

# The Better Way

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## SPRING CHURCH OF CHRIST

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### SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

#### SUNDAY

Bible Study.....9:00 a.m.  
Worship.....10:00 a.m.  
Afternoon Worship.....1:00 p.m.

#### WEDNESDAY

Bible Study.....7:30 p.m.  
(via Zoom Meetings)

#### ELDERS

David P. Brown  
Ken Cohn  
John West

#### DEACONS

Bret Bailey  
J. D. Gunter  
Eric Paluka

#### EVANGELIST

David P. Brown

#### SECRETARY

Sonya West

## THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE OF FREE MORAL AGENCY (Part 2)

*Franklin Camp*

It is interesting that the first mention of the throne of God in the Bible is found at a difficult time in the nation of Israel. It was during the reign of Ahab. Ahab was a wicked king and he wanted no true prophet. Micaiah has a true prophet, but Ahab had no use for him. He told Jehosaphat that he always prophesied evil against him.

In First Kings 22:18, it is stated: **“And the king of Israel said unto Jehosaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil. And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.”**

It was the failure of the nation of Israel to see the abiding throne of God that led them to say, **“Give us a king so that we may be like the nations around about us.”** It was then that God told Samuel, **“They have not rejected thee, they have rejected me.”**

But while they rejected God, as Ahab had rejected God, they had not de-throned God or done away with His authority or set aside their free moral agency and their accountability.

Leaving chapter 17 and moving to Jeremiah 18 and 19, we have two further pictures which establish the sovereignty of God. In chapter 18, we have the potter; and in chapter 19, we have the potter's earthen bottle. In verse 10, Jeremiah is told to break the bottle **“in the sight of the men that go with thee.”**

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, **Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them (Jer. 18:1-10).**

The sovereignty of God is set forth in chapter 17. Chapters 18 and 19 interpret it. In the potter's house Jeremiah must learn something about the sovereignty of God. The potter at work was an illustration of the sovereignty of God. The clay represents man, and it has two possibilities: It has one of potential greatness, of being obedient to the will of God, while on the other side it has the potential of marring, just as the nation had marred as God sought to mold it. But this was not apart from the free moral agency of the individuals in the nation and the accountability and the responsibility of the nation of Israel.

Then there is the sense in which clay is different from man. Clay has no intellect. It has no will-power. But man has been created by God with the power to choose, to select, and to be accountable and responsible. There is no connecting link between the potter and the clay, of intellect, affections, and will. The clay may not be able to cooperate with the potter, but this is not true of man and God.

So the nation of Israel marred in the hands of God. Did this eliminate God's sovereignty? No. Did it eliminate Judah's responsibility and accountability unto God? No.

Ezekiel prophesied along with Jeremiah prior to the fall of the nation and then continued his prophecy after the fall of the nation. Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem; Ezekiel prophesied in captivity. Some of the prophecies of Ezekiel become a divine commentary on the question that we are studying.

Jeremiah sets forth clearly the sovereignty of God and, as indicated, man's responsibility and accountability. Ezekiel discusses particularly man's responsibility and accountability. Ezekiel 3, 18 and 33 set forth clearly the individual responsibility of man in relationship to the sovereignty of God.

There were those in Ezekiel's day who refused to accept their free moral agency and the responsibility for their sins. They denied their individual responsibility and blamed others for their sins and then charged God that His ways were unequal. **"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die"** (Eze. 18:4.)

This verse shows that there is available unto every man, in spite of what his physical situation or circumstances may be, the proper and right relationship with God. He has the free moral opportunity of making that choice. He is accountable and responsible for making that decision.

**So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word of my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall**

**thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live. Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal. When the righteous turneth from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways (Eze. 33:7-20).**

These verses show that God is still in control and yet man has an individual responsibility. As the potter took the clay and remade it, this was a symbol of God's remolding and remaking the nation. How was God going to do it? Was He going to do it based upon His sovereignty apart from man's responsibility and accountability and apart from man's free moral agency? Ezekiel sets the stage and helps one see how God planned to fulfill the symbol and the sign of Jeremiah 18.

