

## Our Final Authority

Those of you who watch the news know that this past week the Episcopal Church voted into the office of Bishop a self-proclaimed homosexual man. I was very saddened to hear a statement made by one of the high church officials on Fox News that night. It was on an interview with Bill O'Riley. Bill said to this man, "Since all Christian churches are founded on the scriptures, and the scripture is very clear that homosexuality is an abomination to God, doesn't your putting a homosexual into the office of bishop bring a certain amount of strain into the church?" The official answered, "Oh no, the scripture is NOT our final authority, the Holy Spirit is, and the Holy Spirit directed us to do this."

Well, we want to make one thing crystal clear. The absolute final authority for this ministry and for Daniel and I personally IS the scripture! The Holy Spirit would NEVER tell anyone to do anything that is contrary to God's written word! If anyone comes to you with a prophecy, or a word of knowledge, or some "guidance" from the Holy Spirit that is contrary to the scriptures, do not accept it! Remember that Jesus told us that in these last days there would be many false prophets. What is a false prophet? Someone who teaches things that do not line up with the scripture.

We see examples of this within the church almost daily. I spoke to a young man just the other day who told me that he had been married nine years. Suddenly, one year ago, his wife left him and moved in with her mother. She began attending a different church. In spite of all his efforts to reconcile the marriage, this woman refused to do so and quickly began to date another man at the new church she was attending. Her husband went and spoke to the pastor of that church and asked him to speak to his wife and the man she was dating about the fact that what they were doing is sin. The pastor's reply was, "Oh I cannot do anything about that, everyone has to make their own choices." Just this past week, this young man found out that his wife has set a wedding date to this other man, AND that the pastor of that church is planning to marry them! She is not even divorced from her husband yet. And this pastor claims to be a Christian and a leader of God's people! His excuse is that it is better for this woman to be married than out on her own. This is a pastor who obviously does not accept the scriptures as his final authority. I wish I could say that such incidents are rare, but they are not. We live in an age when professing Christians are refusing to accept God's Word as their final authority – choosing instead to become comfortable with sin.

So, I must ask you this question: What is the final authority in your life?

### God's Will vs. Your Will

The most expensive gift God has ever given to the human race is the gift of free will! By giving humans free will, God gave us the opportunity of rebelling against Himself which, in turn, cost Him everything on the cross to pay for our choices. The scripture clearly shows us the fact that God gave mankind free will in Genesis.

"Then the lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" Genesis 2:15-17

I want you to note two things here. First, God was indicating that man had the freedom to make his own choice. He could choose to obey God and not eat from the tree of knowledge, or he

could choose to disobey and eat from the tree. The second thing I want you to think about is this. God didn't have to put that tree of knowledge in the garden. He could simply have not planted it there, and the issue would never have come up. Without the tree of knowledge, Adam would never have had the chance of making the choice to disobey God. Sin would not have entered the world, and Jesus wouldn't have had to die on the cross. Now why in the world did God chose to put that tree in the garden? The answer is simple. God is not interested in having a bunch of little robots running around here on earth. He wants men and women with free wills who freely chose to obey Him. The only way God could do this was to give Adam and Eve the chance to make up their own minds. Either they would chose to obey, or they wouldn't, but the choice would be their own, not God's. God would not violate their free wills. It is important that we understand just how vital God regards the issue of our free will. Free will for the human race is so important to God that He gave Adam and Eve the choice in the very beginning, knowing all the time the terrible price He would have to pay for that gift! Understanding this principle is vital to our being able to understand how God works on our own lives, and the lives of those around us. God will not stop our free will, or the free will of those around us. This is why God allows evil here on earth. So many times people rile against God, saying, "If God is a God of love, why does He allow this and this evil here on earth?" The answer is simple. God gave human beings free will, and until He chooses to come back to earth to judge all evil, He will not step in to put a stop to the free will He has given to human beings. Humans can, and do, choose to do evil things! They will one day have to answer for everything they do, that is for sure, the scripture proclaims it. But until that day arrives, they are free to do as they chose. Unfortunately, every human being chooses to sin. The idea that ultimately there is good in every man is totally wrong. Without the restraints of government, men will do only evil all of their days. This is what sin has done to the human race.

