

KINGDOM SPIRIT



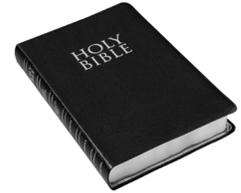
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“SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

Matthew 6:33



Issue 906

PAUL’S EPISTLES TO THE CHURCHES

With this issue, we begin our look at Paul’s epistles to the churches. We need to understand that the word translated “church” here is not the Greek word for church. The word is “ecclesia” and means “that which is called out.” It does not mean an organized church as we think of churches and/or denominations today, but rather a group of people who had been called out, or separated out, to be Christians.

Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians was written after his first trip to Corinth on his second missionary journey. It was written from Philippi. According to Acts 18, Paul had begun his ministry in Corinth by teaching in the synagogue, but had been thrown out. He continued in a private home next to the synagogue. One of his converts was Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue. Acquaintances included Aquila and Priscilla who had been recently ejected from Rome. Being tent-makers by trade, the trade that Paul was also trained in, Paul worked with them in this trade. He spent eighteen months there at that time.

This first letter was written in apparent answer to a letter from the church. Before he gets to the questions they had asked, he deals with something he had heard about the church that had him bothered. There were apparently divisions within the church, due to people following different apostles and disciples. He lists himself, Appolos, Peter and Christ as ones that the different factions were supposedly following. He asks, “Is

Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (I Cor. 6:18-19)

His answers to their questions begin with chapter 7. We are not told the questions—only the answers. The first question apparently had to do with whether marriage was proper at all. Though Paul felt remaining single was desirable, explaining why in chapt. 7:32-33, he tells them marriage is right and proper and gives some advice on marriage and also some advice in case a marriage doesn’t work out.

Another problem they had was with eating meat or food that had been offered to idols. Since idols were no-gods, Paul saw no problem eating meat that had been first offered to idols. However, since to non-Christians these idols represented gods, for them to see a Christian eating the meat that had been offered might put a stumbling block in their path to understanding Christianity. Therefore, for their sake Paul suggested they not eat it.

Paul then answers a question that apparently had to do with spiritual gifts. He acknowledges several, such as wisdom, healing, tongues, etc. He told them that as our own body had different members with different functions, so did the body of Christ (the church or more properly “ecclesia”) have different members with different functions so that the ecclesia or body can fully function. There seemed to be a special concern over speaking in tongues. Paul told them charity, or love, was the most important gift they could have regardless of whatever other gift they might possess. He also considered the gift of prophesy more important than that of tongues, but whatever

the gift, Paul admonishes that it be used properly.

He then repeats the gospel of Jesus Christ which he had preached in their presence. He reviewed the death, burial, and resurrection. Since Christ was resurrected, we also will be resurrected he tells them in chapt. 15:20, but they must recognize that, **“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”** (vs. 51) and then details what will happen in verse 52, **“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”** He then admonishes them in verse 58, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren; be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

The second letter to the Corinthians was written following a second trip by Paul to Corinth and as Paul is preparing for his third missionary journey. He has had to be very severe with them on his second trip as he apparently had to take care of a problem they wouldn't take care of themselves. This may have been the case of the fornicator discussed in the first letter, but we are not told what the problem was. Paul had a very great love for these people and thanks them for their prayers, love, and support during Paul's tribulation, but he does not want to return to them under the conditions of his last trip. We aren't told what he did during his second visit with them, but he is sorry he had to do it, though he feels that what he did was for their benefit. Apparently, the one who caused the problem has repented and is asking for forgiveness. Paul asks them to forgive this one who caused the problem and to comfort and confirm their love to him following his punishment.

He continues to talk of the hope we have in Christ. Though we know not what we shall be like, we know that in immortality God has prepared what we shall be, therefore it will be more glorious than our present bodies. As Christ is no longer known in the flesh, so shall we also be a new creature.

II Cor. 5:18-21 introduces us to a very important doctrine. This concerns the doctrine of

reconciliation. God, through Christ, has offered conciliation to the world. Paul urges that all be reconciled to Him.

Paul, in his love for the Corinthians, tells them he is jealous over them with a Godly jealousy. He is fearful that someone will come in among them and mislead them. Paul doesn't want to boast of himself, but he knows what he taught them is right and warns them not to be misled by any other doctrine. He lists his many persecutions as proof he has been tried sufficiently to prove his faith and love. He also again expresses his concern that they take care of the problems they have so he doesn't have to do so when he comes.

Galatia was an area or country, which is now central Turkey, rather than a city. So Paul's epistle to the Galatians, which was written from Rome during Paul's first stay there, was addressed to the churches of Galatia rather than to one church or group as the letters to the Corinthians were.