When one leaves Jeremiah and comes to Ezekiel, one comes to a stage in the history of the nation of Israel where individual responsibility and accountability are given primary emphasis. This is one of the distinguishing factors of the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was laying the groundwork for the return from Babylonian captivity. Their return from captivity would rest upon the sovereignty of God, but it would include man's free moral agency and his responsibility.

Read carefully Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 30:1-6. God warned the nation of Israel about their sins and the judgment that would follow if they refused to acknowledge and confess their sins. He warned them that their sins would carry them into captivity. He then told them that, if they went into captivity, there was a way for them to come out.

**And if they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with**

**Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land (Lev. 26:40-42).**

**And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live (Deu 30:1-6).**

Ezekiel was given the principles upon which their return from captivity could take place. Their return would depend upon their turning to God in penitence, confession, and prayer. All one must do to see this is true is to read the books concerning the return from captivity.

Turn to the book of Ezra, and one will find that the entire nation did not return from captivity, but only a remnant. The remnant returned based upon the individual responsibility set forth in Ezekiel 3, 18, and 33. Now read Ezra's prayer in the ninth chapter of the book, beginning in verse 5 through the rest of the chapter. His prayer is based upon Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 30:1-6. In this prayer there is the acknowledgement and the confession of sin.

Read also the first chapter of the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah's prayer is in keeping with Leviticus 26. The nation that came out of captivity was altogether a different kind of people than those prior to the captivity. The captivity became a line of demarcation in relationship to the nation of Israel. A transition was made in the captivity and the coming out. The thing that made the difference particularly was the individual responsibility and the application of it in the remnant that returned.

The vessel that was marred in Jeremiah 18 and was broken in Jeremiah 19 was remade by God. His sovereignty was at work through the Babylonian captivity and the judgment that was brought upon the people, until finally there was within the nation the penitent element that realized their sinfulness, made their confession, and under Zerubbabel began to make their way back to Jerusalem to begin the work of restoration.

Here we have a divine illustration of God's sovereignty on the one side and man's free moral

agency on the other. If it rested entirely upon the sovereignty of God, why did not the entire nation return from captivity, lock, stock, and barrel? The answer is found in Ezekiel 3, 18, and 33. God was molding and remaking the nation while it was in captivity. He used His own sovereignty with the kings that were over them. He used His own sovereignty with Cyrus in their returning, but it included man's free moral agency.

If one reads Cyrus's decree given in Ezra 1, note carefully that Cyrus said, "**Whosoever will.**" They did not come back by force. Even the king of Babylon did not force them to return, though he realized that he was the instrument of God in bringing about their return from captivity. This is but one illustration of the manner in which God has always worked. This is in harmony with the way that He made man and planned the scheme of redemption.

In the picture of the story of the potter given in Jeremiah 18, the clay marred, and when it marred he took it and remade it. But sometimes when the clay marred, he was unable to make another vessel, the vessel was broken, and it was carried out and thrown away outside of the potter's house. The last mention of the potter is in Matthew 27:

**Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, Who is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me (Mat. 27:3-10).**

The potter's field was the place where wrecked and ruined pottery was thrown. This potter's field was bought by the blood of the Son of God. What a paradox that the very blood that Jesus shed was bought for thirty pieces of silver and the money was used to buy a potter's field where wrecked and ruined pottery was thrown away! But through it all one may see the sovereignty of God and the greatness of God.

By the blood that was shed, bought for thirty pieces of silver which bought a potter's field, God made it possible for the life that had been marred by sin and ruined by sin to be redeemed through the gospel of redemption, to be remade by God into the likeness of His own Son and in the image of His Son, so that man could once again enjoy fellowship with Him. What a wonderful thing, the possibility of sinful man's being

remade by the sovereignty of go through His grace, but it involves man's free moral agency and his individual responsibility in accepting the offer that God extends to him through the gospel of Christ.

