



PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3-21-05

HARMONY

(January, 2010 update)

by Jim Buller

At the end of creation week, “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.” Genesis 1:31. Everything throughout the whole world was in harmony with God and with each other. For, “God is not the author of disorder but of peace.” (1 Corinthians 14:33 margin).

But, at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Satan tempted Eve. If she ate the fruit, he told her, her “eyes [would] be opened,” and she would “be like God, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:5. *She* could be like God, knowing what was good and what was bad, so *she* would be able to choose what was right and wrong *for herself*. In other words, *She would not need God* to tell her what to do.

This same idea had been a key element in Satan’s own fall. For he had said, “I will be like the Most High.” Isaiah 14:14. And like Satan, Adam and Eve chose to be their own “god,” deciding for themselves what they should do or not do; and as a result, the global harmony God had created came to an end.

Ever since then, to one extent or another, the whole human race has been infected with this same notion —that we don’t need God to tell us what to do because we can decide what is best for ourselves. Today we still hear —and yield— to the same tempting message that says: “You’re intelligent. You’re the one who *really* knows what is best for *yourself*. So, to find the most fulfillment in life, just *follow your heart*.” In other words, *you* can do the best job at directing your own life —since *you* are the only one who *really* knows what would be good or bad for yourself.

But, what has been the result of everyone choosing what is right and wrong for themselves? To illustrate this, let’s think for a moment what would happen if we all somehow decided to get together and sing, but each of us sang whatever song we thought would be best. Or suppose we somehow all decided to sing the same song, but each of us decided for ourselves which key to sing in, what rhythm, and when we would start singing —it would be chaos!

To avoid this chaos and confusion we have a song leader or director to start everyone off on the same song, at the same time, in the same key, and with the same

rhythm. The result of everyone singing together, can be beautiful and harmonious. It is not necessary for the song leader to be a bossy tyrant, or for the singers to be slaves without any mind of their own for this to happen. In fact, many times when we get together and sing, the person who is *acting* as “song leader” doesn’t even realize they are “leading.” Everyone just follows them, so we can all sing together. For this type of harmony to exist, we must have two things: first, there needs to be someone who organizes, or “directs traffic” so to speak; and second, everyone else involved must be willing to cooperate, and follow this director’s leading.

So, who is best qualified to be the “director” for the universe? The obvious answer is the Creator. No one else even comes close. This then brings us to *the* central question. “Is the Creator-God *really* organizing and directing things for our best good?” Or, to personalize the issue, “Can I trust God to do what is best for *me*?”

The choice that Eve was faced with at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil centered around this very question. She had to choose —was she going to trust and follow God, or was she going to direct her own life, and do things her own way. And still today —probably several times everyday— each of one us are faced with this same basic choice —are we going to trust and follow God, or are we going to follow our own hearts and minds?

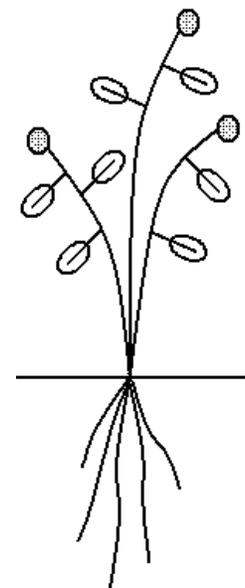
To help us answer this question in an intelligent manner, we need to look at what God’s overall organizational plan is. In John 15:1-8, Jesus uses the example of a grape vine to describe this plan.

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ... Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ... By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

As a result of being connected with Him —that is, relying on His wisdom, trusting His provision and following His plan— Jesus said we would “bear much fruit.” But what does He mean by “bearing fruit?”

It is both interesting and significant that Jesus chose “fruit” to illustrate His point. To help us understand, let’s think like botanists for a minute, and ask the question, “What do the different parts of a plant do *for* the plant they are growing on?” For the sake of simplicity, we will generalize plant parts to: roots, stems, leaves, and flowers which turn into fruit.

What do the roots do for the plant? —they provide support, and soak up water and soil nutrients. What do stems do? —they give the plant a frame work, and have vascular tissue which carries the water



and nutrients around to the whole plant. And leaves? —through the process of photosynthesis, they use sunlight energy to turn water and carbon dioxide into sugar, making food for the plant. Plants grow roots, stems and leaves because they all perform important functions for the plant. Without any one of them, the plant would fall over, or wither up, and die. Which brings us to “fruit.” What does fruit do for the plant it is growing on? —Nothing.

Because fruit doesn’t do anything for the plant it is growing on, it may seem strange at first, that Jesus chose “fruit” to illustrate the result of being connected with Him. However, looking at the bigger picture we find that “fruit” is something the plant does, *not* for itself, but to benefit *others*. Fruit can be food for birds and animals. Fruit contains the seeds to start new plants. Fruit even benefits non-living things —if it just falls to the ground and decomposes, it at least enriches the soil.

