



Christian Ambassadors, Inc.

My Brother's Keeper

Volume 22, Number 4, Fourth Quarter, 2017

GROWING on the WORD

A scripture study

The Word of God is the source of light, truth and power, for those who seek its meaning and apply it to their life. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, and we seek to follow him.

John 8:12 (NIV) – *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

John 12:46 (NIV) – *“...No one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

Each issue of “My Brother’s Keeper” features a WORD study. This issue’s Word Study comes to us from Alan W. Griffiee, Co-founder of Christian Ambassadors, Inc.

What Choice Do I Have?

By: Alan W. Griffiee

Is God in control? To what extent does God pre-ordain and control the events in our life? Am I where I am, and doing what I am doing, because God pre-destined me to be exactly where I am at this time in my life? What choice do I have? In this word study, we will look at the subject of God’s sovereignty and our right to freely make choices.

God’s Sovereignty

First and foremost, God is Sovereign; meaning that He is the supreme power and authority in the universe. He is the creator of the universe, the earth, the seas, the plants, the fish, the animals, and He created human life.

Genesis 1:1-31 (NIV) – *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... [Read the chapter for the vastness of God’s creation.]*

God created the universe and everything in it by speaking His Word and it was done. His sovereign power is beyond anything we can imagine. He has the power to control everything that happens in His creation, from the growth of the smallest flower, to the flight of birds, and to every action you or I do in our life.

But, does God control everything that happens on earth? Does God cause hurricanes to ravage our coasts for some reason beyond our ability to understand? He could, and He does choose at times to physically intervene, but for the most part, God has chosen to let the natural processes He put in place to govern the weather, the behavior of animals, the seasons, and the earth. And, God, in His sovereignty and infinite wisdom, chose to create us in His image, with the right to choose; to consider, to decide, to act, and to face the consequences for our choices.

Genesis 1:26 (NIV) – *Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”*

God did not give up His sovereignty by giving us the right to govern our own affairs and the affairs of society. But He did put us at risk of making poor choices. And, He put at risk our response to His love; we might not choose to accept the sacrifice of His only begotten Son.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) said, "*Man is freer than all the animals, on account of his free-will with which he is endowed.*" But, I heard another man say to me many years ago, "*There is no such thing as free-will; it is not free. Every choice we make has consequences.*" We have the God-given right to make choices, good or bad, and to face the consequences of those choices. But, God did not leave us alone to make blind, foolish choices. He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to earth as a man to reveal His (the Father's) nature, and to reveal how much He loves each and every one of us.

John 3:16-17 (KJV) – *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

And, Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit to be our comforter (counselor, advisor, and guide).

John 14:15-17 (KJV) – *If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth;*

God is in control of our life – if we choose to allow His Holy Spirit to guide us, step by step, along the path of God's will for us.

God's Will

Jesus revealed much about God's nature and His love for us, but beyond that, God would like us to follow His will; as individuals and as groups (families, churches, nations, and the world).

So, what is God's will? Is His will the same for you and for me, for my family and your family, for the church, for our government, for the

world? And, is His will the same today, as it was two thousand years ago? God's character, His word, and His purposes are unchangeable, but His specific will (objectives) varies to meet the conditions and needs of the time and place.

I've learned that God's will takes on three distinct characteristics: His Ultimate Will (does not change and will absolutely come to pass), His Intentional Will (what He wants us, individually or as a group, to do over some period of time), and His Circumstantial Will (what He wants us to do if we fail, or choose not to do His Intentional Will).

One Ultimate Will that God has for all of His creation is that we shall be free to respond to Him in love, as He has loved us; to become as sons and daughters to Him. The Father and the Son want each of us to have an eternal, loving, personal relationship with them; just as Jesus prayed in the garden:

John 17:20-21 (KJV) – *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

God also has an Intentional Will for each one of us individually, for each group of people, and for each period of our life and earth's history.

Ecclesiastes 3:1(KJV) – *To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.*

Billy Graham expressed that he believes God's intentional will for all Christians is to become more like Christ. The framers of our US Constitution believed that God's intentional will for this nation is to be, "*One Nation under God*". Sharon and I believe that God's intentional will for our marriage is that it be a three-way relationship with Him. I believe that God's intentional will for every organized body of people, is that His Holy Spirit be consulted when they establish a mission and purpose for their organization (He wants organizations to have a

righteous purpose for existing). And, God has, intentional wills for each and every one of us as individuals. But, God's intentional will for us (as well as for any group of people) will come to fruition only if we know what that will is, choose to accept it, and do all we can to stay on the path to its completion.