Paul comes to the central point of his letter very quickly in Gal. 1:6-7. This was a concern that they were being perverted away from the true gospel of Christ. This was a very serious concern of Paul's.

He first re-establishes his own credibility. He tells them he was taught directly by Jesus and not by other men. It was three years after his conversion before he went to Jerusalem and then for only fifteen days and then he didn't return to Jerusalem for fourteen years. Yet, he points out that he ran into no controversy with the apostles over what he had been teaching when he did return to Jerusalem. His only problem with the other apostles was with Peter in that he felt Peter was being hypocritical by associating with the gentiles until certain ones came from James and then he refused to eat with these same gentiles. When others of Paul's association started doing the same thing, he publicly confronted Peter about it (Gal. 2:14)

Paul then presents a rather extensive argument for justification by faith as opposed to justification by law. He points out that the promises to Abraham through which Christ redeemed Israel were by faith and not by law.

It may be well to point out what Paul is

talking about when he uses the term “law” here. That it was not the commandments, statutes and judgments Paul makes evident. In Gal. 3:17 he says, **“And this I say, that the covenant (the promises to Abraham), that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.”** Then in verse 19, he says, **“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made;”** referring to Jesus Christ. I John 3:4 tells us **“sin is the transgression of the law.”** So Paul is telling us this law he is talking about was added some four hundred thirty years after the promises were made because of transgression of the law. This new law was given to counteract, or to do something about, transgression of another law. If you will recall when we discussed the four categories of the law (Commandments, Statutes, Judgments and Ordinances), we indicated that the writing of the Ten Commandments in stone by God and the giving of the commandments, statutes and judgments attendant to them that God gave Moses, were primarily a codifying, or writing, of the laws that really weren’t new to the people. However, by codifying the laws and the people agreeing to them, the people now became responsible to these laws and a violation, or transgression, of one of them now became a sin, not only before the person or persons injured by the transgression, but now before God. Hence, another set of laws, the ordinances, containing primarily the sacrifice and worship laws, were given to provide atonement (or provide a covering over—i.e. forgive or justify) for the sins of the people, individually and/or nationally, when they violated one or more of the commandments, statutes and judgments. These ordinances were new, they had never been practiced or adhered to before. Now in Gal. 3:24, Paul says, **“Wherefore the law (these ordinances—sacrifice and worship laws) was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,”** (i.e. teach us the necessity of the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for us) **that we might be justified through faith.”**

It is apparent that some person or persons

had come to the Galatians teaching that it was still necessary, if they were to partake in the promises to Abraham, to continue, or as the case may be here, to begin observing these ordinances (or law). By the time of Christ, the Pharisaic or Talmudic law had grossly added to and distorted this law by what both Christ and Paul referred to as their “traditions of men.” Paul calls these Galatians foolish for accepting this type of teaching. After explaining that true and complete justification is by faith in Christ Jesus, Paul says in verse 29, **“And if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**

The text of chapters 3 and 4 make it evident he knew he was talking to Israelites. Thus he is telling them that just descending from Abraham did not automatically entitle them to partake of the promises to Abraham, but believing God as Abraham believed God was necessary as well. Gal. 4:1-2 explains the adoption custom at that time and how the redemption of them that are under the law (i.e. Israelites) works the same way. The custom was that a son really had basically the same standing in the household as a servant until he reached the age and maturity that he could take on the responsibility of his father. At that time the father “adopted” him, meaning he gave him standing in the household as a son who could and did take on family responsibility with his father. The son could then conduct business in his father’s name as if he were his father. This standing of a servant was the position Israelites had until the redemption by Christ, then, **“Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”** (Gal. 4:7) (We will discuss the inheritance more thoroughly when we study the book of Hebrews.) Paul then asks how they can turn back or away from this relationship to God.

When Paul was among them, he was received as an angel, even the acceptance of his physical problem (we are not told what this was), but now he feels they regard him as an enemy because he has told them the truth. He desires greatly to be with them again to convince them to return to the gospel of grace through Jesus Christ.

He admonishes them to stand fast in their liberty through Christ and not be again entangled in the yoke of bondage of the “traditions of men.” Christ is of no effect to one who thinks he is justified by the law. True righteousness can only come by our faith in Christ.