Most plants also put their *whole life energy* into *bearing fruit*. Take a tomato plant for instance. Suppose we were to compare the weight of the tomato plant itself, with the weight of all the tomatoes it produced. Which would weigh more? —the tomatoes! This would definitely be true of watermelons! It is true of fruit trees too! —when we consider all the fruit produced during the lifetime of the tree. Other plants, grains in particular, pour their whole life energy into producing “fruit,” something that does nothing for themselves, and then they *die*. Plants *live* for the sole purpose of benefitting others. Once they have fulfilled their purpose, they die.

To the selfish way of thinking this doesn’t make sense. Another common message tells us, “Look out for yourself, because no one else is going to.” But instead of looking out for themselves, plants literally pour their whole lives into doing things for others! In spite of the effects of sin, plants still give us an excellent illustration of God’s plan for all creation —that everything would exist for the purpose of benefitting others. This is why Jesus says, as a result of our connection with Him, we will “bear much fruit.”

There is another important point in John 15:4-5 that we also need to emphasize. Let’s read it again. “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Fruit is borne *only* on a branch that is attached to the vine. If a branch is disconnected from the vine, it withers up and dies, (see John 15:6). Therefore, we are not expected to try to “bear fruit,” or benefit others, on our own. We can only be a benefit to others by being connected to *The Source* of all benefit —the Creator Himself. (See Colossians 1:16.)

God created everything in the universe so as it filled its place in His plan, and maintained its connection with Himself, *The Source* of all good things, (see James 1:17), it would “bear” some kind of “fruit” —it would pass along some benefit to the things around it. Because it had “freely received” from Him, it would be able to “freely give” to others, (see Matthew 10:8). As we look around in nature we find that all things, both living *and* non-living exist for the purpose of benefitting others. Sunlight, air, water, dirt and rocks all benefit other things. Blessings from God are passed on, from one created thing to another. Each thing receives what it needs and then produces something that is useful to other things. For example, plants receive the soil nutrients and sunlight energy that animals can not readily make use of, and produce fruits and vegetables which

animals can use for food. The animals in turn, do things to benefit plants, such as spreading seeds, fertilizing, thinning and pruning.

God created the whole universe to be a huge interconnected network of benefit sharing. Instead of each thing just looking out for itself, everything exists to benefit others. Thus the needs of each are met by the abundant sharing of all the other things around it. *This* is God's overall organizational plan, and everything in the universe follows this plan —everything, except demons and selfish humans.

The results of not following God's plan can easily be seen in the condition of our planet. In the beginning, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.” Genesis 2:15. And by extension, the human race, as it spread across the globe, was to take care of the whole world. However, instead of being a benefit to the earth, humans have come close to destroying it! No wonder sin has been confined to this planet.

Our lives, therefore, will have the greatest fulfillment when we occupy the position God has for us in His “network” —His plan. Because *then*, we will be in the right place, at the right time, to receive all the blessings He sends our way; and we will also be able to pass on all the benefits He has planned for us to give to others. Only the Creator-God would be able to organize and maintain the harmony of a system as complicated as this. For this system to run smoothly though, it is necessary for *everyone and everything* to stay connected to God, fill their place in His plan, and be willing to share.

Think about the intricate inner workings of a wind-up clock. If even one part stopped functioning as it should, the whole clock would stop working. In the same way, one selfish, uncooperative individual can potentially cause problems throughout the entire universe! By choosing to direct our own lives and do things our own way, we will not be cooperating with the Creator's plan, nor filling our place in it. As a result, we will not be where we need to be to receive the things God sends our way, (no wonder our needs are not met); nor will we be passing on the things God has planned for us to share with those around us (no wonder the needs of others are not met). Thus the flow of benefits throughout the whole network is disrupted in the same way that one pebble thrown into a pond causes ever widening ripples that eventually reach the farthest shore. One of the reasons Christ died was to show the eventual extent of the ruin that is caused by being out of harmony with God's plan.

More importantly though, Christ's death is a demonstration of God's love. It shows that *He too* operates by the same principle of living to benefit others. Christ's death shows that He *is* willing to do whatever is necessary for the good of His creatures, even to the point of giving the ultimate gift —His own life! “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8. He died to show us that we really *can* trust Him. That in *all* His plans, He really *is* organizing and directing things for our best good. In fact, because of His infinite wisdom, power, and love, He can do a much better job of looking out for our interests than we are able to do for ourselves.

But God does not want us to just follow Him out of instinct, simply because we are programmed that way. He wants us to follow Him because *we recognize* that His

way is best —best for us *and* best for everything else. Therefore, unlike the rest of nature, God created humans with the ability to *choose* whether to be a part of His plan, or to go our own selfish way. As the crowning act of creation, He gave humans the power of choice because our intelligent choice to follow Him, is from His perspective, the most valuable thing in the universe —the one thing He can not create.

