

A Brand new venueand in part a repeat of an old weekend!

1996

The first part of this book is a reprint of “**ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE**”, the ~~1995~~ senior weekend. The studies all come from that, so apologies to anyone who came then ...try to make sure you don't do the same study!

Then the second part of the book picks up the Lord's Prayer at the 3rd line (we did the first line last year, and we've done a recent weekend on the Kingdom of God as well). Put those together and you get this weekend: LOVE, HONOUR and OBEY.

Programme: Please keep a watch of times....especially if you are based in the Oak or Willow Lodges!

Friday

7:30pm Dinner
8:30pm Main meeting

Saturday

8:30am Breakfast
9:30am Worship
10am Introduction to Groups
10:30am Grouptime (coffee available about 11:15)
12:45pm Lunch, then freetime
4:45pm Groups report back
6:30pm Dinner
8pm Worship
Talk & Ministry

Sunday

8:30am Breakfast, clear rooms
9:45am Communion
10:45am Mission Reports
11:15am Coffee
11:45am Business Matters
Noon Prayer and Worship
12:45pm Lunch



Needless to say, the usual pleas for respecting others,
not letting doors bang,
quiet in corridors (especially 11pm-7am),
wiping mud from feet,
keeping outer doors closed, etc etc.

But will anyone listen?



All You Need Is Love:

Love is a Many Splendoured Thing ¹

We talk about love a lot, both as Christians and generally in the world. It's become one of those words that has a lot of different meanings. We might say, for instance:

I have fallen in love with Basil

We made love last night

I love chocolate²

I love my baby sister

How are you, love?

I'm in love with Will Young

We love you Beckham, we do!

“Forty, love”



In each of those statements the word means something different. So what do we mean when we say “God loves the world”; “Jesus loves me, this I know” or even “I love God”? Perhaps we're not sure. Even if we think we are, the aim of Saturday is to bring it more clearly into focus.

So we are going to concentrate on LOVE as the *Bible* sees it. You probably know that Greek had different words for love. The ones used in the Bible are:

Αγαπαο/Αγαπε (Agapao(verb)/Agape(noun)) describes Christian love, the attitude of God towards His Son and all believers. It does not come from feelings but is a commitment. It does not change because we feel good or bad or because circumstances change. In us it might grow and become stronger, but true αγαπε is a deep and constant desire for the best towards others and God. Its an **Everlasting Love**³ See Habbakuk 3:17,18 for this type of love in action!

Φιλεω (Phileo) is tender affection. It is to do with cherishing something/one we like. The Bible never commands us to Φιλεω, but it does command us to Αγαπαο. Its a love that is based more on feelings than dedication, a sort of

¹ Nat King Cole

² you knew chocolate would get mentioned somewhere, didn't you!

³ Love Affair, 1968



Groovy Kind of Love 4

Φιλανθρωπια (Philanthropia) is kindness towards other people. Much like the Good Samaritan was “philanthropic” to the mugged man on the roadside. The word is used in English to describe someone (normally a very wealthy person) who gives generously to help others. Someone who values **Love Over Gold**⁵

I want to know what love is⁶

So your job on Saturday morning is to start to find out more about Αγαπε love. God’s love for us. The following notes, as ever, are designed to help you BUT NOT to limit you. The whole Bible is your study book. But what follows here may be a useful starting place!

God -> Us

Father/Parent
Friend
Lover/Betrothed

Us-> God

Child (Son)
Friend
Fiancee

Waiter

Us-> Each Other

Brothers/Sisters
Friends
Self-Sacrificing

Us-> Non-Christians

Servants

Sacrificial

If it doesn’t hurt it isn’t love!

The above categories may help us to begin to think about what this Αγαπε love is.

You might like to add in other words to the lists as the day progresses.

⁴ Sonny & Cher

⁵ Dire Straits, 1982

⁶ Foreigner



Study Time!

As ever, make notes in this book and be prepared as a group to feed back what you learn to the rest of us. You will only have time to do one study this weekend (or maybe only part of it). Other groups will teach you the other studies, and you can always do them yourself when you get home!

Here we go then! **It's too late to turn back now!**⁷

Study One: God->Us - The Love of a Parent

God teaches us in the fifth Commandment that parents are rightly proud of their children, and to do anything that dishonours your parents - anything that would rob them of the pride they have in you - is wrong. God also has pride in us as His children, **Pride (in the Name of Love)**⁸. In this study we are going to look at what the Bible teaches us about God as our parent, Mother as well as Father.

If you have had a bad relationship with your parents (especially your dad) then this might be a painful study. But persevere! There is gold here, and the harder it is to get at it the richer the quality of the gold you will find!

Remember that in some of the verses that follow it is human relationships that are being talked about, but that these are to reflect our relationship with God.

God our Father

Deuteronomy 1:31
2 Samuel 7:14
1 Chronicles 28:6
Psalm 103:13,14
Isaiah 63:16
Matthew 18:10
John 20:17
1 John 3:1

Faithfulness

Psalm 27:10
Psalm 68:5
Jeremiah 31:9
Matthew 6:9
Acts 1:4 and 2:33

The Father's Love for Jesus, The Son

Psalm 89:20-29
Proverbs 3:12
Matthew 11:27
Matthew 6:6
John 3:35

continued next page

⁷ Cornelius Brothers

⁸ U2, 1984



love, honour & obey

**The Father's Love for Jesus,
The Son**

Matthew 10:29,30

John 5:20

John 10:17

John 15:9

2 Peter 1:17

Ways God is like Father to us

2 Corinthians 1:3

Hebrews 12:7-10

Jesus is the Father too!!

Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah 22:21,22

John 1:18

John 5:18

John 10:30,38

John 14:9

Being part of the Family

Romans 8:15

2 Corinthians 6:17,18

Galatians 4:6

Ephesians 2:18

1 John 1:3

1 John 2:15

1 John 5:1

Colossians 1:13

God Our Mother

Isaiah 49:15

Isaiah 66:13

The Psalmists also frequently talk of God being like a mother-hen, sheltering her chicks:

Psalms 17:8, 36:7, 57:1, 63:7 and especially Psalm 90:1,4

See also Matthew 23:37

The picture of God as our Father is one of the strongest and most important in the Bible. Is it any wonder that the devil has done all he can to ruin the picture for so many people? If he can destroy human fatherhood he damages our ability to relate to our heavenly Father properly. That is perhaps why so many fathers fail.

And family life in general is also important.....and has been under satanic attack throughout history and especially in this century. As Christians we need to pray for families, and the fathers we know, in our fellowships. If you have time left pray now for your families. Also pray for Nick Hillman as a father in our fellowship.



Studies Two & Three: God Us and Us -> God - The Love of Friends.



These two studies concentrate on the lives of people described in the Bible as Friends of God. But first we need to look at what it means, according to the Bible to be a friend of God:

Words that describe our friendship with God, and His with us

Look for key words or phrases or ideas in these verses that talk of friendship between God and us:

Read and compare James 2:23 with Genesis 15: 1-6

Job 29:4,5

John 15:14

Revelation 3:20

1 Corinthians 8: 1-3

Now read the relevant passages (and others if you wish) about Moses or David, and try to answer the questions below.

Study Two: Moses

Exodus 33:9 to 34:9

Numbers 12

Notice how Moses spent long hours alone with God in

The Chapel of Love⁹



Study Three: David

1 Samuel 18:28, 23:4

2 Samuel 7: 11b-29

any of his Psalms, but start perhaps with

Psalm 18 and Psalm 23

also Acts 7:45,46

Questions:

In what ways does God show friendship towards the person?

In what ways does the person show friendship towards God?

In what way(s) was the person convinced of God's faithfulness towards them?

⁹ The Dixie Cups



There is boldness in their approach, but also reverence. Give examples of each.

There is great grace (generosity) in God's dealing with them, also warnings. Give examples of each.

God's friendship is not something that is cheap and easy. It grows through intimacy with Him. Reflect on the intimacy shown by Moses/David and spend some time examining your own times with God...how intimate are you, and how can you become more so?

Remember, God tells us clearly that you **Can't Buy Me Love**¹⁰

Study Four: God -> Us - The Lover/Betrothed.

One of the strong pictures of the Bible is of Jesus, the Messiah, God as a wooing Husband-to-be, longing for His Bride and waiting in excited anticipation for the Wedding to come.

You can see this picture in some of Jesus' parables (see Matthew 22 and 25, for example).

God describes His relationship with Israel as like that of a husband with an adulterous wife (see Hosea 1:2, Jeremiah 3:14, for example).

This picture of our relationship with God is perhaps the one which is most intimate. One day the Church, the Body of Christ (that's Christians, folks) will become the Bride of Christ. There's going to be one big wedding feast when we get to heaven!

See Revelation 19: 6-9.

The Bible describes God as taking great delight in His people. See

Zephaniah 3:17

Hosea 2: 14-16 (which is spoken about the adulterous wife of God. He does not give up on her/us....thank Goodness!)

and Ephesians 5:25-33

¹⁰ The Beatles, 1964



Study of Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)

For the clearest picture of all this, skim read through Song of Solomon and note the parts spoken by the Lover.



This is a tremendous love poem, and represents God talking to His Bride-to-be (His people). The Lover is God, the Beloved the Bride and the others are observers.

Most modern translations have the poem sectioned up into “Lover” and “Beloved” bits. You are interested in the Lover, and how much He loves His people.....how much God loves us!

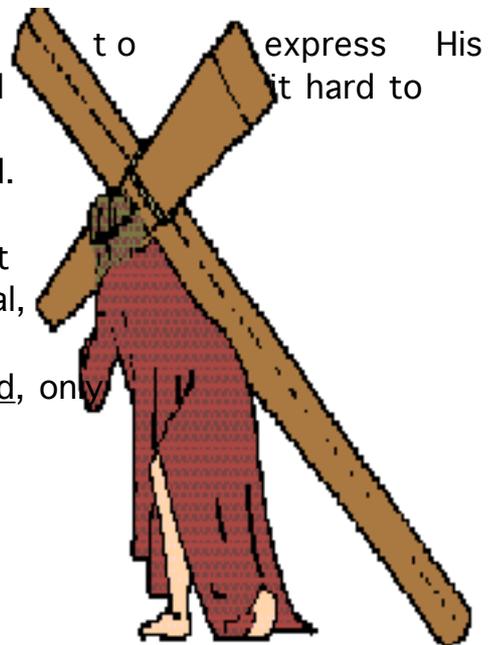
Its erotic stuff, this. Use it to reflect on how precious you are to God, how lovely you look to His eyes. For the Lover in this song, being with His Beloved makes Him feel good. It could almost be subtitled **Build Me Up, Buttercup**¹¹!