So how does all of this affect us Christians? First of all, we need to understand how it affects our prayers. If you will stop to think about it, I dare say that the majority of your prayers are asking God to put a stop to other people's free wills. For example, "Lord my wife has left me, please make her come back to me." Or, "Lord my child has rebelled and gone out into the world. Please make them come back to serve You." Right? In these types of prayers, you are asking God to do something that He cannot and will not do. He will not put a stop to someone's free will. Your prayer for your rebellious child should rather be this: "Lord, bring whatever circumstances into my child's life that are necessary to bring him to the realization that he needs a Savior." God can answer this type of prayer. The problem is, most parents won't pray this type of prayer because as soon as their child starts to get into all sorts of difficulties, then they jump in there to try to get their child out of the difficulty, shouting to the Lord the whole time to hurry and put a stop the their troubles! They totally forget the parable Jesus taught about a rebellious son.

"A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!' Luke 15:11-17

In this case, God did NOT put a stop to this rebellious son's free will. Instead, He allowed him to experiences the consequences of his actions. The son spent everything on sinful living and ended up nearly starving to death. It was the experience of the consequences of his sin that brought this young man "to his senses" and made him decide that it would be better to go home as a servant than to die of hunger. Unfortunately, most parents spend their lives trying to save their children from the consequences of their sins, rather than letting God use them to bring their children to an understanding of their need of a Savior. God, in His great mercy, has decreed that

every choice we make brings with it a whole set of consequences. In this way, if we chose to do wrong, we should quickly learn the error of our ways.

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” Galatians 6:7-8

Just as Christians don't understand the principal of free will, they also do not understand the principal of sowing and reaping. Do not think that you will not reap the consequences of bad choices just because you are a Christian. Yes, your sins are forgiven so that you will not reap an eternity in Hell, BUT you WILL reap the consequences of your actions here on earth. I think this is the most common misconception I hear from Christians, especially those who accept Christ while in prison. They think that once they have accepted Christ, that they should no longer reap the consequences of their free will choices. Christians think that somehow, they should be released from prison before the end of their sentence, or that they should stop experiencing the difficulties that have resulted from their choices. This is not so! The scripture I just quoted from in Galatians is written to Christians! What you sow, you SHALL reap.

Does this principal of reaping mean that every person will turn from their sin once they begin to experience the difficulties resulting from their sin? Unfortunately, NO. God can, and does manipulate people's circumstances to bring them to an understanding of their need for a Savior, but many people still reject God because they value their sin more than they value God. That is why, so many times, the prayers of a Christian seem to go unanswered. God works in response to the prayers, but the people harden their hearts and continue to walk in rebellion. That is one of the costs of free will. People can choose to totally reject God.

#### Remaining In God's Will

This is the next area of difficulty in our lives that is tangled up in this whole issue of free will. Those of us who serve Jesus Christ earnestly desire to live our lives in the center of God's will. The problem is, how do we know what God's will is for us? Most of the situations we experience are not talked about in the Bible. Should we buy a computer and go on-line or not? Should we change jobs or not? Should we go to school or not? Should we move to a different location or not? Should we marry this person or not? These are all questions that we wrestle with daily. Sometimes God will speak to us and give us clear guidance as to what He wants us to do. But, most of the time He remains silent. Why? Because He wants us to use our own free will. He gave us a brain, and He expects us to use it! He doesn't want us to be little puppets in His service, never moving or doing anything unless He pulls the strings. He wants us to think for ourselves and choose to live pleasing to Him. How do we do this? By reading and studying His word, then living our lives according to the principles taught in His word. God does not want to micro-manage us! I have heard well-meaning Christians tell me that they “won't go out to the grocery store unless God tells them to.” What nonsense! If you are hungry, God created you with enough brains that you should be able to make the decision to go out and get something to eat.