Yes, “free choice,” as it is called, opened the possibility for someone to go his or her own way —and then to deceive others into thinking that going their own way would be best. Therefore, as a part of His design in the creation of this earth, Christ also planned to come and die for those who may be deceived. He is the “Lamb *slain from the foundation of the world.*” Revelation 13:8, (emphasis supplied). His death made the “plan of redemption” possible, providing the opportunity for us to be brought back into harmony with both Himself and the rest of His creation, (see Colossians 1:19-23).



Since Adam and Eve, all of us have selfishly chosen to go our own way, instead of following our Creator’s plan. We have all chosen the chaos and confusion which has resulted in unfulfilled needs. And like a broken clock or a disconnected branch, the inevitable result has been death. But on the cross, Jesus died in our place so that by cooperating with Him, we could again live fulfilled, harmonious lives. He assures us, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10.

But we cannot bring ourselves back into harmony any more than a disconnected branch can re-attach itself. Only the Creator can re-create this connection. All we can do is be willing to give up our selfishness, and choose to co-operate with Him —trusting and allowing Him to do what needs to be done, both to re-attach us to Himself, and to strengthen our connection. Each day, and several times throughout the day, we should renew our choice to stay connected to Him, asking Him to keep the connection strong, and to pour His life through us so we can be a benefit to others.

If we ever find that we have yielded to the temptation to go our own way again, we simply need to recommit ourselves to Him and let Him reconnect us once more. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24.

Christ's Object Lessons, page 159

No outward observances can take the place of simple faith and entire renunciation of self. But no man can empty himself of self. We can only consent for Christ to accomplish the work. Then the language of the soul will be, Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul.

Steps to Christ, page 70

Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, "Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee." This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.

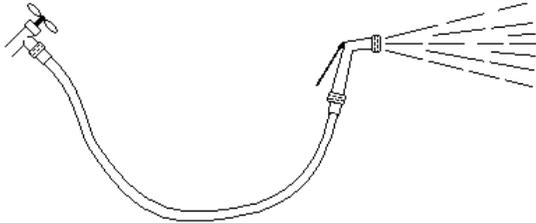
Christ's Object Lessons, page 156

It is Satan's special device to lead man into sin, and then leave him, helpless and trembling, fearing to seek for pardon.

Christ's Object Lessons, page 332

Do not disappoint Him who so loved you that He gave His own life to cancel your sins. He says, "Without Me ye can do nothing." John 15:5. Remember this. If you have made mistakes, you certainly gain a victory if you see these mistakes and regard them as beacons of warning. Thus you turn defeat into victory, disappointing the enemy and honoring your Redeemer.

To use a more modern illustration, the Christian is like a garden hose. One end is hooked up to a faucet, and the other end has one of those squeeze-valves on it. The faucet represents our connection to God —the source of all blessings. The squeeze-valve represents our choice to be selfish or unselfish. By choosing to be selfish and not share, no clean water —no fresh blessings— can come into the hose, and the water that is already in it just gets stagnant. The only way the hose can be continually filled with fresh clear water is for it to be connected to the faucet, the faucet turned on, and the squeeze-valve held open, spraying blessings on everything within reach. As long as it stays connected to the faucet and the faucet stays turned on, it is safe for the hose to share abundantly, because "there's plenty more where that came from."



To take this illustration one step further, our “hose” can become clogged by things in our lives that obstruct the flow of God’s blessings. (See also Matthew 13:5-6.) We need to be willing to let go of these things, and let them be blasted out of our lives. If not, we will not be fulfilling the purpose of our creation. For if we had a hose that was plugged up and we were not able to unclog it, it would be useless, and we would get rid of it. This corresponds to what Jesus said in John 15:2, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” As someone pointed out, we are going to get “cut” either way. Either we will allow God to cut out the things in our lives that keep us from being fruitful, or we will get cut off as an unfruitful branch.

Which brings us to the parable of the unfruitful fig tree in Luke 13:6-9. The fig tree was planted in the garden for the purpose of bearing figs. But if it remained unfruitful, the owner has a right to pull it out, because why should it take up space if it is not going to fulfill its purpose. In the same way, God created us for the purpose of “bearing fruit.” If because of our selfishness we refuse to be “fruitful,” He has a right to “pull us out” —which is another reason why the wicked will be destroyed in the end. “Christ will not permit one selfish person to enter the courts of heaven.” *Counsels on Stewardship* page 26

Because our thinking has been twisted by our selfish human nature, we don’t know what unselfish love really is —and we certainly can’t trust the world’s definition! God tells us in Isaiah 55:8-9, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Therefore, God has given us the Bible, with all its instructions, so we can know how to truly be loving and sharing.

It is my prayer in writing this: that by studying both the Bible and nature you will observe God’s plan and get to know Him better; that you will understand His love, wisdom and willingness to do what is best for you, as well as for all creation; and that you will recognize that following His way of sharing is better than our way of selfishness, chaos and death. It is also my prayer that you will desire to fill your place in His plan; and that you will allow Him to reconnect you to Himself and the rest of the universe, to get rid of your selfishness, and to bring you back into harmony.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil.” Proverbs 3:5-7.