



S4.E1. Settling for Less

Col. 1.27 *“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

A Personal Comment: Above all things, I desire to have the *understanding*, not just having an intellectual *knowledge* mind you, but a *full understanding* and appreciation of what is meant as our glorious “union with Jesus Christ;” it is a oneness that cannot be reasoned with the natural mind but understand and experience spiritually. It remains a “*mystery*” to most, but divine mysteries were never intended to be kept a secret or hidden from man; when sought after, God reveals their understanding. Such a oneness has a profound impact upon my life as I live now in the present and on my resurrected life in the age to come. The scripture reads, “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*”— it is both a tormenting and teasing thought, which is both within sight, and with promise of being obtainable. It is a vision that apprehends me: it creates an unquenchable thirst; it also establishes a clear end goal for my life. Knowing “oneness” is something exceedingly far and above a mere concept of obtaining heaven. This understanding involves both a vital *relationship* with God and *fellowship* with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Paul paints the picture of a Christian life as one running a race, not with complacency of just being qualified to be a participant in the race, and as one who will eventually cross the finish line into eternity in heaven, but as one straining, with every fiber of his being, stretching out to his fullest extent to win the highest prize at the end of the race. (1 Cor. 9.24-27) He concludes this thought in Phil. 2.16, “*holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not **run** in vain or **labored** in vain.*” At one time Paul had a fervent religious zeal in accordance to the strictest condition of the Jewish Law; of this obedience he said of himself, “*concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*” Phil. 3.6

Blameless? I don’t believe Paul was as much a braggart as he was a pragmatist in that he was obedient to the Law as much as anyone else, and he worked to enforce the Law of Judaism on other Jews and to bring Christians under arrest for their disobedience to it. But one day Christ Jesus appeared in his life, and Paul was never the same again. As easy as flicking a light switch Paul, completely abandoned the religion life of a Jewish zealot as a way of darkness and embraced the light of a new dynamic life, a spiritual life found only in Christ. He suddenly had thrust upon him a high calling and vision for believers in Christ. Following are a few foundational scriptures needful for this understanding:

Phil. 3.13-14 *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I **press** toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* To Paul the end goal is certainly not just a place called heaven, but a continual eternal relationship and fellowship with God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Col. 1.27-29 *“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also **labor, striving** according to His working which works in me mightily.”*

The depth of understanding this passage alone is above and beyond all I could ever ask or think. Once when Paul was preaching a message at Phillipi, a woman by the name of Lydia responded to the call of God, as it is written, Acts 16.14 *“The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.”* Isn’t that interesting, *“whose heart the lord opened.”* This takes away all our natural ability, our intellect, our IQ, our cleverness in unraveling the mysteries of God. In Jn. 6.44 Jesus reveals that no man can come to Him *unless the Father draws him*. Our hearts are, in itself, cold, hard, and closed to the things of God, but it is the prerogative of God to open them. May God so open our hearts.

The Promises

Of the hope and expectations of all who are in Christ, it is written, 2 Cor. 1.20 *“For all the promises of God in Him are yes, and in Him amen.”* All the **promises** of God, all those blessings ratified in the blood of Christ on our behalf, are now and forever more made available to believers in His Son. These promises are not just to a select few, but to “whosoever” responds to the call of God. Once the door of the heart has been opened, made soft and pliable, the Lord continues *“to sup with us and we with Him.”* (Rev. 3.20) These promises include, but are certainly not limited to: first of all the complete and thorough cleaning and pardon of sin; a new life born of His Spirit; a progressing to the sanctification in this life as one being set apart from the world but unto the purposes of His Kingdom; and being lifted up spiritually to Christ’s own presence in our lives for fellowship, support, and strength in times of temptation and trial, and for His spiritual guidance in the manner and ways of living this life.

These promises are finally consummated in the glory of the resurrection of our bodies and the eternal life in His presence in the world to come. All these promises come to us by faith in the Son of God and the call of God and His grace freely bestowed upon us. As it is written, Eph. 1.3, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”* It must be understood that our salvation collapses time, past, present, and future, into eternity and that we now live in the reality of these promises first spiritually, then in matters of the soul, and finally in the resurrection.