Study Five: God -> Us - Saviour.¹²

There are so many passages on this theme that its hard to know where to start. We all know John 3:16 off by heart, don't we? Don't we???

So its easy to forget what it cost God to be able love for us. Someone said recently that they found believe that God loved *them* personally because He loved the whole world, and so they were not special.

But God looks at it the other way round. He doesn't start with the world and work down to the individual, but with the person and up to the world. If God did not love YOU then He would not be loving the world, only part of it. So you see, you are special to Him!



¹¹ The Foundations, 1968

¹² a fuller treatment of this topic was given on TFG's **BedRock** weekends. Copies of the **BedRock** booklet are still available at £2 each.

¹³ all of TFG's 10 verses to learn can be found on our website, www.tfg.org.uk



The Price of Love

Read Philippians 2:5-11. Think about the example of Jesus and remember it says "Your attitude should be the same"

1 John 3:16 (easy to remember that.....why not learn it along with John 3:16?)
1 John 4:9,10
Isaiah 53:4-6,10-12

The Size of His Love

Ephesians 3:17-19
Romans 5:8
Romans 3:23, 6:23
Isaiah 53:6-9
Titus 3: 3-8

The Reason He saved Us

Isaiah 53:6
2 Corinthians 5:15-18,19
Zephaniah 3:15,17
Micah 7:9,18,19
Colossians 1:13

The Gospel Account

This should not be forgotten, of course. Read through one of the four accounts of the crucifixion, using your imagination to agonise with Jesus and remember that it is for you that He undergoes these things.

In the Titus reading above we read *when the ... love of God our Saviour appeared He saved us*. In **When Love Comes To Town**¹⁴ Bono writes:

*I was there when they crucified my Lord
I held the scabbard when the soldier drew the sword/
threw the dice when they pierced His side
But I've seen love conquer the great divide.*

Study Six: Us -> God - Child(Son).

If God is our Father then it stands to reason that we must be His children. Infact, the Bible describes us all (females too) as sons of God.

This is important because in ancient times it was only the sons who gained the inheritance, girls received from their husbands, not their fathers. But God

¹⁴ U2, 1988



love, honour & obey



includes us all in His inheritance. What's more, since we, the sons of God, will also become the Bride of Christ, we're also gonna get an

inheritance that way! Whoopee!

But Sonship brings with it responsibilities, as well as rewards. Its not just **Sugar Baby Love**¹⁵! That's what this study is about:

The Promises of Sonship

2 Corinthians 6:17,18
1 John 3:1,2
John 1:12,13
Nahum 1:7
Hosea 1:10
Isaiah 63:8
2 Samuel 7:14,15
Jeremiah 31:33
Luke 20:36
Philippians 2:15
Ephesians 1:4,5
Galatians 4:3-7

The Responsibilities of Sonship

Proverbs 3:11
Malachi 1:6
Matthew 5:48
Hebrews 12:7
1 Peter 1:17
Revelation 3:19,20

Its also worth bearing in mind Deuteronomy 27:16. This clearly applies to our human parents, but also extends to our attitude towards God. Linked with his, then, is also Exodus 20:12.

What makes someone a 'Son of God'?

See again John 1:12,13
Also Romans 8:14-19
Romans 5:8-10
Galatians 3:26,27

That old 'favourite' says it all:

*Father God I wonder how I managed to exist
Without the knowlege of Your Parenthood*

¹⁵ The Rubettes



love, honour & obey

*And Your loving care
But now I am Your son, I am adopted in Your family
And I can never be alone
'Cause Father God You're there beside me!*¹⁶

Study Seven: Us -> God - Fiancee.



Incredible as it may seem, Jesus is head-over-heals in love with you. Or, to quote that teenage musical, **Hopelessly Devoted to You**¹⁷. So, surely, our reaction to that must be to fall in love with Him, and be able to tell Him **You Really Got Me**¹⁸?

We are the Bride of Christ. Or, at least, we will be. The Wedding hasn't happened yet. But its getting closer, excitement is mounting. *(Its) nearer now than when we first believed!*¹⁹. So, how should we be loving Jesus?

Signs that we are not loving Jesus

1 John 2:15
James 4:4

How we should love Him

Psalm 37:4,5
Luke 14:26

Its not just obeying rules!

Infact, it isn't even obeying rules! Our Great Fiance isn't after laying a load of impossible commands on us. He is after our love. He wants time with us. In his more laws, rules and regulations. A call to holiness is a call to intimacy with God. To develop a love affair with the Creator of all that is - romancing Him as He romances us, caring for Him as He cares for us. To approach His person with complete transparency, openly disclosing who we truly are in a humble adoration of Him. Holiness is not something we can acquire through human efforts.....holiness is a gift of God.

¹⁶ Ian Smale (Ishmael) Words printed under CCL licence number 3472.

¹⁷ Grease, 1978

¹⁸ The Kinks, 1964

¹⁹ Romans 13:11

²⁰ Kingsway 1989, 0-86065-745-0, Page 84.



To become holy, therefore, we need to spend time romancing Jesus. I find that exciting!

Study of Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)

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Most modern translations have the poem sectioned up into ->“Lover” and ->“Beloved” bits. You are interested in the Beloved, and how much she loves her Lover.....how much we should love Jesus!

