



# The Reflector

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## Things Working for Our Good

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"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28 KJV)

This verse has been a comfort to Christians throughout the present dispensation. Many take the "all things" in the verse to be unlimited i.e., that every single thing that happens to one will eventually be for his good. Others view the "all things" to be limited by the context, like many other passages where "all things" or "all men" are used to mean all within the context. As Vine puts it, "In the plural it signifies 'the totality of the persons or things referred to'" While I lean toward the second view, the point of this article is not to defend that view. My purpose is to help us appreciate the "things" in the immediate context (chapter 8) that are working together for our good as a people who loves God.

### Our Freedom in Christ

After describing the struggle of one under the domination of sin while under "the law," meaning the law of Moses, in chapter seven, Paul now turns to the benefits of being in Christ chapter 8. In verses 1-4, he declares there is "now no condemnation" in Christ. Why. Because of what "the law of the Spirit of life" in Christ has done, namely, freed us from "the law of sin and death." This was the law that he said was working in his body while he was under the law (of Moses). (7:23-24). There are three laws discussed in verses 1-4: 1) "The law" (of Moses), 2) "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ" and 3) "the law of sin and death." What law number 1 could not do, free one for from number 3, number 2 did. Hence, there is no

condemnation because one is freed from the bondage of the law of sin and death. By this process we are able to enjoy the "righteousness of the law (of Moses)" (v. 4), without having kept it, but by the freedom (forgiveness) that came with "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ." that provides for the taking away sin, thus making one righteous. What a blessing!

### The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Beginning with verse 11, Paul declares that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Because of this we are no longer to live after the flesh but the Spirit (v. 12) and put to death the "deeds (sins) of the body" (v. 13). One of the great benefits of the indwelling of the Spirit is the intercession that he makes to the Father for us when we are unable to put into words our groanings which we through our weakness cannot express (vv. 26-27).

### Children of God

He defines sons of God as being those who are led by the Spirit of God (v. 14). From other passages, like 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we know that the Spirit leads through the God breathed written word of God. We are born again ... by the word of God (1 Pet. 2:23). But here we notice the things associated with being Sons of God. The privilege of calling God, "Abba, Father" (v. 15). As children we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ and as such we can know that if we suffer with Him that we will be glorified with him in the end (vv. 17-18). The award awaiting at the end is called the glorious liberty of the "children of God" – a reward that belongs only to those who are God's children.

### Hope in Christ

Paul declares elsewhere that those without

Christ are without God and without hope in the world. In this chapter 8, as children of God, we have hope in Christ that far out weighs any suffering that we are called on to suffer for Christ (v. 18). We live with the hope (or “earnest expectation” – v. 19) that after the suffering of this short life in Christ on earth, we will receive the “glorious liberty of the children of God” (v. 21) or “the redemption of our body” (v. 23). Living with knowledge that this life is not all there is for us keeps us pushing to do that which the Lord expects of us. Not only is the suffering of this present time not worthy of being compared to the life to come, even the joy and comfort of the fellowship that we have with members of the Godhead and each other is but a small foretaste of the everlasting life that we will enjoy with them in heaven. What a blessed hope!

Truly “what shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (v. 31). They all work together for our good.

lost. The meaning here is that they had such an irreverent, defiant manner toward all godly things that The Lord was determined to punish them. The greatest lesson is that Eli failed in raising his sons. Training children involves modeling proper behavior before them. But that’s not all. We must teach them God’s will and discipline them too. Eli refused to restrain his sons from their wickedness. (1 Sam.3:13) He did not have the moral courage to do what he knew was right. Fathers are given the enormous task of raising their children in “the training and admonition of The Lord.” (Eph.6:4) Eli did not do this but we can.

