salvation. We are to be watchful for error; leaders can also rebel against God. We are commanded:

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."—Romans 12:18.

"If it be possible" means that there are times when we cannot be at peace with what the leadership or others tell us. In these times, we are not to rebel or strive; but, in humility, we are to submit to God instead. As long as we are obeying what the Bible says, we are safe. Let us read some words of inspiration on this subject, that no man deceives himself:

"Satan has ability to suggest doubts and to devise [plan a new system for handling] objections to the pointed testimony that God sends, and many think it a virtue, a mark of intelligence in them, to be unbelieving and to question and quibble [argue and complain]. Those who desire to doubt will have plenty of room. God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence. God gives sufficient evidence for the candid [honest] mind to believe; but he who turns from the weight of evidence because there are a few things which he cannot make plain to his finite understanding will be left in the cold, chilling atmosphere of unbelief and questioning doubts, and will make shipwreck of faith."—*Counsels for the Church*, 93.

We must beware not to reject what leadership says because of personal bias or because it does not agree with our desires. We Can learn a lesson about the humble submission of a little child from Jesus's disciples. There were times that they were wrong, and they submitted their positions to Christ and accepted His correction.

"It was by cherishing a humble, teachable spirit that these men gained the experience that enabled them to go out as workers into the harvest field. Their example presents to Christians a lesson of great value. There are many who make but little progress in the divine life because they are too self-sufficient to occupy the position of learners. They are content with a superficial knowledge of God's Word. They do not wish to change their faith or practice and hence [therefore] make no effort to obtain greater light."—*Acts of the Apostles*, 283.

None of us are to place ourselves in the position of infallible teachers of the Bible. We are not to be comfortable with what we already know at this time. There are many who make their own ideas idols and reject the truth when it comes to them because it is contrary

to their own understanding. They are unwilling to submit to others who disprove their cherished ideas.

“There are a thousand temptations in disguise prepared for those who have the light of truth; and the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience. Lay it before them in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer; and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for ‘in the multitude of counselors there is safety’ [Proverbs 11:14].”—5 *Testimonies*, 293.

“Our brethren should be willing to investigate in a candid [honest, without ulterior motive] way every point of controversy. If a brother is teaching error, those who are in responsible positions ought to know it; and if he is teaching truth, they ought to take their stand at his side. We should all know what is being taught among us; for if it is truth, we need it. We are all under obligation to God to know what He sends us. He has given directions by which we may test every doctrine—‘To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them’ [Isaiah 8:20]. If the light presented meets this test, we are not to refuse to accept it because it does not agree with our ideas.”—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 43-44.

It is important to find brothers and sisters who are earnest Truth seekers. We can make these our councilors. The Bible should be our primary councilor. If we read it humility with a desire to obey God will not allow us to be led astray. Ellen Whites writings in context, should be our secondary councilor when seeking Truth in the Bible, because she is a trustworthy councilor. We can trust that she will not lead astray.

“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.”—*Proverbs 27:17*.

It is our duty to seek the wisdom of others, but we are never to rely upon another to think for us.

“We must study the truth for ourselves. No living man should be relied upon to think for us. No matter who it is, or in what position he may be placed, we are not to look upon any man as a perfect criterion for us. We are to counsel together, and to be subject to one another; but at the same time we are to exercise the ability God has given us to learn what is truth. Each one of us must look to God for divine enlightenment. We must individually develop a character that will stand the test in the day of God. We must not become set in our ideas, and think that no one should interfere with our opinions.”—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 45.

Submitting our ideas to others of more learning and experience helps us not to become set in our own ideas. It protects us from the danger of idolizing an opinion instead of treasuring a love of Truth. We

should cling to the Truth, but not our opinions of the Truth. God will guide every humble earnest seeker.

Submit to One Another

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”—Ephesians 5:21.

Christians should willingly yield to each other, motivated by a deep reverence for God and a desire to honor Him in their relationships.

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”—Philippians 2:3.

Here we see another group of people we are to submit to that is related to our submission to church leadership. God expects us to esteem one another better than ourselves, and to act upon it. The younger are to submit to the older, but the older are also to submit to the younger; none are to consider themselves greater than their brother or sister.

“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”—1 Peter 5:5.

We are to submit ourselves to our elders, our leaders, and to each other, to preserve peace and unity. The biggest problem with this submission is self. Self often convinces people that they should be the ones submitted to, and they rise up and break the peace and unity. This is great confusion.