The Spirit and the flesh are contrary to one another with the works of the flesh being all kinds of sin, while the works of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, etc. It is the responsibility of those who are spiritual to restore in the spirit of meekness one who stumbles, remembering we are all tempted. We fulfill the law of Christ in bearing one another’s burdens. In summation he says, **“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”** (Gal. 6:15-16) JRL

RECONCILIATION — RESTORATION

A number of years ago as I studied the Bible, I realized that, though I had gone to church all my life, I had never heard it taught or preached that the Bible was basically an outline, or blue print if you will, of God’s overall plan for mankind. This outline became relatively clear to me as I studied and the series of lead articles in this publication for the last 2 1/2 years is a result of that realization. We have presented this study in various ways through the years since. But it is really only an outline of an outline, or a bird’s eye view, of the complete Bible. In the process of that study, some deeper doctrines became apparent that needed deeper study and thought. I have looked at some of these doctrines in part through articles in this publication, but I feel the need to give more attention to some of these doctrines. I’m hesitant to put labels or titles on these doctrines for fear they will turn someone away from

reading articles about these doctrines because they might associate it with a different teaching, in whole or in part, that someone has applied a particular label or title. So I pray you will bear with me and if you so desire, you can title these teachings, I feel have been made apparent to me, however you wish for your benefit.

I would like to begin this series of articles with Gen. 1:31, **“And God saw everything he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”** This included man, all living creatures, the earth and the universe. The point is that God considered it all good. In Isa. 45:7 God says, **“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”** If He creates evil, how can that be good? To answer this question, we have to be able to look at the big picture.

To try to put the big picture into perspective, let’s look at some Scripture. Rev. 13:8 tells us, **“And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”** There is a lot in this verse we want to explore, but for now let us pay particular attention to the last phrase, **“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”** It was determined by God (Jesus Christ) from the time He formed the foundation of the earth that Jesus would die. Before creation took place, this was the major part of God’s plan for mankind. If God knew before creation that Jesus would have to die for the sins of man and man was part of that creation, how could God call His creation good?

In Ephesians 1, the second sentence is four verses long. At risk of it being perceived that we are taking something out of context, verse 4 says, **“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”** Some were chosen long before they even came into existence to be in Christ, **“holy and without blame before him in love.”** If all of creation is good, why were not all chosen before they existed? Also, if there were those that were chosen before the foundation of the world, would not they be part of the creation? What about those not

chosen?

Hebrews 4:3 says, **“For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said ‘As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall (they shall not) enter into my rest:’ although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.”** This quote is from Psa. 95:11, speaking of the children of Israel when they refused to go into Canaan when God told them to the first time. In effect, if God ceased His work at the end of the sixth day, when He said all His creation was good, then the refusal of Israel to go into Canaan had to have been part of His plan, His creation. If so, how could He have viewed this as good.

The answer to all of these question lies in seeing the big picture, i.e. God’s complete plan.

How do we see the big picture? In Daniel 2, we find the story of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, having a dream he could neither remember nor interpret. Finally Daniel is called in to tell the king his dream and its interpretation. The dream consisted of a metal image the king saw that we now know represented the Babylonian succession of empires and ultimately this image was to be destroyed by a stone cut out without hands. In verse 35, we’re told that this stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. Mountain is often used in Scripture to represent a kingdom, as I believe is the case here. The stone that became a mountain represented the kingdom of God. Ultimately it filled the whole earth. This is like seeing the big picture from outer space. We don’t see it clearly at all but at least we know that it is the kingdom of God that makes up this big picture. So, let us get much closer and see what we can see.

The first 11 chapters of Genesis tell us of the creation including that of Adam and Eve, Adam’s sin through disobedience, the world becoming so wicked that God destroyed the then known world with a flood, and the saving of Noah and his family from the flood, and finally we narrow down to one man, Abram. Keep in mind that if God quit working at the end of the sixth

day, all of this had to be part of His creation that He set in motion and called it good.

Starting with Gen. 12, the Scripture centers on this one man Abraham throughout his life. God made some unconditional promises to Abraham that have affected all the world ever since. These promises, in effect, promised that from Abraham would come the kingdom of God with all that a kingdom consists of such as people, land, and a king that would bless all the earth. However, it was not until Abraham’s descendants had multiplied through Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons sufficiently, that this kingdom began to materialize as God leads them out of bondage in Egypt to the land of Canaan.

We need now to get a good bit closer that we might see more clearly. While we want to see things in more detail, keep in mind that it is only to see how they fit into the big picture and not become too narrowly focused on a particular detail. When the children of Israel (Jacob) came out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, they first were led by God to Mt. Sinai in the Arabian desert. God stopped them at this point and organized them into a nation. A major part of this organization was giving them His law system by which they were to govern and be governed. As part of the law system, He gave them laws to govern themselves as individuals, laws to govern themselves as a nation, and judgments for any disobedience of these laws. Also, because they promised God they would be obedient to His laws, but did not keep their promise, God also gave them laws to, in effect, right themselves with God. These laws the Bible often refers to as ordinances.