Israel needed a strong leader during Eli’s time. The Philistines were threatening and Israel greatly needed God’s help. Yet, The Lord does not bless a people whose leaders show disdain for righteousness. You might say, “Eli was good. He followed The Lord.” It is true that Eli did not participate in any of the iniquities of his sons. Yet, he did not truly follow The Lord. In fact, God sent a prophet to tell Eli that his family was going to be punished because he honored his sons more than God. (1 Sam.2:29)

Hophni and Phinehas were killed in battle with the Philistines. The Philistines captured the ark of God. Upon hearing of its capture, Eli, fell backward out of his seat and died. (1 Sam.4:18)

Too often as fathers we console ourselves by saying we don’t approve of what our children do. We are washing our hands of their evil deeds. Yet, we might not do the difficult work of standing against their sins. When we refuse to stand against evil, we fail as a parent and as a leader of God’s people.

## Eli: A Weak Leader

**David Hartsell**

Eli was the next to the last Israelite judge. He was not only a judge but he was also the high priest. As political and religious leader, Eli was in prime position to influence many to follow God. However, though Eli was personally good, he failed as a leader – first as a father and then as a judge.

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas that were priests. They were not dedicated to God but were extremely evil. They violated the sacrificial laws and were immoral with the women who assembled at the tabernacle. Their sins were so blatant that they caused many in Israel to abhor “the offering of the Lord.” (1 Sam.2:12-22) Eli reprimanded his sons for their evil behavior. “So he said to them, ‘Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people.’” (1 Sam.2:23) They ignored their father’s warnings and continued in their sinful ways. The text says that this was “because The Lord desired to kill them.” (1 Sam.2:25) Clearly, God’s nature does not want to kill anyone or does not wish anybody to be

## Church Autonomy

**Robert Turner**

“Autonomy” is a compound word, composed of *autos*, meaning “self,” and *nomos*, meaning “law.” An ordinary dictionary will tell us the word means “self-ruled,” so that an autonomous church is “self-governed, without outside control.”

There are those who reject the concept of God and revelation, saying ultimate authority is in man.

To them there would be no limitations placed upon self-rule. Of course most of our readers accept Christ as King, and know that a church which wishes to exercise "self rule" in all things is not the church of Christ. But our brethren are far from clear on the legitimate (scriptural) field of self rule, and how this affects the relation of one church to another. Some seem to think "autonomy" means the right to devise organizational arrangements for which there is no N.T. authority; while others think calling attention to such error violates the "autonomy" of the erring brethren.

A church can not "rule" on the importance of Christ's death, the necessity of faith, the meaning and purpose of baptism; for these are legacies of truth which Christ gave the world and by which we are called. The church is the product of the gospel, not its author. One would not violate some church's autonomy by teaching along these lines, for no church as a legitimate "say" in such things.

Does God give a local church the right to decide the day of worship? May they "rule" on the need for assembling, or the so-called "items" of acceptable worship? It is not clear that even in those things assigned as church (team) activity, a distinction must be made in that which is part of "the faith, once for all delivered unto the saints" (over which the congregation has no rule), and such details as are left to human judgement. The field of church autonomy is that of human judgement, and that only.

As an example: God's word indicates the day on which saints are to partake of the Lord's Supper---but it does not specify the time of day. The time is left to human judgement, and therefore to the "rule" of brethren. A church exercises autonomy when it sets its own time of assembling---and we might add, that time rests upon human authority, not upon divine mandate. Each church has this same right and may choose different times. If one sought to unduly influence or alter another's time of meeting, this would be interfering with "autonomy."

But if one church should declare Thursday the Lord's Day, others could seek to teach them more perfectly the way of the Lord---and violate no legitimate "autonomy" in doing so---for no church has the scriptural right to "rule" in matters God has settled.

When brethren have honest differences in their understanding of what God has said, one church may believe their "ruling" is done in matters of judgement, while another may believe they violate plain teachings of God. If both parties are equally interested in serving God, neither will rest the case in "our rights," but will be happy to study God's word together so that God can rule supremely in all.

## What is the Difference?

Irven Lee

An instrument of music was introduced into the worship at Midway, Kentucky about 1858. This innovation moved slowly among churches in the North and finally came to the South about 1900. Of course, the church support of the missionary society and other central collecting and disbursing organizations came with the instrument. The intra church organizations also came along about the same time, as well as church sponsored entertainment and fraternization with the Protestant denominations who taught that one is saved at the point of faith before obedience.