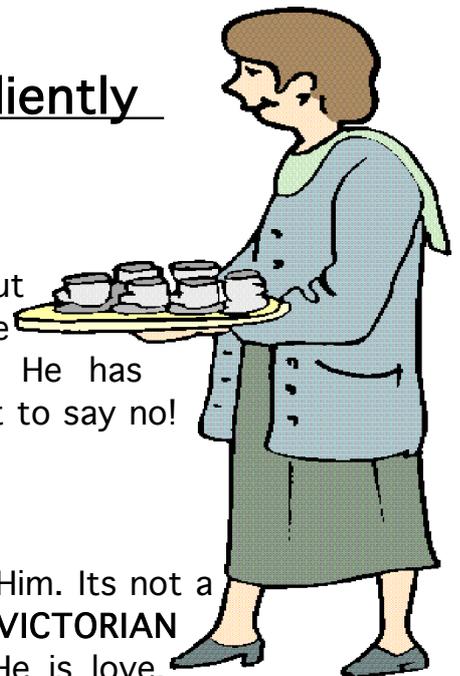
Its erotic stuff, this. Its the Bible’s picture of how we should be romancing God!

Study Eight: Us -> God - Obediently Waiting.

Jesus is Lord, we often say (or at least sing). But do we mean it? Lordship is not something to declare lightly. *If* Jesus is your Lord then that means He has complete authority in your life, and you have no right to say no!

Yet if we love Him.....we will obey Him (2 John 6).

Note though that obedience comes because we love Him. Its not a fearful obedience. **GOD IS NOT LIKE SOME VICTORIAN HEADMASTER WITH A CANE AND A SNARL.** He is love. And He only has the best in mind for you and for me.



Loving obedience.

John 15:10-14
1 John 5:2
Micah 6:8
Revelation 2:4,5
Revelation 2:10
Revelation 3:19

Ways of Obeying

2 John 4-6
Matthew 11:50



The Greatest Obedience is to obey the Greatest Commandment.

Matthew 22:36-40.

So, how do we ->Love the Lord your God'? The Bible speaks over and over about the time we spend with God as time of *Waiting on Him* and of *Seeking His face*. Waiting as a waiter waits in a restaurant. Hanging around until called on. Being there, just for Him. Doing it for Him, and telling Him all the time its '**For Your Love²¹**'. That was and is the job of the priest....and we are all His priests.

Wait a While

Revelation 1:6
Psalm 37:4-7
Psalm 40:1-3
Jude 21
Revelation 22:3,4
1 John 4:16
Acts 1:4,14
Exodus 24:15-18
Psalm 46:10
Micah 7:7
Hosea 12:6
Isaiah 55:6
Isaiah 30:15,18

Him's the Boss

Isaiah 64:8
Exodus 34:1-9



Loving Others

There's no point in being commanded to love each other, 'cos we just can't do it! Not in our own human strength anyway. But when we get Love for God right, when we allow Him to change us by a 'complete renewing of our mind' (Romans 12:2), then we will discover that His love flows through us and we are able to love others. Even the unlovely, even the unlikable, even a teacher.

That's why we spent so long looking at love for God and the love of God. Its crucial, without it we are nothing! (see 1 Corinthians 13). But when we bathe in His love, when we receive His love, when we fall in love with Him, **When Love Comes to Town²²**, we will find that we are absorbed with love for others too! Both for fellow believers and also for the rest of humanity.

²¹ The Yardbirds, 1965

²² U2, 1988



We are not actually studying this section together in groups over the weekend, it will be mentioned in the Communion service but there won't be enough time to go into it in the depth we ought to! So use these notes to spur on extra study at home!

Us -> Each Other: Sisters and Brothers.

I don't know about you and any brother or sister you may have, but me and my bruv used to fight a bit, argue a lot, and so on. But we also were, and are, committed to each other. That's the picture the Bible gives of how Christians should be with each other. Not always agreeing or pretending to agree. Not always being oh-so-charming. But, at the bottom line, to care for each other, to be committed to each other and to *love* each other.

Romans 12:10 says actually to be *devoted* to each other. And we are told to love out brother sister Christians in lots of places in the letters in the New Testament. If you don't believe me look up:

1 Peter 1:22 love each other from the heart

1 Peter 2:17.....love the brotherhood

1 Peter 3:8love as brothers

1Peter 4:8love each other deeply

2 Peter 1:7-11 add brotherly kindness to your salvation, anyone who does not do this has forgotten what God has done for them!

Peter had a thing about love! But that's not surprising when you think of the painful lesson he learnt about it.

He denied Jesus 3 times and then, after He rose, Jesus asked Him three times "Peter, do you love me?" (see John 21:15 onwards). Actually Jesus asked "Peter, do you αγαπε me?" the first two times, and Peter replied "You know I φιλεω you". Jesus then asked Him if he really did φιλεω Him....that must have hurt!

2 John 5 love one another

1Thessalonians 3:12.....love *overflowing* for each other.

Hebrews 13:1 *keep on* loving as brothers. Even in the hard times.

Romans 13:8-10 ... our continuing debt to one another.

The message could hardly be clearer! We need to apply it to each other within TFG, to each other in our churches and to each other across church/group divides. Because brotherly love is so important to the Gospel it is also important



to the Devil...he does what he can to stop it. That's why through the ages churches have been split apart, Christians divided, and love has not been seen. It has to stop, and we can start in TFG!

