



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume X
Issue 231

The Song of the Clay

by – Wim Janse (1947-)
The Netherlands

In 1967 the American band *The American Breed* released their version of *Bend Me, Shape Me*.

The single reached the #5 position in the top 100 in the U.S.A. in 1968.

The first lines of the chorus were for me the reason to write the article below.



Job knew something very important and he told it to his wife, who was completely fed up with the situation:

“Indeed should we receive good from the One, Elohim, and should we not receive evil?” In all this, Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2:10; Concordant Literal Translation).

“It Is WELL ...”

You probably sing once in a while: “It is well, it is well with my soul!” Of course it is well with your soul: your heavenly Father won’t send you the wrong things!!

But what if things happen that we do *not* like, or experience as *unpleasant*? Think of when someone we love dies young, contracts an illness without the prospect of a cure, has a loss of income, or experiences an accident? You can probably fill in many more examples. What happens then with “It is well, it is well ...”? Can we still sing it then?

The song “It is well, it is well with my soul” did not exist when Job walked on the Earth, but Job could very well have written it! To him befell, completely without his fault, the most horrible things. He lost his great wealth, his children and finally his health; he got terrible boils all over his body! One thing wasn’t over before the next happened. He went from being super rich to being a beggar.

How did Job react? Did Job become a rebel? Did he start to rage and swear, and moan? No!

Job knew something that many today do not know or want to recognize: ALL things are out of God; not only the good, but also that which we experience as evil. God is the creator of evil (Isaiah 45:7), and He uses it as a tool to paint a dark background against which, later, His glory and goodness will contrast in a magnificent way. This way He teaches us the reason for our loyalty and gratitude towards Him. Without evil this would not be possible.

Evil in itself is neutral; it is the goal for which it is applied that determines what it will be. A box on the ear will be experienced as evil by the receiver, but it can, in the end, be very beneficial! The greatest evil EVER, *the murder of Jesus Christ*, had very beneficial results! Just wait until you see the end result!

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

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Bible Student's Notebook™

PO Box 265, Windber, PA 15963

Office: (800) 784-6010

Local: (814) 701-0063

bsn@studyshef.com

www.BibleStudentsNotebook.com

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr. – Editor

(clyde@studyshef.com)

André Sneider – Managing Editor

Rick Lemons – Associate Editor

Department Managers

Clyde L. Pilkington, III – Office

Nathan H. Pilkington – Shipping

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SONG (continued from page 2185)

Does God Himself hand out evil to us? No – for that, He has His instruments. In Egypt, for example, it was the “*angel of death*” and for the bulk of the work He created Satan for the task; yet Satan cannot do everything he wants. In Job 1 and 2 we see that Satan suggests action against Job, but he cannot do anything or more without God’s approval. He cannot go outside the ground that God has given him. That is why, in the end, all is out of God.

Should we then applaud evil? No. Should we apply evil? Be very careful with that, because we have such a limited insight, and we are often so selfish. We could do more harm than good. Should we thank God for the evil that hits us? No. *We should thank God for the OUTCOME of evil!* Since all is out of Him, it will have a good result in the end!

INDEPENDENT?

Many people think the world of themselves. They think that things and people – yes, even God! – can be manipulated, and it indeed seems that way! Yet, in God’s eyes we are just tiny toddlers who may be able to crawl and walk, but who lack the insight to really take the right decisions. Put on top of that the fact that we are mortals (because of which we sin, Romans 5:12), and the picture is complete. Still, “WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS!!!”

I

I.

I, Lord.

Lord, I.

Lord!

In these little words the whole spectrum of mankind lies hidden.

I. Here man is on the throne. He thinks he must have everything in his life under control, and that he has it so. O.K., sometimes things are hard, but ...

I, Lord. Here man is religious, and finds it comfortable to have a Lord standing by Who can help him in difficult times. However, man is on the journey of life and keeps the reins firmly in his hands. The Lord is advisor.