For purposes of this lesson, we want to zero in on the judgments. If we try to understand the principles judgment, rather than just a particular situation, we can then apply the principle to the various other situations we might encounter in our own lives. For example in Exodus 22:1, **“If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.”** In verse 4 we’re told, **“if the theft be certainly found in his hand**

alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double.” Several principles are involved here. In both verses, we see that the primary principle of judgment is restoration; the thief is to restore to the owner that which was stolen so that the owner is not only made whole but he is compensated for the trouble that the thief has caused him. Also since the ox served not only for meat but was also used as a “tool” in the owner’s livelihood, a larger restoration is required if the ox is killed or sold. If the original sheep or ox can be restored unharmed, the thief only had to restore double.

I believe we can understand the basic principle of restoration based on these two verses. If we study the law further, we’ll find that different circumstances warranted a different variation as to how much was required to be restored but the principle of restoration of things stolen, damaged or destroyed remain throughout. Whatever damage is done has to be restored plus varying amounts dependent on circumstances.

Now, suppose a man’s child is stolen, or kidnapped. Whether the child is harmed or not, how does one restore the damage done? Or if someone takes another man’s life (all crime is some form of theft), how does one restore that life? I think we can all agree that to restore in this type of theft is beyond man’s ability to do so. But would it be beyond God’s ability, or rather maybe we should say, would it be beyond God’s ability to devise a means for restoration to be made? I think not. For this reason, God’s judgment is death to the kidnapper, or murderer. How does this restore we might ask ourselves. As we today put someone suspected of a serious crime in jail until their trial, I suggest that death of the perpetrator equates to this. Jesus tells us in John 5:28-29, speaking of resurrection, **“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (judgment).”** Note that Jesus says all that are in the grave will be resurrected. This doesn’t leave

anyone out. But it tells us there is still judgment to come. John, in Rev. 20:12 tells us, **“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”** Again, this doesn’t leave anyone out except those who have already been resurrected in the first resurrection “see vs. 4-6 of Rev. 20). The books to be opened are the books of the law that include commandments and statutes by which guilt or innocence will be determined but also the judgments which are based on the principle of restoration. All this tells me that God has a way figured out for the murder, the kidnapper, the rapist, the adulterer, etc. to restore the damage done in each person’s life time. I don’t know what that way might be and am not going to speculated on it, but I know that God doesn’t change (Malachi 3:6), therefore, His principle of judgment does not change either.

But, what about Rev. 20:15, **“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”**? Keep in mind what verse 12 says. The people standing before God here are being judged according to their works. Let’s try, for a moment, to separate what we do from the fact that we do it, i.e. separate the actual theft from what thought process in our mind that causes us to do the damage. We want to deal further with this thought process a little later. But for now, let’s deal with the actual theft. In Deut. 33:2, Moses said, **“The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them: he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.”** God’s law is regarded as fire. God appeared to Moses as fire at the burning bush and He led the Israelites during the exodus as a pillar of fire. In Daniel 7, Daniel saw in a vision the same event John is describing in Rev. 20. He says God’s throne **“was like fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him.”** (vs. 9-10) A lake of fire

then, to me, represents God's law, His principle of restitution, which results in a cleansing, if you will, of the damaging works of man. Acts 3:20-21 tells us, looking toward Jesus' second coming, **“And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heavens must receive until the times of the restitution of all things.”** This tells us there will be a time of the restitution, or restoration, of all things as well as that all things will be restored. I think we could equate “the times of restitution of all things” with “the lake of fire.” That the lake of fire is not some everlasting burning torment will be come more evident as we continue this study. We will continue next issue and see how “reconciliation” plays a part in this. JRL

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

As we continue our study into the Gospel of John, I am going to ask that you read the Scripture from your own Bible to save space in this article

(Read John 1:10-14) Vs. 12—As many as received Him, He gave them power to become the sons, or children, of God, not by natural birth, but by spiritual birth, i.e. the will of God.

(Read John 1:15-18) (Read John 4:24) Man has only seen manifestations of God such as the burning bush, the pillar of fire and the cloud that led the children of Israel through the wilderness, the man who Abraham bargained with over Sodom, the man who wrestled with Jacob, and Jesus Christ for examples. Until man enters the spiritual realm when resurrected as Christ was resurrected, he cannot see God as a Spirit.