If our non-Christian friends can see that we Christians really do love each other, then the love of God becomes clearer to them and the Gospel is presented as it should be!

So, if there is a Christian brother/sister you have a problem with....here or elsewhere.... get it sorted!

Three examples from the Bible to go home and read about:

1> Joseph, forgiving his brothers for selling him as a slave (Genesis 45)

2> Naomi and Ruth, where Ruth committed herself to a sisterly love towards her mother -in-law (Ruth)

3> David and Jonathan. Two young men who loved each other totally. Yet they were not homosexual! It is not sexual love this, but ἀγάπε (1 Samuel 20).

Us -> Each Other: Friends.

We're also supposed to be friends! The Bible word for friendship is fellowship. It means a strong form of friendship. Of course, it's related to brotherly love. But this gives a new dimension to it. And after all, you've got to have **Friends**²³. Look up:

1 John 3:17-23 ... if you see someone in need and show no pity, where is love?

2 Corinthians 13:14 ... a reminder that this friendship love is from the Holy Spirit too, we can't do it 'on our own'.

Hebrews 10:24 ... Spur each other on to love and good deeds. Encourage each other.

1 Peter 5:14 ... greet with a kiss of love

Galatians 5:18 (Leviticus 19:18) Love your neighbour as you love yourself.

Philippians 2:2 ... be likeminded (doesn't mean have to think same way but to agree on the central truth of Jesus and work things out from there)

Colossians 2:2 ... be united in love.

Ephesians 4:2 ... bearing with each other in love. Here we see the struggle and pain of loving each other....but we must do it!

And there are others too! (1 Corinthians 16:14, 1 John 3:11, 1 Thessalonians 3:12 for example). And plenty in the Old Testament too about friendship.

A sobering reminder comes in 1 John 4:7-21. John tells us here that if we *do not*

²³ Buzzy Lin-Hart and Bette Midler



love, honour & obey

love each other we cannot know God . That its only as we love each other that we get into a position of being able to see God, and that if we claim to know and love God but do not love our brother/sister Christians then we are lying! And how do you measure up to that!!? As Christians who love each other, we should be able to honestly proclaim to the world that **We go Together**²⁴ and that I get by **With a Little Help from My Friends**²⁵

Us -> Each Other: Self-Sacrificing.

Obvious, really. If we are putting Jesus first and aiming at loving others, there just isn't much room left for 'me'! That's not a popular thought. The 'New Age Nineties' teach that its me first, me second and me third too. Can we really want to live any other way?

Probably not, if we remain focussed on worldly things and fill our minds only with a diet of Neighbours, Take That and Just 17. But as we do fall in love with God, and as we allow His Word access to our hearts (by reading it, guys) then we will become like Him.

God said "If you love me you will obey my commands". That isn't a 'do this or else' but a 'if you love me you won't be able to stop yourself from wanting to obey me and please me...it'll happen!'. Verses which speak about this include the following, some of which we've already looked at on earlier pages:

John 15:12-17, esp 12.

Ephesians 3:17 ... be rooted and established in love

Colossians 3:14 ... put on love

1 Thessalonians 5:8 ... wear love as your breastplate (armour protection)

1 John 3:16 ... lay down your life...

1 John 3:18 ... not just with words but with actions

1 John 4:7-11 ... love like Jesus loved us

2 John 6 ... love is obedience.

I have no doubt that there is a lot of love for each other in TFG. A lot more than in some churches. That is unsurprising in many ways, because not only have we been a fellowship together for several years but also lived and worked together at school 5 days a week. Few churches have that much contact with each other. But it has to grow too in our relationships with other Christians. We, TFG, can teach older Christians in our churches in this area!

²⁴ Grease, 1978

²⁵ Joe Cocker



As others look at us as Christians they should see that, for us, **Love is Life**²⁶.

Us -> Non-Christians: Servants.

And so we take it outward. With our Christian friends we can rightly expect love to be returned. We have no right to expect that from non-Christians, but yet we are called to serve them in love too, whatever their response!

If God sent His own Son to die for us, isn't that enough to make it our aim to win as many for Him as possible? To love them into the Kingdom. Paul said "*though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible*"²⁷. Peter spelt it out in a specific situation (1 Peter 3:1). We are told to '*entertain strangers*'²⁸. Again, this is a *sacrificial* love and invades and takes our whole lives (see Ephesians 3:17 and 5:2).

But, as said earlier: its not something we can do ourselves! Paul writes:

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else.²⁹

There is obviously so much more that could be written about loving others....but it would probably be a waste of space. Why? Because if we are not loving God first then it will just be rules and regulations. And if we are falling in love with God...our love for others will just grow anyway! We'll all be saying **I Love to Love**³⁰, and be able to recognise that **I'm into Something Good**³¹!

and now for part two.....

This is what became chapter 2 of the book "KNEES WORN THROUGH"
on the Lord's Prayer which is available on
www.lumin.org.uk

²⁶ Hot Chocolate

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:19

²⁸ Hebrews 13:2

²⁹ 1 Thessalonians 3:12

³⁰ Tina Charles

³¹ Hermans Hermits, 1964



Your Will be Done



What's the difference between this line and the last one? In some ways not much. In both we are praying that things might be lined up with God's way of doing things. But it can be God's Kingdom without His will being done; and it can also be very much NOT God's Kingdom, yet in ways and places His will is fulfilled.