Lord, I. Here is the average believer. He recognizes that the Lord is there and he does want to give Him the honor for all kinds of things; *BUT*, the Lord is expected to listen to the advice that *I* gives Him. If He does not listen, *I* starts arranging things himself; *I* takes the power back in his own hands. The Lord may be on the journey with him, but man rules and takes the reins if things are not to his liking.

Lord! Here, man has totally surrendered to God and to Christ. He lives his life with the daily problems and reacts to that which crosses his path, but he recognizes that God is in control and rules, and that both good and evil come from Him. Man does not panic and does not start manipulating when things seem to go “wrong.”

“BEND ME, SHAPE ME.”

The chorus of the song by *The American Breed* is as follows:

Bend me, shape me,
Anyway you want me
Long as you love me
It’s all right.

The man who says “Lord!” recognizes that in the end all is out of God, that therefore it *cannot* be wrong, and then there *must* be a positive reason behind *everything* that happens. He does not complain when life is hard, because life is not hard – it is just not the way *he* wants it to be. He lives within the given realm. Of course, he goes to a doctor when he is ill, but he does not seek a cure from things that are not meant for this dispensation (like miracle workers and the like). The man who says “Lord!” works for his bread, but he does not live to work; he lives to serve his God. He does not strive after the things after which the world is chasing, because he knows that his future lies in the heavenly realms, where he ►

will not be working with perishable things but with spiritual things, things that last. That is why our apostle Paul says:

Now devoutness with contentment is great capital; for nothing do we carry into the world, and it is evident that neither can we carry anything out. Now, **having sustenance and shelter, with these we shall be sufficed.** Now, those intending to be rich are falling into a trial and a trap and the many foolish and harmful desires which are swamping men into extermination and destruction. For a root of all of the evils is the fondness for money, which some, craving, were led astray from the faith and try themselves on all sides with much pain. **Now you, O man of God, flee from these things: yet pursue righteousness, devoutness, faith, love, with endurance, suffering, and meekness** (I Timothy 6:6-11; Concordant Literal Translation)

Paul knew how things were. He had seen Christ in His glory and Paul knew that he himself, once, will be allowed to possess that glory; and once we will see that you and I, too, one day will get such glory, we will change and not be troubled so much by earthly things. Paul had seen Christ and what the result of the great evil was that happened to Christ: endless glory! Paul knew that both good and evil, ultimately, come from God. Paul went straight through good and evil. Unjustly imprisoned, shipwrecked, stoned, hungry, rejection, etc, and what was his conclusion?

Being reviled, **we are blessing**; being persecuted, **we are bearing with it** (I Corinthians 4:12; Concordant Literal Translation).

Did Paul, while in prison, escape when an earthquake broke his shackles and opened the doors? No! Paul knew that the road he was travelling was programmed for him by God (Acts 9:16), and when, humanly speaking, things did not go so well, Paul did not start moaning and he did not take the reins out of the hands of his Lord! No, *Paul started praising God!* (Acts 16:25).

He did not run away from it, but walked the road ahead of him, even though that road was often far from easy. Paul did not break out to “work on his career” and collect goods. Paul knew God and that his heavenly Father would take care of him. Paul also knew that in a good education, evil is not kept outside – that would only create weaklings – but used, in a measure, to improve the child, fit for what is to come.

There is a lot of anxiety among people – even among Christians – much resistance, much rebellion, often originating from fear: “How will it go?” Wouldn’t it be much better, when necessary, to suffer injustice and keep the peace? Why do we cling so much to earthly things? Why don’t we instead aim for our future and for the spiritual blessings that we now already may receive, blessings that are *unspeakably* more beautiful and precious than the most valuable things that we can own here on Earth? Doesn’t the rebellion and the labor against what God has put on our path take a lot (if not all!) of our happiness away that we get thrown in our lap, for free, without any merit from our side? Even though we can be very rich with our earthly things, we can be as poor as a church mouse. Conversely we, in a different way, could be *extremely* wealthy, as long as we would look at our *spiritual* wealth!

I do hope that you, with me, can sing, “Bend me, shape me, anyway You want me! Long as You love me, it’s alright!” The scary question, “How will it go?” is answered in, “It is well, it is well with my soul!” Do you know what the last line of “Bend me, shape me” is? “You’ve got the power to turn on the light!”

