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GOD FIRST – HIS APPOINTMENTS.

"Giving thanks unto the Father...who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of his dear Son...He is the Head of the body the Church: who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." – Col. 1:12-18.

SCARCELY could we hope to find a more suitable motto for the Lord's people during the present year, than, the words, "God First." A thorough devotion to him, a full recognition of all his appointments, acknowledges our Lord Jesus: as our text declares, he has the preeminence, – he is Lord of all. This motto was adopted by the Allegheny Church for the present year: assuredly all who shall endeavor to live up to this motto to the best of their ability will enjoy much of divine favor, and make considerable progress in the narrow way.

The text suggests the thought that the divine government is an autocratic one – the reverse of a democratic government, "of the people, by the people, for the people." As we look over the governments of civilized nations, we find that the more autocratic the government the less intelligent the people who will support it. For instance, the Russian government is autocratic; the authority, the power, being very largely held by the Czar, without responsibility to a parliament or Congress representing the people. As an example of a liberal monarchy, Great Britain is perhaps best, for there the powers of the sovereign are quite limited; the aristocracy being represented in the House of Lords, and the populace in the House of Commons; these two representative bodies share with the monarch the responsibilities of the government. The government of the United States, in which all the citizens are ostensibly on an equality, and in which the Citizen President, as their [R2984 : page 101] choice, is the chief executive,

is recognized as the highest type of civil government, most favorable to the masses – a republic, a democracy.

It may at first seem strange to some that the type of earthly government least favorable, least esteemed by the intelligent, – the autocratic form, should most nearly represent the form of government which the Almighty has instituted for the entire realm of creation. If an autocratic form of government has proven itself so unfavorable to human liberty and progress amongst men now, can it be possible that this form of government is the very best for the universe in general, and forever? If so, wherein lies the difference? By what process of reasoning shall we demonstrate that that which experimentally amongst men has proven itself to be bad, should ultimately prove itself to be best? We answer that the difference is because all men are fallen and imperfect; hence are under the dominion of sin and selfishness to a greater or less degree; and additionally, all are imperfect in knowledge and in judgment, even if their hearts were fully disposed for righteousness. On the contrary, the Almighty is perfect in his attributes, and in his knowledge; and the law of his being as well as the law of his empire is – the reverse of selfishness – the law of Love. It is indeed dangerous to be fully under the power of any fallen imperfect being, however well intentioned; but it is a most desirable thing to be under the guidance and control of a perfect being, possessed of all knowledge, wisdom, justice, love, power. This is the situation: Jehovah, our God, is a dictator, his laws are perfect, just and good, and all of his creatures subject to those laws are blessed. Under these conditions, the autocratic, theocratic government which now obtains in heaven, is the most desirable one of all; hence, as our Lord suggests, we pray that this same government may ere long come to earth; saying, – "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is done in Heaven."

Altho Jehovah God, our Creator, is not elected to his position, and does not hold it through the consent **[R2985 : page 101]** of his creatures; yet all of his creatures who are in harmony with the

principles of righteousness delight to hold him as their King and Lord, – their Dictator, whose every wish it is their pleasure to obey. As a Dictator he has appointed Christ Jesus to be "Head of the body, the Church." But although we are not asked to vote, as to whether or not Christ shall be the head of the Church, God, nevertheless, respects our free moral agency, to the extent that we are not compelled to accept his arrangement in this matter. But, if we object, it means that we are not of the body, the Church; for the Almighty proceeds with his own plans, and those who do not fall in with those plans merely fail to that extent to secure to themselves the proffered blessings.

Similarly the Almighty did not inquire of the angels whether or not they would accept the glorified Jesus as their Lord: he autocratically elevated our Lord Jesus, because of his implicit obedience even unto death, even the death of the cross, as the Apostle declares, "Wherefore [on account of his obedience unto death] God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess...to the glory of God the Father." Similarly, our context declares, that in his prehuman condition our Lord Jesus was from the beginning the head, the chief of all his Father's creatures, works, arrangements. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Col. 1:16,17.) This agrees also with the statement of John's Gospel (1:1), "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with *the* God, and the Logos was *a* God: the same was in the beginning with *the* God. All things were made by him; and without him was not one thing made that was made."