To illustrate that, the United Kingdom is ruled by the Queen. It is her Kingdom. But does every thing in it happen according to her will? Does the Government always pass laws which agree with her desires and her will? That's probably very unlikely. We rarely get to find out her views on things, but I am sure there are many times when laws are passed which she regrets, when things are sanctioned which she would rather not happen at all. And just as likely in some country where she does not reign a law is passed which she hears of and smiles "if only they could do that here!"....its not her Kingdom but her will is being done!

In God's Kingdom it should be frequent that His will is being done, but is it? And in those places on earth, and those institutions, which do not claim to be in His Kingdom sometimes His will *is* done there anyway.

So,

What is God's will?

There are many times in scripture when God reveals His will to His people, sometimes only a small part of it, sometimes a great deal. The most famous is the ten commandments, which Jesus summed up as just two: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "*Love your neighbour as yourself.*" All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

(Matthew 22:37 to 40).

The key word there of course is LOVE, and the biblical description of love is self-sacrifice on behalf of the one being loved. God does not call us to do something which He Himself would not do, and He demonstrates His own love for us in this, while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Infact, all of God's commandments to us are simply telling us to act *as He would act in*



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all circumstances. God is 'One' in the Trinity, He commands us to respect our parents (and be 'one' with them). God is the Creator of Life, He commands us not to murder. God is the giver of all things, He commands us not to steal (not to be a taker of things). God is faithful in all relationships, He commands us not to be unfaithful (not to commit adultery). God is truthful, He commands us not to lie or bear false witness. God is satisfied and content, He commands us not to covet and be greedy.

In short, then, God's will is that we act as He would act and we live as He would live. To reflect "What Would Jesus Do?" in each situation we come across, and then to do it!

Your Will be Done.....by Me

So we start with ourselves. "Father, may I do Your will today". We cannot pray "Father, *make* me do Your will today" because that is one of the things God CANNOT do! He has given you a *free will*, and therefore He cannot violate that. If you are to do God's will then it has to be a choice you make there and then, in each circumstance and situation you come across.

However, we *can* pray that God will help us to make the right choices, that He will remind us of our promise to make those choices, and that he will work in us by His Spirit to bring our will more into line with His. It will always remain our responsibility to obey, however. There is never a time when we can truthfully say to God "It wasn't my fault".



Adam tried. Back there in Genesis chapter 3, in paradise. God's will had been simply stated: *enjoy the good things I have given you, just stay away from the one poisonous tree as it will destroy you.* (see Genesis 2:16,17). Every day that he got up, Adam had a fresh opportunity to obey or to disobey that command. Foolishly, he and Eve would go and gaze at the tree often I expect; not actually being disobedient but always wondering why God had said what He had. The garden was huge, with so many good things, but instead of enjoying it to the full they were drawn back again and again to this one tree. "But no," thought Adam, "today I choose not to disobey God. His will be done".

Then one day he fell. One day he chose to disobey. He ate the poisoned fruit of that tree. His spiritual life was over, he had sacrificed the best for the thing he momentarily desired. When God asked him what he had done he said "IT'S NOT MY FAULT!"



Then he tried to blame everyone else for the fact that his will had wanted something



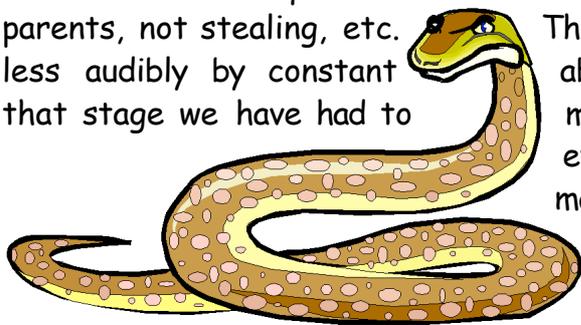
other than God's will. "Everyone else" meant Eve, and God. "The woman You put here gave it to me, so what could I do but eat it?". Ever since, men and women have blamed each other for their sins (their disobedience to God's will) and then they have also blamed God. After all, if God didn't make the world like it is I would not have done it! It's God's fault that I can't control my drinking, He made me like it. It's God's fault that my sex drive is so strong, He made me like it. It was the other person who led me to do it, I am an innocent victim. And so it goes on in court case after court case, family row after family row, excuse after excuse.

Eve blamed the serpent (who we find out later in the Bible to be the Devil himself, see Revelation 12:9). That's another typical excuse. "I was tempted beyond endurance", "The devil attacked me and made me do it"., "I was deceived into thinking it was right". Yet the Bible says that

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, **since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.** For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, **so that men are without excuse.***

(Romans 1: 18-20, my emphasis)

Everyone has a conscience, it is something which reveals God's will to even those who have never heard a single sermon preached nor ever opened the Bible. The conscience affirms God's qualities of faithfulness, truth, respect for life, honouring of parents, not stealing, etc. less audibly by constant abuse of it, by constant ignoring of it. To get to that stage we have had to



The conscience can only be dulled and made to speak make many choices to disobey it in the past. Yet even if those choices to disobey God's will were made with the bad guidance of adults when we were youths, we are still ultimately accountable to God for our own actions. We are without excuse.

Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Yet all three were held to account by God. All three had to face the consequences for their actions. The serpent got the worst, and though Adam and Eve were thrown out from God's Presence we still see God's character of grace shining through: He looked after them as the following chapters show us; and His ultimate rescue plan was already well in preparation!

So, when we pray "Father, Your will be done in my life" it is not a prayer for God to control us, but a prayer that He will help us to know His will and then to choose to do it. How do we get to know God's will? A better question would be: *what do I already know God's will to be, and am I obeying that?* In this chapter we have looked at some of



the ten commandments. Before we need to know anything else about God's will we ought to make sure we are obeying those! Beyond that there are two ways to discover more of God's will.

The first is to read His Word, the Bible. Part of your time alone with God each day should include time to reflect on His word, read one of the Gospels if you haven't done so before. Read it all through like a book to get an overview, but then go back and read just one section at a time. As you pray through the Lord's Prayer, each time you get to "Your Will be done" it would be a good time to read the next section of the Bible and reflect on how God's will is revealed in that section, and on what it means for you to obey it. (Not every section of the Bible, or even the gospels, will reveal a new command. It might be a promise or an example of someone obeying or disobeying God's will. However, all sections contain something that God wants to speak about to people today.)

The second is simply to be praying as we are, open to God prompting us and guiding us as we do. Sometimes a passage you read months ago will come back into your mind as you pray, and you will understand it in a way you didn't earlier. God speaks to us as we pray, which is why we should aim to avoid just rattling off this, or any other, prayer without giving time for stillness and quietness as we pray.

Jesus faced temptations too, like Adam did and like we do. One of the biggest temptations He faced was in Gethsemane the night He was going to be arrested. His whole body cried out to reject the path to the cross. His mind was probably screaming at Him in anticipation of the pain. He had probably seen people being crucified before, He knew what it was to be like. And beyond the Cross itself He could see the separation from God that sin caused, and that would be His too once the sin of the world was dumped upon Him. He was going to be apart from His Father for the first time in eternity.

"If there is any other way, that's what I want", He prayed, "But if there isn't, then let it not be my will that's done but Yours". He was praying "Your will be done" even though it was the last thing He wanted for Himself. It was a sacrifice beyond all sacrifices, and so often doing God's will requires just such an attitude of self-sacrifice from us. "Your will be done" is not an easy prayer, and nor is it just about what everyone else should be doing!

Your Will be done.....by the Church

If Jesus walked on earth today, what would He see, and what would He do? The Church, as the Body of Christ, needs to see and do the same.

What does the 'world' think of when it thinks of the church? Often it is condemnation.



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The Church says "you can't do that, you can't do this". Worse still, the message often is "you can't come here if you do that!"

Did Jesus say that? Didn't He rather say

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

(Matthew 11:28-30)

Jesus said "Come", so often the Church says "Keep out". God's will is that the sinners of this world are drawn to Him by His people, and we need to pray that that will be what happens.

Wait a minute, doesn't the New Testament preach damnation to those who sin? Isn't the message repent or go to Hell? Doesn't Paul write that if someone persists in their sin we should 'expel the immoral brother'? Yes, but note that word *brother*. Those commands are to Christians. Once we have become believers, once we are part of the church, then we must seek to live holy and righteous lives, with God's help. Corporately we the church must live as I, the individual, should as considered above. But for the non-believer, *of course* many of them are going to be committing 'vile acts'. It was people such as these that Jesus came to save, *And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

(1 Corinthians 6:11)

Jesus did not condemn the sinner (see John 8: 1- 11), but instead He said "Come to Me to get washed and put right with God". Too often the church says "Get clean, then come to us and we might accept you". As we pray "Your will be done in the Church" we need to be praying that the public perception of the Church is changed to one of a welcoming, grace-ridden, People of God. And yet, mixed with that open welcome it needs to be clearly seen that *inside* the Church there is holiness, and the people of the church live righteous lives with integrity.

As we start the 21st Century, the other image of the church is that *inside* it there are child abusers who are condoned and protected by the organisation of the church. Inside the church there are hypocrites who sing to God on Sunday and cheat on their spouses mid week, fiddle their taxes or who openly claim they do not believe the Bible to be True and are not sure of much of what they sing about in church anyway.

Sadly, that is true for many people who belong to churches. But it is also true that in many many places the church is being exactly what it should be in the local community, providing care and refuge for the widows, the orphans, the elderly, the needy. But this



never makes the headlines, and never reaches into the public perception of the church.

So we need to be praying that as God's People do His will in their area, the news of this will spread and the understanding of the church will grow. We need to be praying that where the church falls far short of God's will, He will bring change and bring holiness to the lives of the people who are part of His Kingdom. We need to pray that, once again, as in the church in Acts, those who are not true believers will not dare join a church....and that the true believers will be righteous before God.



Matthew 5 talks of God's will are the salt of the earth. But if it be made salty again? It is no

being done through the Church. "You the salt loses its saltiness, how can longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

(Matthew 5: 13-16)

It is God's will that His people, the Church, are like salt in society. The very flavour and essence of society should be the Church. It should permeate every part of society, the very fabric. Even non-believers should be affected by it. That used to be the case in this country. Our laws were flavoured by God's Word, our old buildings have scriptures written on them, our culture was flavoured by Christian values. Today, however, it is the other way round. The church has little impact on the world around, but the world and its ways have a big impact on things in the Church. Sadly, the warning in Jesus' words in Matthew 5 have come to pass....the church lost the flavouring of society and to a large extent it has become useless to God, and trampled by men. No longer is it what God says that guides the church, but the church is shaped by the thinking of the age.