Promises: Old and New

In a divine covenant, God sovereignly establishes the nature of the relationship between Himself and man. God binds Himself by His own oath to keep His *promises* set forth under the covenant. Still, there are *conditions* attached to the oath on the side of man; if he does not keep the covenant’s conditions, there will be *consequences*. A clear distinction must be made between the *conditions*, *promises*, and *consequences* under the Old Covenant cut in the blood of goats and bulls and the conditions of the New Covenant cut in the blood of Christ. It is as Jesus said at the last supper, *“For this is My blood of the ‘new’ covenant,…”* Mt. 26.28 By emphasizing the word **“new”** He was affirming this divine covenant did not just add to the Old Covenant but it superseded it and was to completely replace the Old Covenant. The New is not the reconditioning of the Old like one reconditions a house, but is a replacement of the Old, a house built upon a new foundation, not one of “the Law” but a foundation which is Christ. It is confirmed again in scripture, Heb. 8.13 *“In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”*

Under the religious Old Covenant the *conditions* and *promises* were written strictly in the “Law”, a system of commandments and ordinances given to Moses. The conditions set forth is thus, Ex. 19.5-6 *“Now therefore, if you will indeed ‘obey’ My voice and ‘keep’ My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* The place of this *“holy nation”* was known as the Promise Land; a tract of land promised to

their patriarch father, Abraham. For various reasons Moses could not actually cross the Jordan, enter into that promise, but he could see this Promise Land afar off from atop Mt. Nebo as he looked west across the Jordan River. God affirmed to Moses in Deut. 34.4, *“Then the LORD said to him, ‘This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’”* Thus, the fulfillment of the Old covenant was for Israel to keep all commandments and ordinances of the Law and to take by force and occupy the Promise Land. This would be the place of their Kingdom; a theocratic kingdom with God as supreme ruling authority, who would give divine guidance through prophets and judges, a kingdom kept under “the Law” of Moses as the ideal religion and mode of worship.

A distinction must now be made between New covenant *conditions* and *promises* and those under the Old Covenant. Please read and understand the following from Hebrews 8.6-10:

“But now He (Christ) has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.” Vs. 6. reads, it is of a **better covenant** and **better promises**. The scripture goes on to read,

*“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”* Vss. 7-10

This new covenant was never intended to be a temporary physical covenant of a land, temples, the Law, and a religious relationship of ordinances, holy days, sacrifices, rituals, and a code of proper conduct. The Old did, however, serve a purpose of being a shadow, or a copy...in the physical...of the higher and better covenant...which is spiritual and eternal, yet to come. We must always keep this in mind and not mix the two covenant conditions and promises together, for one is natural and of obedience to laws and rituals and the other is spiritual regarding the principle of life and an inward transformation of self. As it is written of the promise of a new life in Christ Jesus, Eph. 3.20 *“exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”* The Old Covenant may be thought of as being horizontal relating to physical tangible things whereas the new Covenant is vertical relating spirit to spiritual things.

Failure to Keep the Conditions and Enter the Promise

I have often been bothered by the fact that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh decided not to cross the Jordan River and take part in the fullness of their inheritance in the Promise Land. Even the name, **“Promise Land,”** indicates a *fulfillment* of God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Having this promise before them, these herding tribes made the fateful decision to stay, build their cities, and tend their flocks in the pasture lands east of the Jordan River and not to settle in the land promised to them by the covenant with God. They made the conscious decision to satisfy their natural wants and forego the higher calling of God. They did agree to be on the front lines with the rest of the tribes of Israel as they fought to take possession of the Promise Land, but then return to their families and herding lifestyle in a land taken by the Israelites, but not promised to them by God as a habitation. (Numbers 32)



Why would they do this? Why did they decide to opt out of this important aspect of the covenant with God? One can only assume that worldly circumstances and natural desires drove them to make this decision; that the potential promise of success from settling in the pasturing land was greater than the benefits ever to gain in the Promise

Land. They did not sin by doing this, they did fail, however, to enter into God's highest for them; it was certainly not in the will of God. God's *perfect* will was clearly made known to all the tribes of Israel, as it is written,

Ex. 3.17 *"I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey."*

The borders of the Promise Land were clearly defined and made known. What was not included in the promise was the lands taken by Israel when they defeated the armies of the Amorites and Bashanites on its march towards the Jordan River, which was the point of passage into the Promise Land. (Num. 21.21-35; 32.33). This tract of land, located east of the Jordan River, was not in God's "*perfect*" will for Israel to permanently occupy, but it became a part of God's "*permissive*" will—pandering to the weak and carnal hearts of the 2 ½ tribes. It is written,

Num. 32.33 *"So Moses gave to the Gadites, to the Reubenites, and to the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan—the land including its cities and the territory surrounding them."*