It appears from this, that the Heavenly Father has exercised his autocratic government from the beginning; choosing his first-born Son to be his representative in the entire work of creation. It appears further that it was to this first-born Son that the privilege or opportunity of

becoming man's Redeemer was first proffered – as a privilege; because the Almighty autocratically intended that this matter of man's redemption should not only display his Justice and Love, his Wisdom and his Power, in respect to mankind, but it should additionally be a test, a manifestation, of the loyalty of his First-begotten; and that such loyalty, being fully demonstrated, would properly become the occasion for the still further advancement of his First-begotten One, – to the divine nature, "glory, honor, immortality," – demonstrating his worthiness in all things to be *preeminent*.

It is not, of course, the Apostle's thought that the Father made the Lord Jesus preeminent above himself, Jehovah. We are continually to remember the Apostle's suggestion of I Cor. 15:27, where, after declaring that the Father hath put all things under the Son, he adds, "It is *manifest* [need not be stated] that he [Jehovah] is excepted, which did put all things under him [Jesus]." So, gathering the proper thought of our text, we are still to remember that God is first: and that our Lord Jesus is first to us, as the Head of the Church, because God has given him this preeminence. In recognizing Jesus' full authority and headship of the Church, we are honoring him who appointed him, and thus we keep God first: as our Lord declares, "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." (John 5:23.) They are not to confound the two, but are to worship and reverence and obey both the Father and the Son; for the latter seeks not, and does not his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him, and who exalted him to his position of preeminence over all his creatures. The Apostle explains this relationship fully and emphatically when he declares that, – The head of the woman is the man; and the head of the man is Christ; and the head of Christ is God – Jehovah. – I Cor. 11:3.

While rejoicing in liberal governments amongst men, and esteeming popular governments the most desirable under present conditions, we, nevertheless, recognize that this is so merely because present conditions are evil ones; because selfishness is the reigning **[R2985 : page 102]** law amongst men: the selfish interests

and instincts of the masses may be trusted as safer for the whole population than the selfish instincts of one individual or one class. Consequently, while rejoicing in the government of this land, and in the favor which comes to us under this government, we are still praying for the glorious Kingdom which God has promised, in which his will alone shall be the law, and his representative, the King over all the earth.

In the Church the divine law or theocracy is already to some extent established. We do not refer to the human institutions called churches, but to the Church "whose names are written in heaven," and whose leadership and membership as a body are directed by the Lord Jesus, their appointed Head. As for religious systems amongst men, we believe that on account of the weaknesses of the race and the fact that even the best are more or less contaminated by selfish impulses, the despotic forms of church government are most evil, and the democratic forms of church government proportionately the less evil, after the same manner as in civil governments. And here we note the Lord's arrangement for his Church to be a combination of the two forms of government. (1) It is democratic, inasmuch as the choice of the leaders is to be determined by the judgment of the *members*. (2) It is theocratic in the sense that the members are not to exercise their own preferences in respect to their choice (votes), but are to use their best intelligence in ascertaining *the will of the Lord*, their Head, in the matter; and hence are to express by their votes so far as they are able, not their own wills, but the will of the Lord. Here is the most harmonious and simple and beneficent arrangement imaginable under present conditions. Each individual, or unit of the Church, member in the "body" of Christ, is to say within his own heart, "God first," and God's appointment of Christ as a Bishop or Shepherd of his flock makes him and his will preeminent in our thoughts, in our hearts, in our words, in our deeds. We must, so far as we can discern his will, follow the same; so far as we can understand his Word, we are to speak his Word; and in our choice of leaders his will and not our own is to control. Thus in the Church, in the "body," in all of its associated

interests and affairs, God first and Christ, his representative, preeminent, is to be the order, – in proportion as each member grows in grace and in the knowledge of the divine will. Thus God, through his faithful, still sets in the Church the various members, according as it pleases him. (I Cor. 12:18.) But this applies to each little group of the Lord's people, and to the whole church in general, only in proportion as they conform to his will and Word, – making God first and Christ, the Head, preeminent.

This same principle is to be carried beyond the Church into the homes of the Lord's people. There, also, God is to be first and his representative, Christ, to be preeminent. If the head of the family be a member of the body of Christ, and recognizes him to be his Head, he must recognize his laws in the family as well as in the Church. And recognizing his law he must oppose every thing approximating anarchy – lawlessness; he must hold up before the family as well as before himself, Jehovah the autocratic governor and law-giver; and Christ Jesus his autocratic representative; and the perfect law of Love, which he sets forth, to be the law of all those who are members of his body; – to rule in their hearts perfectly, and in their mortal flesh as far as lieth in them, – to the extent of their ability. The reign of law in every family should be enforced both by precept and example; but it must never be forgotten that it is the law of Love – prompted by love, executed in love, accompanied by every kind and helpful influence possible.