God created each one of us with a whole set of abilities, gifts, and desires. He expects us to use these things for His glory, and to live within the guidelines set up within His word. But I believe He gives us a lot of latitude in our day-to-day lives. God has no desire to prevent us from using our own free will.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” Philipians 2:12-15

This scripture shows us that WE have much to do. We are to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.” The word “salvation” here is not talking about our salvation from sin. (Salvation from sin is purely a free gift given to us by God through our faith in Jesus Christ.) It makes reference to our life as a saved person. This means that we have to carefully make our own choices as to how we live in great reverence of God’s commands. This verse also says that God will work in our lives to help us to live according to His good pleasure, but He won’t control us. The Holy Spirit works to enable us to remain within God’s will, but He won’t dictate our every move. We have to make our own choices. We have to make the daily choices to live so that we become as “lights in the world.”

### Let’s Get Practical

O.K. let’s get practical. You are in a job you hate. Should you change jobs and look for something you like better, or should you stay there because possibly it is God’s will to refine you. God isn’t saying anything so how do you know? The answer is simple. If your life is miserable, attempt to change it, and ask God to close any door you try to walk through that is outside of His will.

“These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens . . . .’” Revelation 3:7

The doors that God opens, no man can shut, and the doors that God shuts, no man can open. Use this principle in your life. But remember this, God has a hard time opening a door that you don’t knock on. So, you are stuck in a job you don’t like. Look around. Try to find another job. BUT, you will never find another job if you don’t go places and put in your application! If people don’t know you are looking for work, they won’t offer you a job. Knock on doors. Ask God to open the right one for you, and to close all the other doors He doesn’t want you to go through. Explore your options! However, be sure that your options line up with God’s word. Working as a strip dancer or A bar-keeper certainly does not line up with God’s word.

You cannot make enough money to make ends meet in your job? Then explore the option of going back to school to get an education so that you can get a better job. What field should you seek to enter? If God doesn’t give you very specific guidance, then you should study in something you like and have the natural abilities to perform. God has given you gifts, both natural and spiritual. Do not despise the natural gifts. They are given to you to use to prosper both in the physical world, and within God’s kingdom. (A subject for another newsletter.)

You hate where you live – then move! Once again, ask God to open and close doors for you. Believe me, God will answer your prayer in this regard. Sometimes you may have to knock on many doors before you find the right one. That has certainly been true in our own lives. To read how this worked in our lives, go to our web site at [www.harvestwarriors.com](http://www.harvestwarriors.com), and read the section titled “Meet The Yoders.”

However, be willing to be teachable and honest. If you are a poor worker, always coming to work late, frequently taking sick days, not working hard while you are on the job, do not blame God if you lose your job. Be willing to learn from the consequences of your actions.

Is your life miserable? Then do what you can to change it. God doesn’t expect His children to live in misery all of their lives. Some of them may have to do so because of their choices. If you choose to murder someone, then you will have to spend the rest of your life in prison. But even there, you can do a work for the Lord.

Most of the misery in our lives is a direct result of our own bad choices, or the result of some active sin in which we are living. Only as we put sin out of our lives and change our choices can

we get back on the right road. The big problem is that very few people are ever willing to admit that their difficulties are the result of their own sinful or poor choices.

Stop worrying and fretting, understand this: God honors the desires of our hearts. As long as it is our heart's desire to serve Him and be pleasing to Him, He will always bring us back onto the right path if we stray. If you make a wrong choice somewhere along the line, God will eventually let you know so that you can change direction. Will God allow you to make wrong choices? Yes, sometimes He does. Why? To teach us lessons we could not learn any other way, and to keep us humble. But His word assures us:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28

So you love God? Then you can rest assured that God can and will make even your bad choices work toward your good! Here is the catch. Do you love God? How can you know? This way:

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me." John 14:21

There is the key! As long as you are reading and studying God's word and obeying His commands, you can rest assured that God WILL keep you in the center of His will. Even if you make a wrong choice, God will still eventually make everything work together towards you good.

