

## The Best Move

980417

Chess is a very interesting but complicated game. Winning involves a great deal of strategy as the moves and countermoves of the players continually do battle back and forth across the board. Some have compared the intricacies of this game to the strategy of war. I tried to learn to play it, but could only really understand the basic movements of pieces. I could look ahead a step or two, but never enough to become very good.

Life is sometimes like this game of chess. We find ourselves playing against each other for high stakes at work or the neighborhood or even at church. We employ some particular strategy to get ahead only to find that it has been countered by someone else. It may be that the battle is thrust upon us, and we do not really want to be involved in it. But some people simply love it! It's like a sign I saw recently at an Uncle Bud's restaurant: "Don't wrestle with a pig; you both get dirty, but the pig likes it!"

Dealing with other people can be rather daunting at times. We often watch a TV show where the main characters try to manipulate the system. They consider their moves like the great chess masters, and work to expand their empire. Remember the television show "Dallas"? This nighttime soap opera was filled with the moves and countermoves of the players.

But I am just not smart enough do this. I see situations that I believe are wrong and feel absolutely powerless to combat them. I believe king Solomon felt this too, when he wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:15, *"In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness."* We must know that we are not sufficient to deal with this by ourselves, but God is in ultimate control. David wrote in Psalms 37:7; *"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes."*

Absalom was surely one of the greatest schemers in the Bible. He schemed to revenge the rape of his sister Tamar by Amnon, he schemed to motivate Joab by burning his fields, and he schemed to overthrow his father's throne. It is especially painful to me to think of the great king David momentarily being outmaneuvered by this wayward son. But in the end God dealt with him through the darts of Joab.

Another interesting example of this kind of mutual plotting against each other is found in Daniel 11:25-27; *"With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him. Those who eat from the king's provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle. The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time."* There is never any end to the pain caused by this type of activity in the world.

Paul encourages us in Ephesians 6:11 when he writes, *"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."* Satan is like a roaring lion trying to defeat us. As C.S. Lewis writes about him, "Like a good chess player he is always trying to maneuver you into a position where you can save your castle only by losing your bishop." So we must be careful how we play the game.

What is our best strategy? In the words of Victor Frankl, "What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. To put the question in general terms would be comparable to the question posed to a chess champion, 'Tell me, Master, what is the best move in the world?' There simply is no such thing as the best or even a good move apart from a particular situation in a game and the particularly personality of one's opponent." This is true to some extent, but we could still hope to generalize in some way.

I remember in one particular college class I found a way to transform all of the math problems so that they could be solved by a single technique, instead of the five or six being taught us. I aced the final exam, and I remember the look of unbelief on the teacher's face that someone had made such a good grade on his test. It was so much easier finding the core of truth which guided me into each solution. If I could generalize our strategy, it would be to paraphrase the words of Jesus Christ, "The best move you can make in this game is to love the Lord your God with all of your being, and your neighbor as yourself." And just as in the game of chess, the opening is extremely important, but you must close (finish) to win.

© Heard Lowry 1998