This is where the rubber hits the road for each of us; are we going to seek and find the path God wants us to be on, and are we going to get back on that path whenever we trip, fall, or wander from the path God desires us to follow? God has provided the Holy Spirit to help us know His will for us and to follow it, if we choose.

Matthew 7:7 (NIV) – Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

If we wander from the path God wants us to be on, He has a fallback, Circumstantial Will, to help us get back to the right path any time we make a wrong choice in life. His circumstantial will for us will always be true and righteous, but it may be different each time, depending on our circumstances at the time, and what choices we have available to us at the time.

Our Choices

The intentional will of God is not the same for all people. We are each unique individuals with unique talents, gifts, and circumstances. A high school student from a faithful Christian family, who is concerned about what path to follow in life, and an elderly man who just recently accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior, have different options and opportunities in life. God's long term intentional will for the student may be very different from God's short term circumstantial will for the elderly man.

The paths available to us throughout life are different for each of us, but ultimately every path will end up at the same place; at the judgement seat of God to face the question of whether we freely responded to Him in love.

The path we take to God's judgement seat requires us to stay focused on God and not

wander off into the wilderness of worldly values. To know what God's intentional will is for you personally, you must first, faithfully accept God as your Father and Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Having done so, you need to approach God in prayer, humbly seeking His will (the path He desires for you to follow). Rather than giving it to you all at once, God may choose to reveal His will for you in manageable pieces that you can realistically handle (two, three years at a time).

Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV) – Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.

When God reveals the path He desires for you to follow, your response is to step boldly through the gate and walk forward in confidence, knowing that God loves you and will never forsake you. The path (the road) God wants you to follow is narrow, and it has many twists and turns, depending on the people we meet, the situations we encounter, and the choices we make. But, with every choice you have, the Holy Spirit is available to reveal the right choice, one step at a time.

If we stumble and fall, we can choose to stay down, or we can choose to take God's helping hand to lift us up. If we wander from the path, we can choose to continue wandering aimlessly, or we can call upon the Holy Spirit to guide us step by step back to the chosen path. God gives us the right to choose what path we are going to follow, and whether or not we are going to stay on the path.

The key to getting up when you fall, or getting back on the path when you stray, is to always remember God's love for you as His child:

1 John 4:9 (NIV) – This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

Sharing the Good News

“We are therefore Christ's Ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

II Corinthians 5:20-21

**From: Lawrence M.
River North Correctional, Independence, VA**

Dear Sister Sharon,

Peace, from prison. Your ministry pages arrived, and I was humbled to see some of my words there. When Jesus said, “I was in prison, and you came to see me”, (Matthew 25:36), what you do is exactly what He meant. In his entire life, Jesus didn't travel 200 miles from where He was born, so it's not possible for you to see all the prisoners in person. By giving prisoners the opportunity to share and thank you, *you* not only “visit” us, but *we* can visit each other and fulfill that scripture. God bless you and all involved with your anointed ministry.

It's something, actually brought tears to my eyes, when I read the letter I wrote – [because] on the same page was a letter from a fellow prisoner [Daniel] in “Elmira” prison in New York. And in 1978 I was there, having done time in Sing Sing, Comstock, and Elmira, and Clinton in the 70's. I've done over 35 years from coast to coast; sad, but true.

There is no testimony without a test, and it's not a testimony until you “testify”.

The Bible says in Romans 8:28 that “God works all things together for good, to them that love God”. The promise is that God will work in all things; the condition is “for those who love God”. And who is that? Well, Jesus said, “Those who love Me obey Me. That leaves a lot of people out of that promise.

There are “consequences” for the decisions we make, and it's not reality to think that God is going to step in and fix every mess we get ourselves into. A part of repentance is to face and accept responsibility for our actions, without condemnation, but with pure remorse. What the devil thought would be my end, is only my beginning, and by Grace I have served Jesus, not “time”, for 20 years in prison. Glory to God.

