

Kingdom Reflections

by Roland Foster

Many a time I came to bed to find my wife sound asleep, and our Dalmatian, Cindy, occupying the spot reserved for my feet. Cindy knew it was time for her to go to her own bed by our bedroom door, but my bed was softer, warmer, and altogether more to a dog's liking. I'd say, "Come on, Cindy, go to your bed." She would look at me, then look away, as if hoping I would disappear or at least change my mind. "Come on, Cindy, time to go to your bed!" Even the edge of sternness in my voice didn't move Cindy. Losing patience, I would grasp her collar and help her (i.e. drag her) to the edge of the bed. Faced with the inevitable, Cindy would sigh and slowly get down from my bed and go to her own. She'd turn around a few times, perhaps looking for a soft, warm spot, then collapse with a heavy thump! And, usually, another sigh.

Lying in bed one night after this rigmarole, I reflected on Cindy's attitude. She obviously hated the circumstances that made her leave my warm, soft bed and move to her own, not-so-warm and not-so-soft one, but she did not dispute my right to make her do it. I'm sure she didn't even feel resentful toward me for exercising that right. Our master-pet relationship was a fact of her existence. It wasn't in her nature to question that fact. Oh, she disobeyed if she could get away with it, but was neither surprised nor pouty when she couldn't.

It occurred to me, as I was reflecting, that my relationship with God should be more like that, at least in one respect. I may not like all of my circumstances, but if He is my Lord, my Master, then I need to recognize and accept His authority to make judgments and take actions that shape those circumstances in whatever way He sees fit. I have no business questioning Him; my business is to trust Him, trust His goodness and His mercy that desires and provides what is best for me; do my best to cooperate so that I may receive that best.

If I question God, or challenge His authority, or resent His actions, then I am forgetting which one of us is God. I am denying His Lordship. This, I believe, is the central message of the book of Job — that God is God, I'm not; He's the King, and I am His subject.

My relationship with God should be unlike Cindy's with me in one respect. I should be smart enough not to disobey, even if I can (temporarily) get away with it. It would be easier, of course, if God would not let me disobey, but that would defeat His purpose; it would take away my free will. But if I ask, He will give me His Holy Spirit to guide me into living the life He calls me to live. Lord, I'm asking!

Another Holy Spirit gift is peace in the circumstances. I saw this very clearly just yesterday as I spent some time with a friend who is literally dying by inches from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, popularly known as "Lou Gehrig's disease"). Each week he loses some part of his ability to control his muscles, and the muscles atrophy and shrink. But he is not angry, not resentful, not afraid of the further ravages of the disease, leading surely to his death in a short while if no miracle happens. "I don't know why I'm not afraid," he told me. And I can tell he really is not afraid to live as he does, or

to die of suffocation when the day arrives. The reason, I'm convinced, is that he knows and accepts that he is subject to the King —and, therefore, securely in the Kingdom.

Those who try to get around His Lordship are fooling themselves. Because, you see, the ones who belong to the Kingdom are, pretty much by definition, those who are subject to the King.