This does not mean that we merge our individuality into one another.

“Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do.”—*Education*, 17.

“Oh, how much the workers need the spirit of Jesus to change and fashion them as clay is molded in the hands of the potter! When they have this spirit, there will be no spirit of variance among them; no one will be so narrow as to want everything done his way, according to his ideas; there will be no inharmonious feeling between him and his brother laborers who do not come up to his standard. The Lord does not want any of his children to be shadows of others; but he would have each one be his own simple self, refined, sanctified, ennobled by imitating the life and character of the great Pattern. The narrow, shut-in, exclusive spirit which keeps everything within the compass of one’s self, has been a curse to the cause of God, and always will be wherever allowed to exist.”—*Review and Herald*, April 13, 1886.

Testing New “Truth”

How should we react to those who tell us that we need to submit to something we think to be error?

“If a brother differ[s] with you on some points of truth, do not stoop to ridicule, do not place him

4 in a false light, or misconstrue his words, making sport of them; do not misinterpret his words and wrest them of their true meaning. This is not conscientious [being careful and according to conscience] argument. Do not present him before others as a heretic, when you have not with him investigated his positions, taking the Scriptures text by text in the spirit of Christ to show him what is truth. You do not yourself really know the evidence he has for his faith, and you cannot really clearly define your own position. Take your Bible, and in a kindly spirit weigh every argument that he presents and show him by the Scriptures if he is in error. When you do this without unkind feelings, you will do only that which is your duty.”—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 50-51.

We need to be very careful, lest we trust in Ellen White as the Pharisees trusted in Moses. When Jesus came, they pitted Him against Moses, as if they were contrary to each other. In doing this they made the light of the knowledge of the glory of God appear to be darkness.

When there are any who come with new doctrines or ideas, it is our duty to investigate, to see if these things are so. We ought to be very careful how we react; there is great danger in taking the wrong opinion on an issue.

“Refusing to hear because you are prejudiced against the message or the messenger will not make your case excusable before God. To condemn that which you have not heard and do not understand will not exalt your wisdom in the eyes of those who are candid [without hidden motives] in their investigations of truth. And to speak with contempt of those whom God has sent with a message of truth is folly and madness.

“If our youth are seeking to educate themselves to be workers in His cause, they should learn the way of the Lord and live by every word that proceedeth out of His mouth. They are not to make up their minds that the whole truth has been unfolded and that the Infinite One has no more light for His people. If they entrench [place oneself in a strong defensive position] themselves in the belief that the whole truth has been revealed, they will be in danger of discarding precious jewels of truth that shall be discovered as men turn their attention to the searching of the rich mine of God’s Word.”—*Testimonies on Sabbath School Work*, 60-61.

There are many people who do not understand the plain statements of the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy, and give them obscure interpretations. Beware of deception. When anyone is proven to be supporting

error, after thorough investigation, we are not to submit to them, even if they are in authority over us:

“Then came one and told them [the chief priests], saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.... And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”—Acts 5:25, 27-29.

Submit to God first and all others are secondary to submit to.

Danger of Neglecting Personal Study

We are to personally search the rich mine of God’s Word. We need to acquaint ourselves with the voice of God. Sister White knew her writings were inspired just as the other Biblical prophets got their messages: but she says that her writings are the ‘lesser light’ pointing to the ‘greater light’ of the Bible. She encouraged a focus on Scripture as the ultimate authority:

“The Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light. O, how much good would be accomplished if the books containing this light were read with a determination to carry out the principles they contain!”—*Colporteur Evangelist*, 37.

“Lay Sister White to one side. Do not quote my words again as long as you live until you can obey the Bible.”—*3 Selected Messages*, 33. (*This is from an address to Church leaders on the night before the opening of the 1901 General Conference Session.*)

There are many who grasp passages from her writings, just as they do the Scriptures, and pervert them to their own destruction. They twist her words, so that she appears to speak directly contrary to the Word of God:

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.”—Isaiah 8:20.

Just because they make it appear that she speaks contrary to the Bible is no proof that she does. Satan is a master at twisting words, and many people learn this skill from him. You will find people using her writings to share error just as you find people using the Bible to share error. In the crisis, we must stand upon the highest authority to defend our position:

“When God’s Word is studied, comprehended,

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and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony.”—*1 Selected Messages*, 416.