We are called to be faithful, where we are, and I pray for all those in prison to be strong in faith, because this world is not our home, and soon we will trade in these numbers for crowns. Hey, if Paul and Silas could sing songs of praise while chained to a dungeon wall, so can we! Anyone can shout after the storm is over, but I want to know what they did in the storm. Don't wait till the battle is over, shout now! Hallelujah!

You are always in my prayers.

Still, Lawrence

**From: Bret S.
Pendleton Correctional, Pendleton, IN**

Dear Sharon & Alan,

I pray this letter finds you both in blessed health and doing good. I'm writing to thank you for “My Brother's Keeper” volume 22, number 3. I really liked and enjoyed Sharon's piece, “*Salvation – God's Workmanship*”.

But, as it states in James chapter 2, verses 14-26, faith without works is dead. Verse 18 is very clear, you have faith and I have works. Show me your faith without your works and I will show you my faith by my works. I think we all have to put in work...and be as you said Sharon; we should all be God's Workmanship. I just wanted to speak on this after reading your article twice. ☺

And again thank you for all the help you give in spreading God's Word and His love for us. You are a true blessing to many, and I just wanted to thank you and everyone at Christian Ambassadors for spreading God's Word and helping others, such as myself, become closer to

our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you and keep you safe always.

Very truly yours, Bret

**From: Ann R.
Frederick, Maryland**

How I praise God for Christian Ambassadors. I love reading the stories of inmate victories over the difficulties they face each day where they are – they challenge me to keep up the good fight [of faith]. Isn't God amazing? He makes us "more than conquerors" no matter where we are and what we are going through.

I wanted to comment on Sharon's recent Spiritual Growth Lesson ["Recidivism – A Revolving Door"]. Your lesson was another reminder to be aware of Satan's tactics and my ongoing warfare against them. Jesus did indeed set an example – "Get away from me Satan!" So, thanks for such a great lesson and how to overcome. Be blessed. Ann

**From: Brian S.
CSP Solano, Vacaville, CA**

Dear Sharon,

How are you doing? First I would like to say thank you for the newsletter which you have consistently sent to me without failure.

There has been several times when I received your newsletter at just the right moment when I needed clarity. I have often found myself passing on the newsletter, then going back and discussing the topic with them.

My reason for writing you at this time is to let you know that I was transferred to a different facility, so I wanted to get you my new address.

In closing, once again I would like to say "thank you", and I would ask that you keep my family in prayer.

Sincerely, Brian

Freedom

By: Rod Gray
Iowa Medical Center,
Coralville, Iowa

As fish in the waters
are free to roam,
I think of my past and
want to go home.

The currents and flow of
water going by,
reminds me of sins that
beg a question, why?

Does the God I serve really
wash me so clean,
that all sins are
forgiven, never to be seen?

The answer is yes, as the
Bible tells us so.
I've accepted the Savior and,
this is what I know;

To love Him and follow Him,
wherever He may lead,
will help you and bless you,
and cause you to succeed.

**From: John T.
CSATF State Prison, Corcoran, CA**

Greetings Sharon and Alan,

It's good to hear from you and your ministry. I am so honored to be a part of it.

It was good reading the work you guys and gals are doing at Christian Ambassadors. Keep up the good work. Jesus loves you and so do I!

P.S. God is great. Realize that, the Greatest!

Love in Christ, John

**From: Alexander G.
TDCJ, Gib Lewis Unit, Woodville, TX**

Dear Sharon,

I hope and pray this letter finds you and Alan in very good health in Jesus' name. The same goes to everyone there at Christian Ambassadors, Inc. As for me, I'm doing fine thanks to God.

I'm just writing to thank you for sending me the Spiritual Growth Lesson, "Recidivism – A Revolving Door". I believe Satan is working his craftiness right now, here on earth. The hurricanes...earthquakes are all signs of Jesus warning us of His coming. When Jesus returns He will do the world a great justice. Keep up the good work you and Alan are doing for prisoners.

Faithful reader, Alexander

The Right of Decision

By: Larry A. Thompson,
BVCF, Buena Vista, Colorado

Of all the God-given "rights", "powers", and "authority" that we are endowed with, *the right of decision* was the first to be used.

For those of us who believe in God, and in the redeeming Grace by which we are saved through His Son, Jesus Christ, we must humbly acknowledge that there, in the garden which He made for us, Adam, and Eve, were faced with a choice; they could either obey the commandment of the Lord, who said:

"... Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

(Genesis 2:16-17 – KJV)

Although it is clear that this commandment was spoken directly to the man, Adam, it is equally

clear that Adam told Eve what the Lord had commanded.