(Read John 1:19-28) The prophet the Jews were asking about is from Deut. 18:15-19 (Read) This was a reference to Christ. In answer to who he was, John the Baptist quotes Isa. 40:3. (Read Isa. 40:1-5)

(Read John 1:29-34) John the Baptist is saying in vs. 30-31 that, even though Jesus was related to him, he did not know that it was He who was the Messiah. He just knew that Jesus

would be made manifest to Israel, so because of this, he, John, came baptizing with water. Whether John understood the significance of Jesus' baptism, i.e. the preparation to both become the High Priest of the Melchisedec order and the offering of Himself for the sins of the world, in accordance with the law, is not stated. But He did recognize Jesus as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world at the point of Jesus coming to be baptized. This was confirmed when he saw the Spirit descend on Jesus from heaven like a dove. John then says that he saw and was bearing record, or bearing witness, that Jesus was the son of God.

Notice that he said that Jesus would take away the sin of the world, not just forgive it. I think there is a difference. If Jesus ultimately takes away all sin, i.e. totally removes it from the world, would we not be back in the position Adam and Eve were in prior to their sin?

(Read John 1:35-42) John tells us that one of the two disciples who went with Jesus was Andrew, but he doesn't tell us who the other is. It is generally thought that it was probably John (the apostle) himself since he does not ever name himself.

Andrew brought his brother, Simon, to see Jesus telling him that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus gives Simon the surname of Cephas, meaning a stone. In Mark and Luke, we're told that Jesus surnamed Simon, Peter. It is the same name, different languages. However, I believe that we only have one other instance where Jesus addresses Peter as Peter. That is in Matthew 16:18. We have no record of Peter being called Cephas again until in some of Paul's epistles. Jesus always addresses him as Simon.

(Read John 1:43-51) Many think that Nathaniel is the same as Bartholomew, one of the twelve, though this is not known for sure.

(Read John 2:1-11) Verse 11 says this is the beginning of miracles or signs that Jesus did. We know that there were many, but it is significant that John only records 8. With the exception of signs 4 & 5, John records the sign and then follows with a teaching to show the significance of each sign. Signs 4 & 5 are given back to back

and then the teaching follows for both signs. So that we can think ahead a little and look for these signs, following is the list of the 8 signs:

- Turning water into wine. (John 2:10)
- The nobleman healed. (John 4:46-54)
- The Bethesda healing. (John 5:1-13)
- Feeding the 5000. (John 6:1-13)
- Walking on water. (John 6:16-25)
- The blind man healed. (John 9:1-7)
- The raising of Lazarus. (John 11:1-45)
- Catching the 153 large fish. (John 21:3-12)

There are a couple of other 8's mentioned in Scripture that may have significance here as well. Moses made 8 trips up Mt. Sinai and there are 8 days in the Feast of Tabernacles. For the moment, put this information in the back of your mind. Whether or not these three 8's are significant to each other, we will have to determine after we have done a little further study.

(Read John 2:12-17) John helps us know the length of Christ's ministry by recording how many Passover feasts that Jesus attended. This was the first after His baptism that took place the fall before, or in 29 A.D., so this would have been in 30 A.D. John 5:1 records a feast for which Jesus went to Jerusalem. We're not told that this was Passover, but I think we can assume that it was. We'll discuss this more when we get to that point in our study. If we're correct, this would have been in 31 A.D. John 6:4 then records the next Passover feast. This would then have been in 32 A.D. Then starting in John 11, we have the last Passover that Jesus attended in Jerusalem when He was crucified, which would have been in 33 A.D.

None of the rest of the Gospel authors

record Jesus cleansing the temple at the beginning of His ministry though both Matthew and Mark record a similar event at the end of His ministry.

(Read John 18-22) The temple structure the Jews were referring to was known as Herod's temple. Though it may have been in the same location as the temple that was rebuilt in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, building of Herod's temple began in 19 B.C. I'm not sure how the temple of Ezra and Nehemiah was destroyed. My New Bible Dictionary says of Herod's temple, "The building of Herod's Temple, commenced early in 19 B.C., was an attempt to reconcile the Jews to their Idumaeen king rather than to glorify God." It goes on to say that the main structure was finished within ten years but that work continued on it until 64 A.D. So when the Jews told Jesus that it took 46 years to build it, it apparently wasn't totally completed at that time as well.

It appears that the disciples didn't fully understand Jesus' answer to the Jews until after Jesus' resurrection.

(Read John 2:23-25) Because Jesus knew man's way of thinking, even though many believed in Him after seeing the miracles He did, He did not trust Himself to be close to the people at this time. Keep in mind this is close to the beginning of His ministry and there would be many times after this that there would be attempts to kill Him. JRL

If you are too big to willingly do little things, you are probably too little to be trusted with big things.