It must be made clear that Moses gave them this permission, not God. God gave all men a free will, even the freedom to choose to eat of the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, to retain the ability to plan and make decisions for themselves and live their lives apart from God. This is not God's highest for man; God's ultimate for man was and is always to eat of the *Tree of Life* in a high calling for a divine relationship. In similar manner, when questioned about divorce, it is written,

Mt. 19.8-9 *"He (Jesus) said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."*

Repeated here, it was Moses giving the permission. Today, certain schools of thought have turned divorce into a duty if the spouse is found incompatible for whatever the reason. This is the point to where man has stretched it. But this decision to divorce is not in God's highest "*perfect*" will, but in a lesser "*permissive*" will because of the *hardness of hearts*— "*hardness of their hearts*" is an expression of scriptures used to describe the Israelite's inability to endure the strictness of the original covenant and law of God; for under Moses the people were governed not by a spirit of divine life but by an outward Law designed to reign in, as much as possible, the desires of the flesh. The Old Covenant simply demands strict obedience to every *jot* and *tittle* of the Law, an expression used by Jesus to describe the " *tiniest matter*" of the Law. (Mt. 5.18)

It must be noted here, Jesus admits that divorce was allowed under the Law by Moses, but strongly contends this was not in the original design of marriage. It was a temporary measure growing out from the weak carnal nature of man and was not designed to be perpetual. Jesus clearly stated God's original '*perfect*' will for marriage,

Mt. 19.4-6 *"And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.'"*

Do you see that *hardness of heart*, *stiffness of neck*, and *weakness of the flesh* are common aspects of the nature of natural man lending them the inability to keep the Law of the Covenant—thus pointing to the ultimate and highest need of man, a Savior to come and a New Covenant established between God and Man—a spiritual covenant of "life." Ever since the fall of man in Adam, access to the *Tree of Life*, described in Genesis, has been guarded by angels, so that man, in his fallen nature, could not

have access to it and live forever. (See Gn. 3.24) Of course, the *Tree of Life* is not a literal tree with magical fruit, but in all spiritual reality, it is the divine person of Jesus Christ. It was looking to the coming Christ that the prophet, Ezekiel, wrote, “*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*” Ezek. 36.26 The Old Covenant Law in Moses was imposed from without; the New Covenant in Christ is life emanating from within.

Our understanding is being opened here, to know now the difference between one being in Adam, of the old nature subject to the religious Law, and one being in Christ of an altogether new nature with His life emanating from within. The bottom line to all of this is, in order for one to flow in the *perfect* will and design of God for our lives, he or she cannot have confidence in their natural nature (the flesh) or have their source of strength in the Law (**religious obligations**), but only to find our rest in Christ as He abides in us and we in Him...which is essentially eating of the *Tree of Life*, in the *perfect will of God*.

Blessings or Consequences

There are always blessings for being found in the will of God, and “consequences” for settling for less than the promises or for presuming to live only under the *permissive* will of God; for in doing so, the finish line of our race becomes clouded; for we are rejecting or missing His more *perfect* Divine plan for our lives. By *permitting* something for us, to help compensate for the weakness of the flesh, is but a bandage to cover a severe wound; it does not bring healing and wholeness. Such is the case for one to slaughter a lamb as a sacrifice for their sins—which is but a bandage—and to reject the divine blood of Christ as a sacrificial offering—which is the only cure. The former is part of God’s *permissive* will under the Old Covenant in Moses and the latter is God’s *perfect* will under the New Covenant in Christ. In the long run, having finished the race, the consequences of living under God’s *permissive* will eventually catches up with us. We cannot presume upon God foolishly saying, “His tolerance is endless and He will uphold His side of the Covenant regardless of our obedience or disobedience. He loves us too much.” This is foolish and ignorant thought.

Rather, His word written or spoken, Heb. 4.12-13 is “*living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*”

What were the repercussions on this fateful decision of the 2 ½ tribes? They did not deliberately transgress the law, or begin worshipping false Gods, or preach false doctrine. These 2 1/2 tribes would fully retain their Jewish identity and religion. They would try to keep the Law, with all its feasts, sacrifices, rituals, and commandments; they would raise their families in the strictest of Jewish tradition; they would sacrifice and worship at Jerusalem, and keep all other responsibilities of the covenant. They would be Jews both by race and by religion. They simply decided not to enter into the land of inheritance but to stay in a land more pleasing to their eyes and desirous for their prosperity...to settle for less.