Their *choice* was clear (which established "power of choice"); eat freely of every other tree and *live forever* in the blessed relationship with God that was originally intended, *or*, eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and *perish through disobedience*; a slave to "self" forever.

The decision which they made was most definitely unwise, because it was made without the full appreciation of their *power of choice*, in that having never known or experienced death before; they had no understanding of what it is to *die*. Therefore they did not know what the true consequences of their actions would be. Nevertheless, they did in fact have *the right of decision* in their grasp.

The "right" of decision is an inalienable right that can never be taken from you by any person, place, or thing. The only way that this "right" loses its power and worth, or one's ownership of it, is when that person exercises their "right" not to make a decision; which is a decision unto itself.

Based on my limited knowledge and understanding of what true power is, there is no doubt in my mind that a person will never be able to fully appreciate their *power of choice*, unless, and until, they learn to respect that they do in fact have the "right" of decision.

Of all the God-given "rights" that we have, the *right of decision* is without a doubt, one of, if not the most important "rights" that we will ever be able to retain and exercise, no matter what the circumstances of our lives may be. Just like Grace, *the right of decision* is a God-given gift.

Are you grateful for your "right" to decide?
I am.

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Final Wake-Up Call

Merissa Lee Kelley, October 24, 2008

An alarm is being sounded and it echoes through the land
The day of the Lord is coming...the day of the Lord is at hand
Complacency cannot continue, our passion must ignite
And burn with fierce intensity to endure and win the fight

A wake-up call is going out...it's time to fast and pray
A call to lament and a call to weep for the ones who've gone astray
A call for repentance that goes beyond the surface of the heart
A mourning for the depth of sin that's driven us apart

For the voices of a generation have been calling to the Lord
And the outcry for their vindication...will not be ignored
As the Father holds them to His heart...let us weep for choices made
And seek forgiveness, that on the cross, was mercifully displayed

Blow the trumpet and sound the alarm...gather from every nation
Call the solemn assembly together and pray for restoration
Redeem the time and return to God, there's a harvest we must reap
The fields will perish from neglect...if we choose to stay asleep

To fully know the ways of God and still decide to disobey
Is a foolish choice that brings despair...for there comes a reckoning day
Much has been given, so in return, much will be required
And what will be our legacy...when life on earth expires?

God has shown us so much mercy...He's shown us so much grace
Even as we slam the doors of life right in His face
But it's His nature to keep on trying, before it gets too late
To reach our hearts...to reach one more...His love is why He waits

But take heart, for God is in control and still upon His throne
Our hope in the midst of perilous times...is God and God alone
The final call is going out to step up on higher ground
To humble ourselves, pray and repent...while there's time to turn around

Inspired by Pastor Joey Hartman's sermon on October 19, 2008

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity. Joel 2:12 & 13

These Hands

By: Lawrence Medici,
River North Correctional, Independence, VA

These hands, that now a Bible hold,
once held a gun in crimes so bold,
from handcuffs tight there still are scars,
that can be seen from behind bars.

These hands, so often clenched to fight,
have found in darkness God's sweet light,
and now in Jesus' name are raised,
for He is worthy to be praised.

These hands, that gambled, cheated, and lied,
now cling to the One who for me died.
His hands were nailed to Calvary's Tree,
"For God so loved the world", and me.

These hands, that shot drugs in my veins,
now worship God, He lives and reigns!
Though locked in prison I may be,
God holds these hands for eternity.

My Brother's Keeper

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Sharon K. Griffee, Senior Editor

Alan W. Griffee, Production Manager

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Inspirational articles and poems, especially from current or former prison inmates, are invited and will be prayerfully considered for publication. **Please request a copy of the publication guidelines before submitting an article for consideration.**

Vision Statement – Christian Ambassadors exists to bring the ministry of Jesus Christ into the lives of people, demonstrating how the gospel teachings can help a person live a more abundant life, filled with joy, hope, and purpose.

If you, a member of your family, or a friend, are imprisoned, wanting to find new hope, purpose and direction in life, please contact us at Christian Ambassadors. Our website can be visited at:

<http://www.christian-ambassadors.org>