If God isn't giving you clear direction in a particular situation, then make your choices according to your desires and gifts as long as those choices are for actions that are not contrary to God's word.

What About Fleecing?

You all remember the story about Gideon. God sent an angel to Gideon commanding him to rise up and fight against the powerful Midianites who currently ruled the land. Gideon was so scared that he put out a sheep's fleece and asked the Lord to make the dew fall on all the land around the fleece but not on the fleece itself as a confirmation that God would give him the victory.

victory. Many Christians take this scripture and think they can ask God for a test regarding everything they do. They call this "fleecing the Lord." I personally believe that God will rarely answer a fleece. In Gideon's case, he did not have the Holy Spirit available to him, he did not have the scripture available to him, and God was asking Him to do something that would require great miracles. I think there will be times in some people's lives when God asks them to do something nearly equivalent to what he asked of Gideon. In these cases, God will probably answer a fleece. But if you are trying to put a fleece before the Lord for everyday decisions, you will find that God simply won't answer you.

Let us stop walking in fear. Use your free will to choose to live pleasing to the Lord, and trust Him for the rest.

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Gossip is:

Confessing your neighbor's sins instead of your own sins.

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Attached Letter

Unfortunately, we receive very biased and limited information through the news media as to what is going on in Iraq. I am attaching a letter from a Christian serviceman who is currently in Iraq. I think it is important that God's people KNOW accurately what is going on over there, especially so that we can pray. Please take the time to read this letter.

Thank you for your prayers

Thank you for your prayers for Daniel. He is slowly recovering from the brain surgery he had one month ago for an aneurysm in his brain. He is still having significant difficulties. The doctor has told him that it will take a minimum of one whole year for him to return to normal. We covet your continued prayers.

covet your continued prayers for him.

Love Offerings

We are a faith supported ministry. We depend on your love and obedience to God to continue and expand this ministry. Our need this month continues to be increased because of Daniel's medical bills. Also, it costs us \$1300 each month to put out this newsletter. I would ask some of you who have not been supporting us to pray about helping us each month with that expense.

Please send us your love offering in the enclosed envelope. We pray that god will grant each one of you His richest blessings as you give to us.

Letter From Iraq

This is an open letter from U.S. Army Maj. Eric Rydbom in Iraq to the First Lutheran Church of Richmond Beach in Shoreline, WA.  
Ryborn in Deputy Division Engineer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

"It has been a while since I have written to my friends at First Lutheran Church about what's really going on here in Iraq. The news you watch on TV is exaggerated, sensationalized and selective. Good news doesn't sell.

The stuff you don't hear about on CNN?

Let's start with electrical power production in Iraq. The day after the war was declared over, there was nearly zero power being generated in Iraq. Just 45 days later, in a partnership between the Army, the Iraqi people and some private companies, there are now 3200 megawatts (Mw) of power being produced daily, 1/3 of the total national potential of 8000 Mw. Downed power lines (big stuff, 400 Kilovolt (Kv) and 132 Kv) are being repaired and are about 70% complete.

Then there is water purification. In central Iraq between Baghdad and Mosul, home of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, water treatment was spotty at best. The facilities existed, but the controls were never implemented. Simple chemicals like Chlorine for purification and Alum (Aluminum Sulfate) for sediment settling (the Tigris River is about as clear as the Mississippi River) were in very short supply or not used at all. When chlorine was used, it was metered by the scientific method of guessing.

So some people got pool water to drink and some people got water with lots of little things floating around in it. We are slowly but surely solving that. Contracts for repairs to facilities that are only 50 percent or less operational are being let, chemicals are being delivered, although we don't have the metering problem solved yet (...but again, it's only been 45 days).

How about oil and fuel? Well the war was all about oil wasn't it? You bet it was. It was all about oil for the Iraqi people! They have no other income, they produce nothing else. Oil is 95% of the Iraqi GNP. For this nation to survive, it must sell oil.

