



The Harvester

*Preparing Souls
To Serve The Lord!*

Volume 42

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Number 1

If Only Satan's Forces Had Known!

Brian R. Kenyon

Several years ago, while at a lectureship, I visited with a fine Christian family. I'm not sure how we got on the subject, but the story was related how their son had always wanted to serve in a specific branch of the military's special services. However, before the boy was 18 years old, he got a tattoo (for which his parents, obviously, had to sign their permission). As far as tattoos go, it was a decent "I Love Mom" work of colored ink that also involved a big red heart. When the boy became of age, he went to the recruiter's office only to discover the tattoo disqualified him to serve. At that time, the only acceptable tattoos had to be covered by the uniform's short sleeve dress shirt. His tattoo was visible past the bottom of the sleeve. I do not know what career path that young man took, but I am confident it worked out for good (Rom. 8:28). Throughout that conversation, though, both child and parents used the expression, "If only I had known." This expression implies that if the consequences of an action could have been known beforehand, that action would be avoided.

Too Little, Too Late

In the beginning of First Corinthians, Paul showed that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" and that his preaching's appeal was not "excellence of speech" or "persuasive words of human wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:18-2:4). All of this was so that the Corinthians' faith would be based in the "power of God" (i.e., the Gospel) rather than the "wisdom of men" (1 Cor. 2:5). Paul then wrote:

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. 2:6-8)

The "mystery" about which Paul writes refers to something that was once hidden but has now been revealed. This is perhaps clearest in his writing to the Ephesians, where he told them that:

[B]y revelation He [God] made known to me the mystery ... by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ ... which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets. (Eph. 3:3-5)

Some, however, like "the rulers of this age," were not given this knowledge until it was too late. God's plan had already been enacted and come to fruition before Paul wrote his epistles (cf. Titus 1:1-3).

With this issue, **The Harvester** begins its **42nd year**. The school had a newsletter from its inception, but the current format and title were greatly influenced by **Rod Rutherford** when he worked with the us over four decades ago. We thank God for Rod and others like him who, since 1969, have touched our history by their sacrifice of time and talent to train preachers and better prepare souls for eternity! —*Brian*

The Rulers of This Age

The question often arises as to whom the “rulers of this age [princes of this world, KJV]” refer. The word “rulers” (from *archon*, ἄρχων) can refer to a ruler; official, authority, or judge. “Of this age” (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) is not so much speaking of this planet but of the world order, whether seen or unseen. There are those who make the case that “rulers of this world” refer to civil rulers. This is based partly on the use of the phrase “of this age,” which is found in other verses where it refers to those active in this world (Lk. 16:8; 20:34; 1 Cor. 1:20). Civil authorities sometimes think they can out-match God (cf. Mt. 27:62-66; 28:11-15). Others make the case that “the rulers of this age” refer to demonic forces. Paul, for example, referred to the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). John referred to Satan as the “prince of this world” (Eph. 2:2; Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). These evil spiritual beings are involved in the human struggle, as God permits (Job 1-2; Rom. 8:38-39 cf. Eph. 3:10).

As is often the case, these two alternatives are not mutually exclusive. “The rulers of this world” can simply refer to all opposition against God! Paul had already been writing about the conflict between the “spirit of the world” and the “message of the cross” (1 Cor. 2:12 [cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5]). Paul wrote elsewhere, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts

of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Demonic rulers work through humans (cf. Jn. 13:2, 27). These evil forces are not omnipotent! They were defeated by Christ and can be defeated by those in Christ through His power (Rom. 8:38-39; Col. 2:15; Jas. 4:7). “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4)!

Jesus’ Death Was Their Defeat

“The rulers of this age” did not know God’s ultimate plan. They thought the death of Jesus was the end of God’s plan. However, they did not realize Jesus would come forth from the grave, “having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:24)! Jesus’ death and resurrection accomplished at least three things that made “the rulers of this world” regret crucifying “the Lord of glory”! First, Jesus’ resurrection proclaimed His authority as God’s Son (Rom. 1:4). The resurrection itself declared to both earth dwellers and the Hadean realm that Jesus was not defeated (Acts 2:25-31 cf. 1 Pet. 3:18-20)!

Second, Jesus’ resurrection publicly humiliated the evil forces against Him. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, which set in motion the certainty of His resurrection, Paul said he “disarmed principalities and powers” and “made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15). The phrase

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*Our final deposit for the month is usually made on the last Wednesday of the month. All contributions received after that time are reported on the next month’s financial statement.