You understand there are times when God’s ways are illogical to our ways, and our reasoning actually seems higher than God’s way of thinking. Certainly, these tribes must have thought that God had blessed them with this prosperous land more suitable to their herding lifestyle; and now His promise and tolerance has somehow expanded, at least in their minds, to include the habitation of this ill-fated land. This is called “rationalizing,” that is, attempting to explain or justify one’s behavior with logical or plausible reasons, even if these are not true or appropriate—a very common trait of man. I had an uncle who justified his improper and immoral behavior by stating simply, “I am what I am; God made me this way.” Or another married man I know said to me, “Jesus delivered me from lying, brawling,

and smoking, but He could not deliver me from women.” Or the one who said to me, “I said to God, if I have a chance encounter today with this woman with whom I am having an affair, then it must be God’s will to divorce and to marry her—and lo and behold, he accidentally bumped into her that very hour.” Sure enough he divorced and remarried. All are inexcusable excuses, rationalizations that hold no water.

It is never acceptable to distort or re-mold the word of God to somehow justify the desires of our hearts or to fit our current circumstances. Nor should we ever presume upon His promises or stretch or distort the promises or the call of God, exercising our reasoning powers saying, “Isn’t it more logical that God would want this or that; after all God would not want me poor or desperate or miserable?” The Law was written in stone, but even the stone tablets could be thrown to the ground and shattered, as Moses did with the first set. (Ex. 32.19) Things of the natural, even when involved with God, can be broken and shattered. But not so are the things of the Spirit. The call of God in Christ Jesus is written on our hearts which no man can erase. (Heb. 8.10) No matter how “logical” or “rational” something may appear to the mind, no matter how much we are emotionally drawn to it, regardless of how circumstance just seems right to us, or how much we feel that in some way we will rationalize that we are doing God’s will, it is always “missing the mark,” a falling short, to turn to away from the higher call of God and to settle for something less. In doing so it will ultimately always affect our spiritual walk; it is settling for something less than the intended high call of God. There are always consequences for missing the mark.

The consequences for the ill-fated decision of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh choosing not to enter the Promise Land but to settle east of the Jordan River was manifold; it includes being exposed to vulnerable attacks from surrounding nations, a perceived lack of commitment to God’s plan from the rest of the tribes, and an eventual religious and cultural isolation. No prophet is ever recorded to have arisen from them; they were eventually taken captive by Assyria and dispersed within their culture and virtually not heard of again.

Before we continue please contemplate the following question: “Is following religion, to the utmost of one’s ability, in God’s *permissive* will or His *perfect* will? Is it God’s highest for one to keep with all the passion within all the religious commandments, vows, sacrifices, rituals, holydays, and other observances?” Or, is ALL of this a part of God’s *permissive* will until the *Perfect* has come? The Old Testament Law is simply a shadow of the Christ to come. And today’s various religions, Catholicism, Pentecostalism, Methodism, and the rest of the “isms” are no less mimicking true spiritual life in the Spirit of Christ. These are outward displays of seemingly pious behavior and confessions of faith, as all religions attempt to imitate the spontaneous life arising within the true believer. Thus, all religions and all the “isms” simply mimic true Christianity—they imitate or try to impersonate a spirit-led life.

There seems to be a battle for the heart and mind of man. Whether it be religion, or the world in general, or Satan himself, their pull is always on the soul of man, his intellect and emotions, and away from the spirit. It is within this realm of the soul that religious attempts are made to learn and memorize doctrine, to practice certain rituals and behavior, and to somehow feel emotional in worship and doing good in service. This seemingly good practice fails to provide any depth of spiritual maturity into our lives. It is the spirit of man that links to God, to actually experience His inner workings in our hearts, to transform us from within our souls into “newness of life” in Christ Jesus.

It is written, in 2 Corinthians 5.17, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*” This, beloved, is God’s *perfect* will for each and every believer. Settling for anything less than regenerated life and divine transformation of our nature, of the termination of an old life and reaching forth to all things being new, falls short of God’s high calling and *perfect* will for our lives. This principle must be fully embraced by faith.

S4.E1. Questions for Discussion

1. Distinguish between the Old covenant and the New Covenant. What are the critical differences.
2. Explain and give examples between God's *permissive will* and His *perfect will*.
3. Describe religion. Is the Old Covenant religion? Explain.
4. When the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh decided not to cross the Jordan River and take part in the fullness of their inheritance in the Promised Land, were they in sin? What was the consequences?
5. What does it mean for a Christian to "settle for less?"