The Refinery at Bayji is operating at 75% of capacity producing gasoline. The crude pipeline between Kirkuk (Oil Central) and Bayji will be repaired by tomorrow (June 2, 2003). LPG, what all Iraqis use to cook and heat with, is at 103% normal production and we, the U.S. Army, are ensuring it is being distributed fairly to all Iraqis.

You have to remember that only three months ago, all these things were used by the Saddam regime as weapons against the population to keep them in line. If your town misbehaved, gasoline shipments stopped, LPG pipelines and trucks stopped, water was turned off, power was turned off.

Now, until exports start, every drop of gasoline produced goes to the Iraqi people. Crude oil is being stored and the country is at 75% capacity right now. They need to export or stop pumping soon, so thank the U.N. for the delay.

All LPG goes to the Iraqi people everywhere. Water is being purified as best it can be, but at least it's running all the time to everyone.

Are we still getting shot at? Yep.

Are American soldiers still dying? Yep, about one a day from my outfit, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, most in accidents, but dead is dead.

If we are doing all this for the Iraqis, why are they shooting at us?

The general Iraqi population isn't shooting at us. There are still bad guys who won't let go of the old regime. They are Ba'ath party members (Read Nazi Party, but not as nice) who have known nothing but and supported nothing but the regime all of their lives. These are the thugs for the regime who caused many to disappear in the night. They have no other skills. At least the Nazis in Germany had jobs and a semblance of a national infrastructure that they could go back to after the war, as plumbers, managers, engineers, etc. These people have no skills but terror. They are simply applying their skills ... and we are applying ours.

There is no Christian way to say this, but they must be eliminated and we are doing so with all the efficiency we can muster. Our troops are shot at literally everyday by small arms and rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs). We respond. One hundred percent of the time, the Ba'ath party guys come out with the short end of the stick.

The most amazing thing to me is that they don't realize that if they stopped shooting at us, we would focus on fixing things more quickly and then leave back to the land of the big PX. The more they shoot at us, the longer we will have to stay.

Lastly, all of you please realize that 90% of the damage you see on TV was caused by Iraqis, not by us and not by the war. Sure, we took out a few bridges from military necessity, we took out a few power and phone lines to disrupt communications, sure we drilled a few palaces and government headquarters buildings with 2000 lb. laser guided bombs (I work 100 yards from where two hit the Tikrit Palace), but he had plenty to spare.

But, any damage you see to schools, hospitals, power generation facilities, refineries, pipelines, was all caused either by the Iraqi Army in its death throes or from much of the Iraqi civilians looting the places.

Could we have prevented it? Nope.

We can and do now, but 45 days ago, the average soldier was fighting for his own survival and trying to get to his objectives as fast as possible. He was lucky to know what town he was in much less be informed enough to know who owned what or have the power to stop 1,000 people from looting and burning a building by himself.

The United States and our allies, especially Great Britain, are doing a very noble thing here. We stuck our necks out on the world's chopping block to free an entire people from the grip of a horrible terror that was beyond belief.

I've already talked the weapons of mass destruction thing to death – bottom line, who cares? This country was one big conventional weapons ammo dump anyway. We have probably destroyed more weapons and ammo in the last 30 days than the U.S. Army has ever fired in the last 30 years (remember this is a country the size of Texas), so drop the WMD argument as the reason we came here. If we find it great, if we don't, so what?

I'm living in a "guest palace" on a 500-acre palace compound with 20 palaces with like facilities built in half a dozen towns all over Iraq that were built for one man. Drive down the street and out into the countryside five miles away like I have and see all the families of 10 or more, all living in mud huts and herding the two dozen sheep on which their very existence depends...then tell me why you think we are here.

WMD is an important issue. We have to find them wherever they may be (in Syria?), but that is not our real motivator. Don't let it be yours either.

Respectfully,  
Eric Rydbom Major, Engineer, Deputy Division Engineer, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

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*We are warring to harvest!*