There was a man by the name of Saul of Tarsus, bitter, self-righteous, a man with a great amount of devotion and ability; but he marred in the hands of God. He was rebellious against God, despised God's people, fought against the church. He stood and watched one of God's own saints stoned to death, held the clothes as Stephen was stoned. How the clay that God had made had become so marred and prejudiced in his thinking, until he could watch one of God's own children be stoned to death! But then God took that same clay and remade it. God was able, because of the blood that bought a potter's field where wrecked and ruined pottery had been thrown away, to remake this man.

The potter's field is an example of the place all of humanity would be cast had it not been for the blood of God's Son shed on the cross. In the shedding of the blood one sees the sovereignty of God and the grace of God extended to a world that is lost in sin, without God and without hope. But this opens the door for the free moral agency of man to work and to reach out and, by the hand of the obedience of faith, to lay hold of the grace of God and to be redeemed from sin, to let God remold and remake him.

What a sobering thought to realize that the God that made the universe, the God that is sovereign, made me so that I am free so that when there is set before me alternatives I have the ability to make the choice and determine what I will do and what I will let God do with me! I am thankful that in the scheme of redemption of God could take a weak and frail being like me and, through His sovereignty, by His grace and the blood of His Son, when I had marred my life by sin remold and remake me. How thankful I am that God's sovereignty does not set aside my responsibility and my free moral agency, but the sovereignty of His grace motivates me to use the mind and the affections and the will that He gave me to serve Him, to take my life, surrender it to His will, and to let Him mold and make me so that I will be suited and fit to live with Him in heaven when this life is over.

Dear reader, friend, is your life marred by sin? Why not let God remold and remake you through His gospel? Are you not persuaded of the truths of the gospel, the value of righteousness? Are you not tired and weary of sin? Are you not ready and willing to lay it aside, to give it up, and to walk through the obedience of faith, the confession of your faith in Christ as the Son of God, to be baptized, buried with Him in baptism to be raised a new creature in Christ? Let Him then take your life, remold and remake it day by day.~

**Deceased**

## THOSE TO SERVE

**SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2024**

<b>Announcements</b>	John West
<b>Scripture Reading</b>	Steven Johnson <i>Rev. 10:1-11</i>
<b>Song Leader</b>	Jonathan West
<b>Prayer</b>	Stephen Cohn/Zack Nero (AM) Joshua West/Gary Blasingame (PM)
<b>Speakers</b>	David Brown
<b>Lord's Table (AM)</b> (Luke 22:66-71)	
Joshua West	Bret Bailey
Zack Nero	Eric Paluka
<b>Lord's Table (PM)</b>	
J.D. Gunter	Ben Gunter
<b>Audio/Video Monitor</b>	Eric Paluka
<b>Camera/Door Monitor</b>	Stephen Cohn

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024**

*(via Zoom Meetings)*

<b>Announcements</b>	J.D. Gunter
<b>Speaker</b>	Bret Bailey
<b>Bible Class Teacher</b>	David Brown

### FOR MARCH

<b>Prepare Communion</b>	L. Paluka
<b>Lock Buildings</b>	Nero
<b>Prepare Bulletin Board</b>	TBA

## IN NEED OF PRAYERS

Edith Young, Bob Terry, Glenda Hackworth, Zack Nero, Cynthia Jackson, Elnora Oxendine, Bernice Hastings, Charles & Ann Nero, Nathaniel Rimmer, Chuck & Nancy Verkist, Freda Smith, Noah Hackworth, Orlinda Chumbley, Carmen Hardy, and Roelf & Janice Ruffner.

## TEST YOUR BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

What was Israel's last encampment before crossing Jordan?

**Answer to last week's question:**  
Numbers 33

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- **Tuesday, March 26th:** Ladies' Bible Class
- **March 29th-31st:** Spanish congregation lectureship.