This will mean that so far as possible each member of the Church recognizing Christ as his Head, will seek to do the will of God in his family; and this will mean that if he has not already established the Family Altar of prayer, he will immediately do so, – to the extent that this is possible. If on account of work or business it is impossible to have family devotions daily, he can probably have them weekly, and we presume that the Lord will accept the good intentions and best endeavors thus evidenced. If the man, the divinely appointed head of the family, is not a member of the body of Christ, the wife, though a

Christian, is to recognize the divine law upon this subject, that the man is the head of the woman and of the family, and she is not to establish *family* worship in any manner in conflict with the expressed will of her husband. She should seek the Lord's blessing and guidance and over-ruling providences, that her husband may be agreeable to the arrangement, and should await the results. The husband who is not a Christian but is, nevertheless, morally and religiously disposed, will under these conditions feel all the more the responsibilities of his position; and the wise and moderate and noble conduct of the wife will have the greater weight with him because of her moderation in this matter, and the evidence he has that she is subject to a higher law and lawgiver, to whom he also should be subject.

Putting God first, and Christ preeminent as his representative, should have an influence also upon our business dealings in which we come in contact with the world: so that in our buying or selling, or whatsoever we do, we should remember continually to seek to do those things pleasing in the sight of the one whom we desire to please, and who is *preeminent* in our hearts. This will mean a decrease of selfishness and an increase of love, and a decrease of meanness [R2986 : page 102] and an increase of nobility of character toward all; and the result will be as our Master suggested, saying, "Let your light so shine before men that they seeing your good works shall glorify your Father which is in heaven."

But while this matter of putting God first, and recognizing his appointments, laws and will in all of life's affairs, will exercise the foregoing influences in matters of the Church, matters of the home and family and matters of business and contact with the world, yet the chief influence of all will surely be found in our own hearts and lives. The thought of the will of Christ preeminent, connecting with all the doings of life in public and in private, – the thought that we wish God to have the first place in our affections, and his blessing in respect to our influence, our joys, our pleasures, our hopes, our aims, – what [R2986 : page 103] a blessing this will bring! – what godliness, what growth

in the fruits and graces of the spirit! Very quickly this preeminence of Christ will expand beyond the *actions* of life and attach itself to our words. The true Christian will seek not only to act gently, as he believes the Lord would be pleased to have him act, but additionally, he will seek to speak gently, kindly, moderately, modestly, – and thus to show forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. No better homage and worship can we offer to the Lord, and no greater honor can we do to his name amongst men, than by exemplifying his teachings in the words and acts of our lives.

But now we come to the most important point of all; for behind all our doings and teachings, in public and in private, are our thoughts. It is of paramount importance that in seeking to have God first in life's affairs, we shall see to it that he is first in our thoughts; – that Jesus there has the preeminence which God intends he should have; – that our affections should be preeminently set upon him more than upon husband, wife, or children; more than upon houses or lands; more than upon honors of men. Christ is to be enthroned in our hearts preeminent over all things, – yea, preeminent over self, and with many this submission of self is the most difficult proposition. This is exactly what our Lord taught, saying, – "If any man come to me, and hate not [love not less] his father, and mother, and wife and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, his own life, [being] also, he cannot be my disciple." – Luke 14:26.

Recurring to the illustration of our text – that of the human body, of which Christ is the head and all we are members: let us notice how intimate is the connection between the head and the members in a healthy, properly constituted body. Each member is in direct communication with the head by means of the nerves (however rapidly it is effected); in case of trouble, accident, pain, – the matter is at once reported to the head, and immediately a member of the body, perhaps a hand, is prompt to give service. The head has full direction because the spirit of the head pervades all the members of the body; so that, – "If one member suffer, all suffer with it;" and every member, in

proportion as it is in harmony with the head and its spirit of love for the members, will be prompt to act. Sometimes in our human bodies the hand may stretch forth assistance to the injured member so quickly that it seems impossible to conceive that the message first went to the head, and that our hand was subsequently directed by the head to assist; and so it is with the members of the body of Christ; those who are in full touch and sympathy with the Head, the Lord, are to so large an extent of "*one spirit*" with him, so anxious to do his will, and so well informed in respect to what his will is, that they sometimes seem to act almost automatically, in respect to rendering help by word, or deed, or otherwise to those with whom they are in contact.

Let us, dear brethren and sisters, during the year dating from the Memorial Supper, have for the watchword of our hearts, "God First" – and Christ "preeminent" by divine appointment; – remembering that it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh, and the general conduct of life proceeds. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." – Prov. 4:23.