We have nothing to fear than fear alone! We have a good Father, Who gives us what we need; good and evil. The result was seen by Paul: *unbelievable glory!*

That is why we sing the song of the clay, that asks the Great Potter, “Bend me, shape me, anyway You want me! Long as You love me, it’s all right!” God *never* leaves you (even though it may *seem* that way), and *always* loves you. He is there, *ALWAYS!* ■

The "Absolute" and the "Relative"

by – Martin Zender (1959-)

Failure to distinguish the absolute from the relative perspective is the cause of many wacky and unscriptural church doctrines.

One of these is: "God, in His absolute sovereignty, has chosen to give every person his and her own absolute sovereignty (free will)."

How could people say something so illogical? Easy. They put verses demonstrating God's sovereignty next to verses showing men and women making choices, then assume both verses to be absolute truth. If only they could realize that God's sovereignty is absolute, while man's is relative, such asinine doctrine could never have arisen to confuse the saints.

ABSOLUTE VS. RELATIVE: DEFINITIONS

Absolute: An unconditional and unlimited perspective, not compared with anything but itself. Something not dependent upon external conditions for existence.

Relative: Existing or having its significance only by relation to something else. Not an absolute or independent perspective. Something dependent upon external conditions for existence.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE TRUE?

I John 3:20 – God knows all ...

Genesis 3:9 – God does not know where Adam is

Romans 3:10 – There is none righteous ...

Luke 1:5-6 – Zechariah and Elizabeth are righteous

Romans 3:11 – None seek after God ...

Matthew 7:7 – Seek and you shall find

II Corinthians 5:18 – All is of God ...

I John 3:10 – The unrighteous are not of God

John 15:16 – You have not chosen Me ...

Joshua 24:15 – Choose whom you will serve

Romans 11:8 – God hardened Israel ...

Matthew 23:37 – I want to assemble ... you will not

MAD SCIENTIST OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

I have proof from Scripture that God doesn't know everything. I realize that this is breakthrough doctrine – the ignorance of God, that is – but I am a breakthrough kind of guy. I realize that my proof text contradicts I John 3:20, which says that God does know everything, but I am not going to let this bother me. My proof text is Genesis 3:9. In this important verse, God asks, "Adam, where are you?"

Next, I have proof from the Scriptures that, apart from the sacrifice of Christ, some people are already righteous. I know this contradicts Romans 3:10, which says that "*not one is righteous, no, not one,*" but this only highlights the stupendous nature of my discovery.

In Luke 1:5-6, Zechariah and Elizabeth are called, "*righteous before God.*"

That is not all. I have proof from Scripture that people must seek God in order to find Him.

I realize that my finding contradicts Romans 3:11, which says, "*There is none that seeketh after God,*" but these contradictions are coming to bother me less and less. My proof text is Matthew 7:7, "*Seek, and you shall find.*"

My genius for finding these kinds of verses astounds even me. The following piece of research is earth- ►

shattering in its significance. I actually have proof from the Word of God that there are some people in this world who are not of God. The shocking aspect of this revelation is that my finding directly contradicts Paul's apparently naïve statement in II Corinthians 5:18, "All is of God." Oh, well. I John 3:10 is the important thing. It says, "Everyone who is not doing righteousness is not of God."

Now for my crème de la revelation: I, Martin Zender, have not one (1), but two (2) proof verses – from Scripture – showing men (and women, no doubt) exercising their free wills. The first is Joshua 24:15, "Choose this day whom you will serve." (Do not be troubled by the fact that this contradicts our Lord's statement in John 15:16, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." We should be used to these contradictions by now, and quite practiced in ignoring them.) The second proof verse is Matthew 23:37. Our Lord speaks to Israel, saying, "How many times do I want to assemble your children ... but you will not." Of course, this contradicts Paul's plain statement that it was God, not the Jews, who hardened the Jews (Romans 11:7-8), but here we go with Paul again; the man is really starting to bug me.