We should not be comfortable with someone else’s experience in the things of God. We dare not be comfortable with hearing our instructions from God through another. The Lord does not want any of his children to be shadows of others.

“Those who have entered upon the work of teaching, or who have been called to any position of responsibility, should not be satisfied to take the product of the researches of other minds, but they should investigate truth for themselves. If they do not form the habit of investigating themes of truth for themselves, they will become superficial in their life and acquirements. The opinions of your associates may be of value to you, but you should not rely upon them and have no definite ideas of your own. You should examine the truths you have been led to believe, until you know that they are without a flaw. You lose much when you do not bring every point of faith you hold to the law and to the testimony, for you do not see or appreciate the truth as it is. Oh, that all our youth might appreciate the privilege that God has given! It is His will that you should go to the source of all light, and receive the enlightenment of His Spirit (for this will be given to every humble seeker for truth), and then you will know that the Spirit and the Word agree, and know that you know what is truth. What assurance this knowledge gives! You can then speak with power, proclaiming what you have learned as truth, knowing that you have not followed cunningly-devised fables.”—*Testimonies on Sabbath School work*, 61.

Ellen White should be our first counselor in things regarding the Bible. She is a trustworthy source. If our views do not align with hers, we should submit to the light God gave her; for, of all people, she was one who watched for souls as one that must give an account. She was an eyewitness of the majesty of God. Ellen G. White was inspired by God as a prophet, as the prophets in the Bible were inspired. However, she does not speak on every topic in the Bible; she did not have all the light on every subject. We need new light for our time.

“The written Testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of

inspiration already revealed. Man’s duty to God and to his fellow man has been distinctly specified in God’s Word, yet but few of you are obedient to the light given. Additional truth is not brought out; but God has through the *Testimonies* simplified the great truths already given and in His own chosen way brought them before the people to awaken and impress the mind with them, that all may be left without excuse.

“The Testimonies are not to belittle the Word of God, but to exalt it and attract minds to it, that the beautiful simplicity of truth may impress all.... When the Testimonies, which were once believed, are doubted and given up, Satan knows the deceived ones will not stop at this; and he redoubles his efforts till he launches them into open rebellion, which becomes incurable and ends in destruction. By giving place to doubts and unbelief in regard to the work of God, and by cherishing feelings of distrust and cruel jealousies, they are preparing themselves for complete deception. They rise up with bitter feelings against the ones who dare to speak of their errors and reprove their sins.

“It is not alone those who openly reject the *Testimonies*, or who cherish doubt concerning them, that are on dangerous ground. To disregard light is to reject it. If you lose confidence in the Testimonies, you will drift away from Bible truth. I have been fearful that many would take a questioning, doubting position, and in my distress for your souls I would warn you. How many will heed the warning?”—*Counsels for the Church*, 92, 94.

“For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail [express sorrow over] the condition of the reformed churches, who are come to a period in religion, and will go at present no farther than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw;... and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented [sorrowed, regretted]; for though they were burning and shining lights in their time, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God, but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received.”—*Great Controversy*, 292 (quote of D. Neal [a Puritan], *History of the Puritans*, Volume 1, p. 269).

We must grow our own understanding.

“Neither young nor old are excusable in trusting to another to have an experience for them. Said the angel:

6 “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.” A noble self-reliance is needed in the Christian experience and warfare.—2 Testimonies, 129

“Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.”—Ezekiel 14:20.

God has ordained that we should be constantly growing through study.

“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” Proverbs 4:18.

Ellen White has pointed us to a shining path, but it must shine more and more until we bear the likeness of Christ. New light on the same Truths is yet to be revealed.

“The people of God have been too easily satisfied with mere surface truths. We should search diligently for the deep, eternal far-reaching truths of God’s Word. Having found them, we shall joyfully sell all, that we may buy the field.”—*Councils on Stewardship*, 244.

We all must advance in the cause of Christ. God rose Ellen White up in the Spirit and power of Elijah. And like Elisha, we need a double portion of that spirit and power. We have to attain to the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus! We must advance; and knowing this, Ellen White places before us her own experience and the attitude of those before us to be taken as a pattern when studying the Bible.

“In 1844, when anything came to our attention that we did not understand, we kneeled down and asked God to help us take the right position; and then we were able to come to a right understanding and see eye to eye. There was no dissension, no enmity, no evil-surmising, no misjudging of our brethren. If we but knew the evil of the spirit of intolerance, how carefully would we shun it!”—*Councils to Writers and Editors*, 43.