“made a public spectacle” is also translated “made a shew of them openly” (KJV); “made a public display” (NAS95); and “put them to open shame” (ESV). This phrase captures the essence of a Roman triumphal procession, where the victor displays as trophies his captives for all the audience to see. The ring of Jesus’ victory over the grave reached even into the evil spirit world for all to know that “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36)!

Third, Jesus’ death and resurrection conquered Satan. The Hebrews writer declared:


Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:14)

Next to God, physical death seems the most powerful force on this earth, for it is the “last enemy that will be destroyed” (1 Cor. 15:26). Its reality has captivated many with fear. However, “When He [Jesus] ascended on high [to the Father’s right hand], He led captivity captive” (Eph. 4:8). Christians have no reason to fear death!

Had “the rulers of this age” known what would have been ushered in with the death and resurrec-

tion of Christ before they put Him to death, they would not have done what they did! They definitely would have liked a “do over,” but such was impossible! Their fate is sealed (cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10). However, until Jesus executes their sentence, they follow their leader, the devil, who “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

Conclusion

What “the rulers of this age” did not know resulted in their ultimate demise! Fortunately, for those living today, we have access to the mind of God revealed in Scripture (1 Cor. 2:11-16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). We can know God’s will and the consequences of disobedience (1 Jn. 2:3-6; Rom. 11:22). In the greater scope of life, the young man whose military career was ruined by his tattoo is of little consequence, for by God’s grace, if he stayed faithful, His providence blessed him even more. For us, however, we must take seriously our response to what we know of God’s will. Unlike “the rulers of this age,” people today have access to Scripture, God’s mind revealed. We can know the consequences of not obeying the Gospel (cf. 2 Thes. 1:7-10). Let us not meet the Lord on Judgment Day to say, “If only I had known!” Rather, let us live our lives now with the constant motivation, “Because I know!” 

A Test (and Lesson) In Sincerity of Loving the Truth

An interesting and challenging incident arose one time when I was teaching on the various ways the local church is identified in the New Testament. The church can be identified: (1) by its ownership, like “church of God” (Acts 20:28) or “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16); (2) by its location, such as “church ... at Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1) or “churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2); or (3) by the people of whom it consists, such as “churches of the Gentiles” (Rom. 16:4) or “church of the firstborn” (Heb. 10:23). “Wait,” someone protests, “That ‘firstborn’ is a reference to Christ!” Well, to many people’s surprise, the term “firstborn,” in “church of the firstborn,” is not a reference to Christ. Because the word is plural (*prototokōn*, πρωτοτόκων), it means “firstborn ones.” Thus, it is actually a reference to the those of whom the church consists. Yes, “church of the firstborn” is a church of Christ, but it is a term identifying its members, not its owner. Do not take my word, of course, let each person examine it for himself.

Here is where the test (and lesson) in sincerity of loving the truth comes. Some church members have heard their whole lives by well-respected preachers that “firstborn” in Hebrews 12:23 refers to Christ. Some of these brethren will push back, not accepting the truth that “firstborn” refers to the Christians of whom the church consists. They insist on teaching that “firstborn” in this verse is referring to Christ. This may seem petty, but why not simply accept what Scripture actually teaches? Are some afraid to go against what a well-respected preacher said? Are some too prideful to admit they misunderstood? Can we be faithful to God if we do not “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15)? Let us always be true to the text no matter what changes we need to make in our beliefs and/or who has taught otherwise (intentionally or not). May we live “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” —*Brian*

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Thank You! As we begin our 53rd school-year, we want to express our appreciation to all of you who take a prayerful interest in the Lord's work through us and those who financially contribute to the school and/or our students' support! We simply could not operate as we have without your prayers and your allowing the Lord to work through you in training preachers and better preparing souls for eternity! We especially thank those who sacrificed extra to help us pay for the technology upgrades over the past year. Although we are still working out a few glitches, we are now able to accommodate online students in a user-friendly learning atmosphere. Despite the corona virus still making its presence known, we continue to train Christians to reach a spiritually lost and dying world. One student missed the first two weeks due to having the virus. Many church members in our area have suffered through the virus. Please continue praying for us as we press on with this work. We will continue to work while it is day and "trust ... in God who raises the dead!"



Back row: John, Trevor, Zach, Forest, Brian; Front row: Wadi, Matthew, Paul;
Not pictured: Jonathan and several online students

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