I hope everyone realizes that I have been speaking facetiously. My purpose has been to detail for you what appear to be real and troubling contradictions from the Word of God – but the Word of God never contradicts itself! What we have been considering is the difference between **the absolute** and **the relative** perspectives.

ALL OF SCRIPTURE IS TRUE; WHAT IS THE PERSPECTIVE?

Sorry to shock you with my new "revelations," but many have done in reality what I have just done tongue-in-cheek: they have chosen to ignore certain verses of Scripture in order to embrace others.

How could all the verses listed earlier be true? It is the difference between the absolute and relative perspectives.

Absolutely speaking, God does know everything. He's God, for God's sake. Whenever God comes across as surprised, shocked or otherwise perplexed, He is speaking of Himself in relation to man (the relative viewpoint), employing a figure of speech known as

Condescension, where God lowers Himself to the level of man in order to communicate with him.

To establish absolute doctrine from this figure of speech is a fatal (and stupid) practice.

In Luke 1, we are considering the behavior of Zechariah and Elizabeth in relation to (the relative viewpoint again) the behavior of the rest of the priesthood. Compared with clowns like Ananias and Caiaphas, this couple was righteous.

In Romans 3:10, however, Paul is considering the whole of humanity against the backdrop of the absolute righteousness of God – and guess what? Against this backdrop, none are righteous.

Romans 3:11 and Matthew 7:7? No contradiction here, just different viewpoints. That none seek after God is absolutely true. Man is helpless in this department. That our Lord invited some to seek Him only proves that our Lord invited some to seek Him. Where did the ability to seek come from, if none are seeking God? From God: "No one can come to Me if ever the Father should not be drawing him." (John 6:44).

How can all be of God if some people are not of God? Absolute versus relative truth again. Some people are not of God only in relation to other people. Our Lord said that the Pharisees were of their father, the Adversary. This was in relation to the apostles, who were friends of God, not adversaries. All of this was of God.

"Choose this day whom you will serve" only proves that some choose God, and some do not; we are relating (relative perspective) one group to another. To get to the absolute truth, ask yourself, "Why do some choose God while others do not?" The answer: *God chooses those who will choose Him.*

Our Lord wanted to assemble Israel, but they would not. True enough, from the human viewpoint, which is limited. As a man, Christ Himself takes this viewpoint. Is it absolute truth? No. The absolute truth is that God hardened Israel.

Isn't it wonderful to be able to believe *ALL* of Scripture?

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Grace as a Doctrine

by – Steve McVey

Sometimes as I've traveled, people have said to me, "Our church is focusing on grace this year." When I'm told that, I can't but find myself thinking, "What did you focus on last year? What will you focus on next year?" I've even heard some say that grace is a very important doctrine and how important it is that we understand it.

These kinds of statements sound good on the surface, but they completely miss the point of grace. Grace is not an important doctrine. In fact, grace is a Person. His name is Jesus Christ. He is Grace personified. When we talk about grace, we're talking about Him.

Grace is the essence of our very lives in Christ. Grace is the foundation of Who God the Father is to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. To say that grace is an important doctrine puts it in a categorical list of other doctrines, which undermines its value and meaning. Grace is not to be put in a list of doctrinal teachings. It is the fountainhead from which every doctrine of the Bible flows.

To suggest that grace is an important doctrine is like saying that breathing is an important part of my life. That would be an understatement of ridiculous proportions. Breathing is not an important part of my life. When Paul said, "For me to live is Christ," he might as well have said, "For me to live is grace." They are the same. John said that Jesus came "full of grace" (see John

1:14). It's Who He is.

Yes, grace is as much a part of our lives as is breathing. It is the core and essence of the gospel. In Acts 20:24, Paul showed that grace is the gospel.

I do not consider my life of any account, as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

Note how the gospel is inseparably joined to grace here. The word gospel means "hilariously good news." What is this good news that Paul said he had been entrusted to share with those around him? It was the good news of the grace of God. Once we wander away from grace in what we proclaim, we've left the gospel. We might be telling the truth, but we've left the gospel. We might be helping people to some degree, but we've left the gospel. The gospel is the message of grace. It's the only thing that has the power to transform lives. Paul described it as "the power of God unto salvation."