As the times change, the living Word of God opens, to reveal Truths perfectly adapted to expose new errors. We should be looking for new proofs that the old light is correct. Deception is fast-growing, and soon it will be powerful enough to deceive the very elect, if possible. We should be searching the Scriptures, to see if the pillars of our faith are true; then we will see that we have not followed cunningly devised fables. We will see the beauty of the gift of prophecy as never before. The pillars of faith can hold up to scrutiny; and, if they cannot, it is high time for us to find out why.

“If the pillars of our faith will not stand the test of investigation, it is time that we knew it. There must be no spirit of pharisaism cherished among us. When Christ came to His own, His own received Him not; and it is a matter of solemn interest to us that we should not pursue a similar course in refusing light from heaven.”—*Councils to Writers and Editors*, 44.

Submission in the Family

God designed to teach fallen mankind about Himself through the family relationship.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.”—Colossians 3:18.

As the church is to submit itself to God, so the wives are to submit themselves to their husbands. Even if they are not pastors or leaders, all husbands should strive to meet the standard of a spiritual leader spoken of in 1 Timothy 3:4:

“One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.”

Note that he does not have his wife in subjection to himself, but his children. This shows that, as Christ won our submission by His love toward us, so a husband is to win the submission of his wife through love. It is a husband’s duty to love his wife. One of the greatest evidences of love is being kind under suffering and provocation. What does charity (God’s all encompassing love) mean? Read 1 Corinthians 13, specifically verses 4-8.

The wife is supposed to understand that, as a representative of the church, she should submit to her husband because he loves her.

“For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands.”—1 Peter 3:5.

This will draw the attention and love of a husband, making a wife more attractive than any jewelry ever could. The wife is not to love her husband more than God. It would be her positive duty to not submit to her husband, if he asks her to disobey God. The world should see an example of the family of God in our families, and this same understanding should also be manifest in the church. God is our Father, the church organization represents the mother, and the members represent the children. (More on leadership under the heading: **“What Constitutes Greatness?”**)

What About Children?

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.”—Ephesians 6:1.

God calls the children in the house to obey their parents. And He again gives permission to the children to disobey their father or mother if they tell them to do something that God says not to do. It is the positive duty of a child to disobey their parents if they are told to do something that God says they shouldn’t do. It would be wise for wives and children to make sure that they are not defiant in disobedience but rather are humbly submitting to God instead. This also applies to the family of God, except our Heavenly Father does not make mistakes.

Servants Are to Submit

Of all the commands to submit to others, this command is the most fascinating:

“Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward [stubborn, obstinate].”—1 Peter 2:18.

God tells the household servants to submit to their masters, whether they are good or evil. This does not show that they obey them by doing evil, but that they follow the commands of their master. In the future, many of us may find ourselves in such a position. But, even here, we can give glory to God by our conduct and submission. We can be as our Lord, who was the Servant of servants.

What Constitutes Greatness?

If you were to ask this question to people of the world, you would get some interesting answers! If you asked Seventh-day Adventists, you may get the same answers. Ultimately, what we think constitutes greatness is irrelevant; what matters is what God says constitutes greatness:

“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world.”—John 18:36.

Jesus came to establish His kingdom on earth, but not through conquest. The kingdom of heaven is entirely foreign to man. It is established by the wisdom of God. A quotation that is attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte expresses it quite beautifully:

“Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him.”

All kingdoms have hierarchy and all kingdoms have law. The kingdom of God is no different. Heaven also has the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were adapted to meet man in His fallen condition, but it is the same law that governs heaven. This law is more like Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might, and your neighbor as yourself. Love is also the law of heaven. Since order is a law of heaven, this means that there is some form of hierarchy too. Jesus revealed the principle which heavens hierarchy is built upon.

Christ’s twelve disciples were often fighting amongst themselves because each of them wanted to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Their idea of greatness was how much power and authority they would possess, and how many would serve them. This is what we naturally think greatness consists of. Heaven has an inverse hierarchy (the opposite effect of what happens on earth); the greatest in heaven is the servant of all.

“Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”—John 13:13-15.

The actions of Christ, the God of the universe, teach us what true greatness is. Christ says that,

when we get to heaven, He will serve us:

“Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”—Luke 12:37.

Greatness in heaven is not based on how many serve you, but on how many you serve. The glory of God would destroy us if we saw it, and yet He provides food for bacteria.

