



"Theirs is an endless road, a hopeless maze, who seek for goods before they seek for God."

—Bernard of Clairvaux

**30-May-08**

## **If the Lord Wills**

With great privilege comes great responsibility. The nation of Israel was clearly privileged, for [God](#) tells her, "You *only* have I known of all the families of the earth" ([Amos 3:2](#)). Through a different prophet, He says that because of His blessing and favor, Israel was to be a living testimony to Him and His sovereign power—a great responsibility indeed:

"You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God." ([Isaiah 43:10-12](#))

Israel's responsibility was to testify, by her conduct, who was the true God (compare [Deuteronomy 4:5-9](#)). She failed, in large part, because she simply did not believe God ([Hebrews 3:18](#); [4:2](#)). If she had believed Him, she would have obeyed, and the God-given laws would have transformed the nation into a dazzling example in the midst of a darkened world.

The church has the same responsibility to let her light shine so that God is glorified ([Matthew 5:14-16](#)), but her blessings exceed Israel's. With God's outpouring of His Spirit, a new heart—a believing heart—is available. The Body of [Christ](#), then, has the means to witness that God *is* God by believing what He says and humbly following His lead. Yet, with these blessings comes a weighty responsibility: to actually *make* that witness.

When we submit to God and allow ourselves to be led by His Spirit, the fruits are evident, and we make a proper witness, whether in our personal lives, our local congregations, our church organizations, or the larger Body. These fruits include love, [joy](#), [peace](#), [longsuffering](#), [kindness](#), [goodness](#), faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). However, if we ignore God and follow another "sovereign"—such as the self—the fruits are likewise manifest, and we make a poor witness. Such fruits include hatred, contention, jealousy, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambition, dissension, [heresy](#), and envy ([Galatians 5:20-21](#)).

The apostle James describes how these two different spiritual conditions play out:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the [meekness of wisdom](#). But if you have *bitter envy and self-seeking* in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where *envy and self-seeking* exist, *confusion* and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first *pure*, then *peaceable*, *gentle*, *willing to yield*, *full of mercy and good fruits*, *without partiality and without hypocrisy*. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who [make peace](#). ([James 3:13-18](#))

At the core of making the right witness is sovereignty. Is God leading things, or are we? Perhaps better put, do we recognize—and desire and seek—God's leadership, or do we prefer to take matters into our own hands, make our own plans, and look to God for a blessing only after *we* have decided what needs to be done? If we actively seek God's leadership, and submit to it as He provides it, our belief will be evident in the fruits produced and the

faithful witness made. If, on the other hand, we—individually or corporately—are self-directed, the results will be confusion, division, contention, and all the other fruits of following the wrong sovereign.

James rebukes those who make too much of their own plans and leave God out of the picture:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ([James 4:13-16](#))

He calls such self-directed plans "boasting" and its source "arrogance," reinforcing the fact that in his natural state, man is in continual contention with God. In this case, carnality's symptom is confidence in one's own ability to bring something to pass without taking God into account.

[Psalm 10:4](#) (KJV) describes a wicked man as one who "will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts." The same man may *inquire* of God—He could be in *some* of his thoughts—but he will not wholeheartedly *seek* Him. The man is self-directed, purpose-driven, and intent on bringing his own plans—"strategic visions," we call them today—to pass. By inference, the righteous man *does* seek after God, rather than merely *inquiring* occasionally, and God *is* in all his thoughts. God will look on such a man: one of a poor and contrite spirit, and who trembles at His word ([Isaiah 66:2](#)).

At various times the leaders of ancient Israel, good and bad, inquired of God. Sometimes, because of idolatry—including setting up idols in their hearts—Sabbath-breaking, rebellion, and general disobedience, Israel was so far from God that He would not even allow them to inquire of Him ([Ezekiel 14:1-11](#); [20:1-4](#))! Of those who inquired of God, not very many are shown actually *seeking* Him. The Bible records bad rulers inquiring of God like an adolescent might play with a Magic 8-Ball: desiring an answer, but not truly recognizing God's sovereignty.

Saul, for example, inquired of God at one point, but God did not answer him. It seems that Saul never bothered to consider *why* God would not answer him. Rather than trying to restore the breach with God by repenting, he just decided to try a different way to make his decision: by consulting a spiritist. He was determined to have his own way. Even when he sought guidance, he demanded it on his own terms—even if it meant seeking "wisdom" from an unclean source. The Bible does not say of many men that God specifically killed them, but Saul made it onto this list for his unfaithfulness ([1 Chronicles 10:13-14](#)).

In contrast, [King David](#) frequently inquired of the Lord, but he is also known for being a man after God's heart—he had a tremendous track-record of *seeking* God. Those who truly [seek God](#) will be answered—positively—when they inquire of Him, for they will be a breathing incarnation of the phrase "if the Lord wills." This is a major part of the witness that God desires us to make of Him: that *He* is God, and there is no other sovereign—least of all a puny man.

- David C. Grabbe

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Prayer and Seeking God](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

We must not have an apathetic relationship toward God (Revelation 3:15), but instead to ardently, earnestly, diligently, and fervently seek God in order to imitate His behavior in our lives. The fervency of a passionate courtship and marriage relationship provides the grounds for comparison of the kind of relationship God wants with us. Jesus, David, and Jacob exemplified the passionate fervor and heat (both to purify good and to destroy evil) God demands of us. If we search for God with all our hearts, looking for something which is a vital necessity for us (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:12-13; Hebrews 11:6) God will reward us, giving us what we are seeking: a warm, ardent relationship, transforming us into what He is.

## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **'You Are My Witnesses...'**

by Martin G. Collins

What is a witness? Martin Collins shows how the term was used in both Old and New Testaments. He also briefly covers the Two Witnesses and the everyday witness of a Christian.

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