As we pray "Your will be done in the church" we need to pray that once again we become the flavour of society, noticeable to all. We need to pray that church leader, local and national, will meet daily with God and seek His will for their flock and for their teaching. We need to pray that the church rediscovers what it means to live as Jesus lived, to see as Jesus saw, to do as Jesus did. We need to pray that those on the outside will feel able to "come" without the threat of rejection, and that those on the inside will reflect the grace and holiness of Jesus.

We need to pray too for a good press, that the world might see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. We are not praying that the media will cover up the errors in the church, but that it will declare the good things too (there are far more good things than bad). We are also praying that the errors will be corrected, the failings of individuals spotted early and sorted before the sin talks a hold. So we are praying that



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leaders will be given wisdom when pasturing their churches, but also that the pastors, priests and vicars themselves will be accountable to other Godly men or women. So we must remember to pray for our leaders and our churches, as well as the national church leaders.

We are praying that the people of God might be the flavour of society again!

Your Will be done.....in the World.

Once we have got ourselves doing God's will, once we have the Church being obedient, then and only then can we pray that the world at large will obey too. Jesus talked about casting the plank out of your own eye before you try to deal with the speck in someone else's (Luke 6:41,42). We can't point accusing fingers at non-believers if we are in the

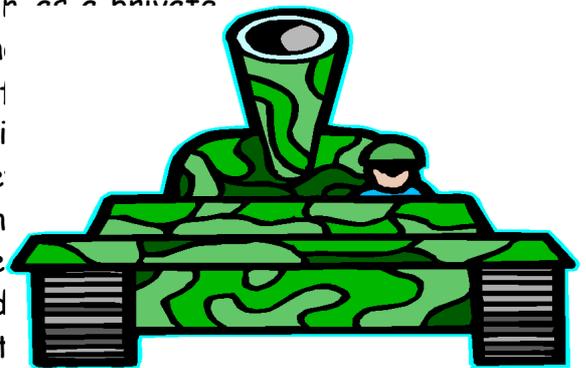


...than that, we have no real power or authority to
e sins of this world if we are being disobedient

tly what the devil is looking for....hypocrisy that he
accuse us of. Mud that he can throw at us that
ll stick and bring us down. On one level that will
nply be the accusations made about us by those we
e near, as they see that our lives do not match our
rds. But even more seriously, there is a spiritual
ion too. As we begin to pray about the sin of the
so we are taking up an attack position in the war.
If we are not wearing the armour of God (see
Ephesians 6 : 13 - 18) we are vulnerable. That
armour requires truth and righteousness to be

worn by us, not just a readiness to declare truth and righteousness to a sinful world.
So is it too dangerous then to pray for the world? No, we must do it, but we must also remember that there are levels of battle we may not be ready for.

For instance, a new recruit in the army comes in as a private
or as a junior officer. They will be trained and
ready to do certain things *under command* of
experienced officers. Providing they keep with
orders they are as safe as they can be. If, howe
of them decides to 'have a go' at being a tank
driver on the field of combat, when they have
not been trained for it, they put themselves, and
the rest of the army, at great risk. A tank might



be more effective a weapon than the gun they are issued with, but only if they are up to using it. They might accidentally fire on their own army, or drive it out of control and wreck it, or any number of different accidents could happen.

When we pray for the world "Your will be done" there are different ways we can use that prayer.:

- We can use it perhaps to pray for a situation such as poverty in the third world. Then we pray for those working to alleviate the poverty, we pray for governments and leaders to act with compassion and generosity, we pray for God to provide for those in need. Often this prayer will cause us to get involved ourselves, by giving time or money to help.
- Then there are situations where there is a clear evil being done against others. For example, the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. In that situation we can pray for an end to the evil, we can pray for God to strengthen those who are working or fighting to rescue those in the camps, we can pray for the people there who are suffering.
- Finally, we could pray *against* the evil at work We could pray for the evil rulers to be removed from office, we could pray that God would 'confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks'³².

Each of those ways of praying is more dangerous or costly than the one before it. In the final one we are actually praying against demonic forces. *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* (Ephesians 6:12). So to do that brings attention to ourselves 'in the heavenly realms' and opens us up to counter attack by the demons that make up those spiritual forces of evil. If we are doing that when we aren't wearing the armour of God, we are going to get clobbered!

As a general rule it is probably wise *never* to pray *against* anything unless you feel specifically called to do so by God. Always aim to make your prayers positive and *for* something, rather than *against*. That may well be why Jesus said "Your will be done" and not "the devil's will be stopped". One very simple prayer that is always relevant is to pray that the Holy Spirit will move in a situation, or on a person. The Holy Spirit challenges about wrongs and brings conviction to those outside of God's will, but reassures and brings blessing to those inside it. So to pray "Holy Spirit I invite you to move in this situation, or in this person's life, so that the Father's will may be done" is a very effective way to pray for the world. It also helps you to visualise God "hovering like a dove" over the problem and that then helps you to find out how He wants you to pray further. "Holy Spirit, as You are now in this situation, what do You want to do? What is Your will, and I will pray it will be done".

³² The National Anthem

