

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 The Lordship of Earth

1 Samuel 8:4-20

June 9, 2024

The everlasting and the time-bound; divine and human things, the lordship of heaven and the lordship of earth; there is a duality about the experience of life. We live in two worlds at once, one foot in heaven and one on earth.

It is the spirit of the age to downplay, or even deny, that there are two realms, in favor of the idea that there is the physical universe, and that is all there is. Although a vast majority, well over 90% of the world's population, claims to disagree with the spirit of the age, it is possible to live as if one agrees that there is only one realm, giving lip service to one way while living according to the other.

This can work both ways, some say they only believe in the material world, but give witness to the other belief by the way they live their lives. Regardless of what one claims to believe, reality must be confronted.

You may have heard that. "perception is reality." In whatever sense that expression may contain a well-taken point, it is in fact not true. Perception is perception. Reality is reality. When a disagreement between the two occurs, sooner or later there is a collision, and reality always wins.

For the Israelites, one such collision occurred over the nature of government. Were they to understand

themselves to be under divine rule? Or under a government typical of the other nations around them? Human rule? They decided that they wanted to be like the nations around them. They wanted a king.

One must not be too hard on them. It was middle of the time when most people lived on farms, and monarchy was the order of the day, so God's people wanted one for themselves. They had landowners so they had candidates for office. There *are* other places in the Old Testament that defended the royal house, especially after the time of King David. But here in the First Book of Samuel, we hear the voice that gave a warning to the lie.

It was Samuel himself that tried to speak this warning. "Don't do it! Don't give the preponderance of the power to the people who own most of the land, especially not to just *one* of them . . . and don't give your political and social order over to inheritance, the way all the other countries did.

For the king will tax you high and take your land; he will make your sons fight wars, turn your daughters into household servants, and become filthy rich at your expense. There will be a hierarchy because that is what inheritance does given enough time; a few at the top who will live high off the hog, while the majority are at the bottom and barely get by. When the king gets greedy, the people will pay. When the king messes up, the people will not be able to fix it.

Don't be like the other nations." Samuel said, and in a surprising development, the Lord stepped in to tell Samuel that human beings are prone to obey the spirit of the times, and desire to be like all the others around them, rather than set apart.

"Listen to all that the people are saying to you, it is not *you* they have rejected, but they have rejected *me* as their king."

There is a basic reality that must be faced; human beings obey the demands of earthly existence. Even God accepts that human beings submit not to one or the other, but to both.

A concession must be made to the earthly realm. The eternal things *are* hard to see, and even correctly perceiving what can be seen is difficult. Throughout our lives we are bound by this earthen vessel existence, to say otherwise is either to be mistaken or dishonest, in the same way that it is a mistake to deny the reality of eternal things because they are hard to see.

In whatever form it comes, human governments are imperfect. We are forced to regard this aspect as universal human experience. No matter what side one is on in the present situation, we submit to at best imperfect governments, even in the age of republics . . . as part of what we mean when we say we are sinners, "that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." No human civilization has ever successfully

achieved submission to divine rule. People don't sit still for it.

We *do*, however, live under the power and authority of God. In the gospel reading for the day, which comes from the Gospel of Mark. Jesus is accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the evil one. He answers the charge with familiar words made even more famous by Abraham Lincoln in the days of the American Civil War,

"How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."

The implication for us is that if we are divided against ourselves, either inwardly, or in our external relationships, we also cannot survive. The conflict is clearly one between the demands of the two realms, the Spirit and the flesh, as Paul explains it. And if there is a definitive statement it comes from the letters of Paul, particularly the Second Letter to the Corinthians, in which Paul has written,

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."

By that point in the letter Paul has already said that we, "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary (and by the way, *all* the evidence confirms this statement), but what is unseen is eternal." And a few verses later, "we live by faith and not by sight."

“So we (and by this he means himself and those with him) do not lose heart . . .” And neither do we. No matter what happens. Nothing that is happening in the world or in our lives is contrary to that message.

The human failure, either at the group dynamic level, or the individual, is enough to shake our confidence in this grace, if we fix our eyes only on what can be seen. In this sense the Lordship of earth refers to the power that earthly life has over us because we are dependent on its resources, and what the earthly life requires of us, we obey.

Let us not forget, however, the other way of understanding our world. In this other sense the lordship of earth refers to God’s lordship over the earth. The earth is the Lord’s and all things therein, which is a superior kingship, and a higher calling; let us not reject God as Lord of the created realm.

This calls for humility and understanding. Since it is *not* possible for us to live out this life without being attached to its demands, we do not pretend to somehow be above it all. We are in the world but not of the world. We acknowledge the earthen vessel life and its demands, but are not to be ultimately controlled by them. We have a higher allegiance, and have been given instructions about how to live in both realms at the same time.

Don’t become too attached to present order of things, it is passing away. It is temporary. Do not be greedy and selfish for the things of this life, angry about or

afraid of losing them, for these are the characteristics of the earth’s lordship over us, and it has no lasting power.

Rather, love God, love others. Be forgiving, compassionate, and hopeful, accepting God’s love for us, and God’s lordship over the earth as the source of our peace and joy.

The source of the character to which we aspire; the commitment to do good, and when we fail, to re-commit to the good; the confidence in the resurrection; in the healing of our bodies and of the nations, and in the liberation of the captives, *is* God’s grace manifesting itself in an undying faith, because God, “made his light shine in our hearts . . . to give us the light of the knowledge . . . of the glory of God . . . in the face of Christ.”

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