Let's not think we flatter grace when we call it an important doctrine. It's more than that. It's everything.

GraceVine
January 2010

MAIL (continued from last page)

and the Bible so that they wouldn't go to hell. This was the moment I needed to commit to God.

"Some people do believe in a place called hell, because their church tells them it's real. I don't believe that hell is a real lake of fire, son. God loves all of his creation, even if they don't love him back. God is amazing like that." Phew! I took a big breath and felt at peace.

"I don't believe in hell either, mom."

Yep, it's official. Thank you, God, for Your grace and perfect love – more perfect than I have ever dreamed of. Thank you, Clyde, for not being afraid to spread the Word of Truth. If it wasn't for you and your ministry, I would have never made the leap. – **IL**



I appreciate your writings. It took a lot of time and bravery to step out of fundamentalist punishment mind-set, but knowing God as He really is, is such a joy. – **PA**

Your book, *The Outsiders*, has something different about it. Upon finishing this exposé an awareness has taken hold of my mind and spirit – a “knowing” that I have been afforded a special measure of His grace in just being allowed to be exposed to the truth contained within. – **KS**

Thank you for your faithful “Goodies!” – **IA**

As you know, having to confront the ugliness in the current more popular bad news gospel can lead to some very uncomfortable moments and difficult decisions. I recently returned from a European trip where I visited the first Nazi concentration camp opened in Germany outside of Munich in a suburb called Dachau. When I looked at the old pictures it suddenly dawned on me that it operated in the middle of a highly populated area for 13 years. I thought, people had to know some of what was going on behind those walls. After all, people do talk, and there were many adjacent apartments that appeared to be overlooking the grounds. I wondered what the common everyday German people said amongst themselves in private conversations concerning many of the atrocities they knew occurred right in their own neighborhood during this fearful period of time. Inside those walls people were being tortured and killed because they believed differently than the “authorities” on political and religious issues. I asked myself, “Why wouldn’t more people have stood up and said this was wrong?” Anyone with any conscience or any sense of decency would know this was a terrible injustice! Obviously, most did nothing about it because of fear, and those brave souls who did, put themselves in isolation and grave danger.

I had a full day to think about this, and I finally came to the conclusion that I could no longer support any group or organization that thinks it is ok to torture and or annihilate people because they believe differently than them. Now, think about what Christians are expected to believe by the authority of the church ... Those who don’t believe the way we do will be tortured and/or annihilated ... What is worse is that most Christians believe it is o.k. for people to be tortured forever. At least the German authorities killed their dissenters and put most out of their misery at some point!

I know this sounds harsh by comparing the Christian community to Nazi Germany, but the comparison is there, and I cannot bury my head in the sand out of fear like the people of Dachau and Munich did from 1933 until 1945. At that point I realized the need to stand up and say that this is wrong! I also understood I could no longer give any of my time or money to a church machine that promotes such propaganda, and I intend to oppose them on this issue in every way I can, even if it means losing family and friends who have been temporarily duped and comfortably numbed by the traditions of a very sick and demented church.

Clyde, thanks for leading by example in this endeavor. I know you gave up your position as a minister over this, and I’m sure the decision was difficult, but in the end rewarding, as God has provided you a new ministry that brings comfort and peace instead of fear and anguish. I will continue to recommend your *Daily Email Goodies* as a way to educate those who are bothered by this “sons of Thunder” thinking. – **TX**

I had a pivotal moment with my beliefs toward universal reconciliation the other day. My 8 year old son asked me (out of the blue) “Mom, do you think hell is a real place?” I tried to buy some time, “Where did you hear that from” (He had heard it from a little boy at school). Or, “Wouldn’t you rather know where babies come from?”

I knew my answer would form his beliefs as well, at least for now. I thought about the years I used to worry about his and his 2 brothers’ souls, and if I would be able to teach them enough about God

(see **MAIL**, previous page)