If a stranger had come to some little town in the early part of this century and had inquired as to the location of the meeting place of the church, some local man might have asked, "Which one?" The stranger might then have asked; "What is the difference?" He would have been told that one used instruments of music and the other did not. Division usually came when the instrument was added. Actually, the social gospel and the church support of manmade institutions also marked the difference, but these facts were not so conspicuous to the neighbors at first. Even the churches themselves gave almost nothing but lip service to the societies with an occasional small token gift of money.

The greatest difference of all was not seen or generally realized. The real difference was in the attitude toward the Bible. Those who brought in the innovations would say that the Bible does not say that we should not have these things. To them the silence of the scriptures meant liberty to add samples of human wisdom. Those who did not approve of the instrument and the societies pointed out that these things were without New Testament authority. They

were not commanded, implied, or taught by approved example. To them it was a sin to go beyond that which was written (2 John 9; Rev. 22:18-19; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Pet. 1:3) Those who approved the changes thought of themselves as progressives. They were bringing in the things that were similar to the practices of the neighboring religious bodies so they would not be so "narrow" (different). In their sight, those who opposed the innovations were non-progressives. Then, as always, the church division was accompanied by bitterness. One group thought that the others were fanatics, hair-splitters, moss backs, antis, and non-progressives even though they were teaching and practicing what their fathers and grandfathers and the Bible taught.

The "progressives" carried most of the members in this movement which was more popular with the religious organizations about them. It was a move in their direction. The progressives wanted to be more acceptable to their neighbors. They were tired of the word "narrow" even though our Lord spoke of the way that leads to life as being narrow (Matt. 7:13, 14). Finer buildings were erected, kitchens were added, and plans were made to have more fun and "fellowship." There was less emphasis on the fellowship often mentioned in the New Testament. That fellowship was with God and with fellow soldiers in earnestly contending for the faith. The battle with denominational errors in faith and practice gradually came to a halt where the instrument and other innovations came into favor. The progress of the progressives was not in winning the fight against error in the good warfare (1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 4:7; Eph. 6:10-20).

Emotionalism and sensationalism came with the progressive movement. The interest came to be in numbers, prominent members, good buildings, and social recognition in the community. These ideas and practices did not come to every place at the same time or to every member to the same degree. There was a package of things to be accepted, and some would offer resistance at times; but the machine was moving rapidly by the time the instrument was added. Big changes in attitude had already come or it would never have been added. Changes continued to such an extent that those who first added the instrument would be shocked by the

"Disciples" today if they could come back to life and walk in among their descendants in religion. It would be hard for them to believe that they were more than distant cousins.

Typical arguments for the instruments of music were: (1) David used them; (2) Others use them; (3) We like them; (4) The Bible does not say that we cannot have them. These arguments are as strong as they could make; they are not indications of their desire to please God in the church that is according to His eternal purpose. They had reorganized the church until they could speak of "our church, our money, and our business." Their desire was the final and highest law. To speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where it is silent was too narrow for them.

The only choice the "non-progressives" had was to go along with the innovations or get out and worship with the few kindred spirits they could find. They might meet in some one's living room, a store building, a court room, or a school house. In several years, they would reach a point where they could build a meeting house of their own on some little inexpensive lot. These "anti's" were almost always the members with less money and with less social prestige. There was a sense of responsibility (often too weak) that caused them to start one little church after another in communities all around the good building where the "progressives" met and continued to become more and more progressive. By the late thirties, this growth of the more conservative people became rather amazing. In the more rapid growth of the forties many came to these conservative churches from the religious groups about them. Some of them were not fully converted, and teaching was inadequate in many places. They were not grounded sufficiently in the basic teachings of the one body and the importance of doing all things according to the pattern. The progressive, social gospel, and institutional spirit started among them. In the last thirty or so years, history has been repeating itself in a very vivid way. It is easy to see that attitude, arguments, bitterness, and the back to denominationalism movement are the same as they were a few decades earlier. ■