“Though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly; but the proud He knoweth afar off.”—Psalms 138:6.

Those who will be great in heaven are the ones who have increased their capacity to serve through practice. Mankind is great as they imitate God.

“Jesus called them [James and John in verses 35-41] to Him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister [waiter]; And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”—Mark 10:42-45.

Christ came to serve mankind in the most degrading of ways. He carried our griefs and our sins upon Him:

“Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”—Isaiah 53:4-5.

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”—2 Corinthians 5:21.

Christ showed us what the Father is like. God is greater than all, not because all of creation serves Him, but because He serves all of creation. This is what the kingdom of God is—a kingdom of servants. Since greatness is about service, we would expect every being in heaven, including the angels, to be pursuing service with the greatest zeal. They are longing for opportunities to do things for God. Then they look to earth and see us, who are warped and degraded by sin, hoping to rule over people and despising the idea of serving each other. Christ tells us:

“If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”—Mark 9:35.

Christ also tells us that many of the great men of our time shall be the least in the kingdom of heaven:

“And they...shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”—Luke

13:29-30.

8 This is because many of the great men of our time have not developed the capacity to serve others but, instead, have been served. In heaven, they will be last, not as punishment but because they have not developed the character necessary to be great.

Let us now see God's government in action. It can be seen, beginning in 1 Kings 22:19:

"And he [Micaiah, the prophet of the Lord, in verse 14] said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left."

Here we see God sitting on His throne with all of heaven's hosts surrounding Him. What are they waiting for? An opportunity to serve the Servant of all; because this is what greatness is. They are eagerly anticipating an opportunity to serve God.

"And the Lord said, Who shall persuade (also entice or deceive) Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner."—1 Kings 22:20. (This chapter describes King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah preparing for battle against the king of Syria. Ramothgilead refers to a city where King Ahab of Israel planned to go to war, and Ahab was killed in battle trying to recover Ramoth-Gilead)

These verses contain so much beauty and insight into how the kingdom of God functions and what true leadership looks like. God, the all-knowing, all-powerful, self-existent Being with infinite understanding, asks for ideas from His creations. Why? Certainly not because He needed ideas! I can't hope to explain God, but I can think of some reasons. If God simply told the angels to do something, they would obey without question; not only would it be the greatest honor in heaven, it would also be their greatest delight to obey God. But they would not get the opportunity to grow. True leadership is not about giving good commands but about giving commands that are best for the growth of your subjects. God, who knew the end from the beginning, gave the angels an opportunity to solve a problem, an opportunity to use their intellects and grow. True leadership is serving your subjects in a way that promotes individual growth. Thus, we see that those who are great in heaven, those who would be leaders, must learn to serve on earth.

"And there came forth a spirit [a lying, deceptive spirit], and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him [King Ahab, the king of Israel, who is being tricked by a lying spirit to go to battle and perish]. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith

[archaic: by what means, how]? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And He [the Lord God] said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so."—1 Kings 22:21-22.

We can see from this line of questioning that God was not simply looking for a volunteer, he expected them to have a plan to persuade Ahab too. This is fascinating because God knew the Holy Angels would not have an idea on how to persuade Ahab. So why did God ask them? Not because He wanted them to feel deficient but because it is necessary for growth to exercise the faculties God has given. Here we see that God's style of leadership is not based upon arbitrary commands, but upon voluntary opportunities. God states a goal and allows the angels to come up with ideas and volunteer to accomplish the goal. This is merely a glimpse of heaven, but it provides eternal insight into what it means to be a good leader.

Heaven's angels serve God from love, adoration, joy and a desire to accomplish the greatness of serving God, Evil angels and Satan must submit out of fear of His power. Satan could not touch Ahab, one of the most wicked kings of Israel, without first obtaining permission from God. This also shows some very interesting truths in the great controversy. God watches over all His subjects, even the wicked ones. He gives life to all the creatures of His creation, even the ones tainted by sin. Satan and his angels are allowed to a degree to exercise their free-will and demonstrate the principles of their kingdom here on this earth.

Praise God that soon sin will be no more, and all creation, for all eternity, will live in a kingdom ruled by the greatest: "the three powers of the Godhead" (*8 Testimonies*, 254). It will be a kingdom of beings whose highest glory and delight is in serving the Servant of all. Let's prove we are ambassadors of this kingdom.

For a finished work



Jonathan Taylor

Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35

More Food for the Little Flock —