

God's Will

and How

to

Know it



C.W. Naylor

GOD'S WILL

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By

C. W. Naylor

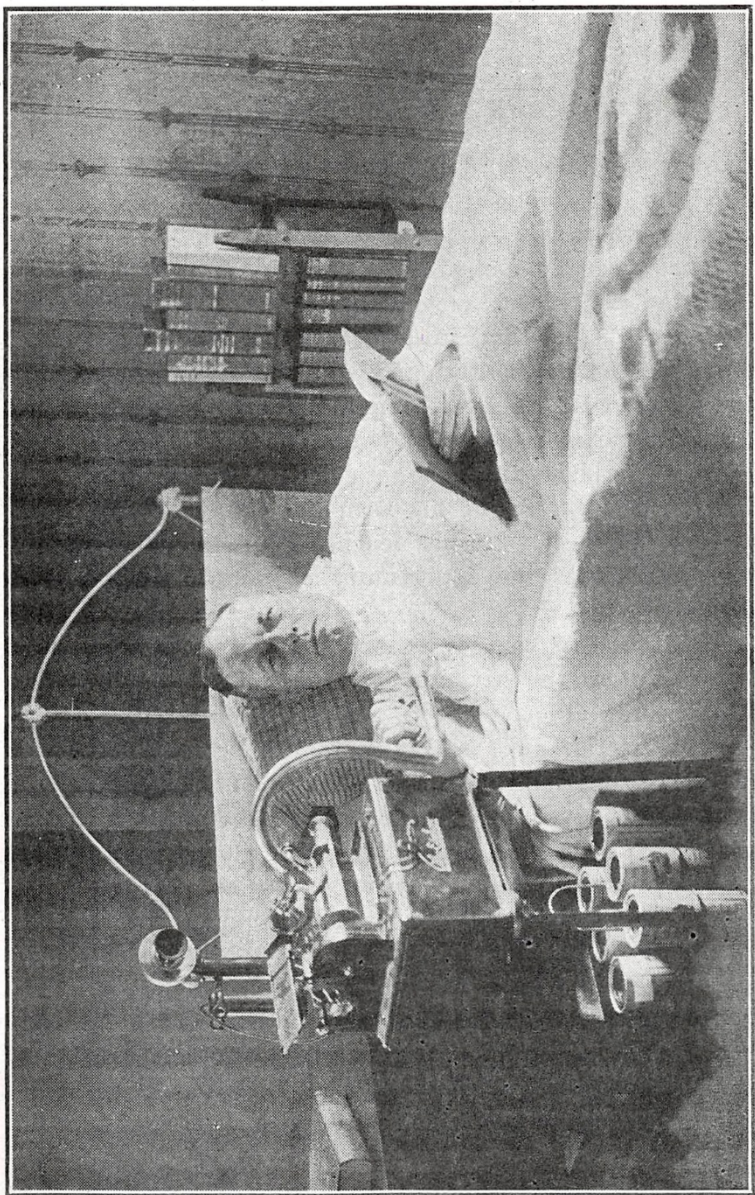
*Author of Winning a Crown
and Christian Unity*

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C. W. Naylor

Concerning the Author

The author of “God’s Will” has been peculiarly qualified for his task by a training of the soul in the school of suffering. After thirteen years in the ministry, as a result of an internal injury he has been compelled to spend the last fifteen years in his bed day and night, a constant sufferer. He has known the experience of long and intense suffering with no hope of relief from any human source, and with no other prospect for the future than that of remaining a helpless invalid for life and without a means of earning a livelihood. He has learned the lesson of patience through suffering. He has learned to trust God for the supply of his temporal needs because there was no other to trust. He has learned to commune with God by being deprived of the opportunity of mingling much with his fellow men.

Yet he has not lost the joy out of life. He still does what he can to build up the kingdom of God and bless his fellow men by his words of good cheer. He is still interested in the events of the world, and especially in the progress of God’s work. He has demonstrated the efficacy of God’s grace to sustain one and give joy in the very discouraging circumstances of life. Though a firm believer in divine healing, and instrumental in the healing of those who kneel at his bedside for prayer, yet he has not received permanent healing, because, as he believes, this is God’s method of developing his heart and making him more useful in helping others.

During the last seven years especially he has contributed regularly to a religious periodical, articles on subjects similar to those in this book, besides conducting a “Questions Answered” and information department, and writing a number of books.

The Publishers

Preface

The many inquiries that have come to the author from all quarters relating to the subject considered in this volume, and the scarcity of treatises that deal with it, except, perhaps, in a merely incidental way, indicate the need for some more full and specific treatment of this theme. While he does not assume to know more of God's will than others of like experience, the writer believes that a record of some of his thoughts may be useful to those who have to solve the daily problems of life, and who, perhaps, have not been able to solve some of them to their own satisfaction. He gratefully acknowledges the assistance he has derived, in the preparation of this work, from the writings of others who have gone over the way before him, especially that prince of preachers Alexander Maclaren, from whose works most of the quotations are taken. Direct quotations have been marked; indirect quotations could not very well be indicated, but are hereby acknowledged.

With a prayer that this volume may help many a traveler on the way of life, it is sent forth on its mission.

C. W. Naylor

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Chapter I

What Is God's Will?

In a recent investigation of a certain public institution, a blind child was found shut up in a cage. His keepers had made this cage, and had shut the child in it, so they could avoid giving to him the care and attention that he otherwise would have required. Though he was six or seven years of age, there had been little normal development of his intelligence, because he had been kept from contact with most of the things about him, outside his cage. He did not even know the ordinary articles of furniture, for since he was blind, he could learn only by touch and hearing. When he had been removed from his cage, and given the freedom of an apartment, he went about handling all the objects with which he came in contact, and constantly saying, "What is this? What is this?"

Everything new excited his interest, and drew forth questions. These questions revealed in him a something that lies inherently in all of us. Every new object or substance, every new experience or emotion, is the progenitor, when presented to our minds, of a brood of new questions. Our curiosity and interest are aroused, our minds are made alert, and our thirst for knowledge impels us to seek an understanding of that which is new. When our questions are answered, the mind is satisfied. If they are not answered, they will probably recur again and again, as the mind searches for a solution.

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The material realm holds many mysteries that challenge our attention. It is not strange, therefore, that the spiritual realm should also hold many locked secrets, the key with which we may gain access to them we feel impelled to seek. He who approaches the threshold of spiritual things, finds the door locked before him, and turns away with the thought that it is useless to try to understand that realm, is more foolish than he who turns back from all the mysteries of the natural world.

Is there a God? If so, what kind of a being is he? What are my relations to him? What is his attitude toward me? These, and a thousand other similar questions, at times arise spontaneously in our minds. Somewhere along the path of life they confront us. Upon the way in which we answer them depends to a great extent the outlook of our lives and the attitude of our souls. Can these questions be answered with any certainty? Can we really know whether there is a God? And if there is one, what is he like? What is his character? What is his attitude toward us? And what is our duty toward him? Or, must all these questions remain unsolved riddles?

While the Deity is veiled in clouds of mystery, and while many of his purposes and ways are inscrutable to us, we deem it no more improper to inquire reverently and earnestly as to his being, character, and will, than to investigate any other legitimate subject. It is manifest that the same laws of evidence establishing other facts are capable of being applied to such an inquiry with good prospect of yielding satisfactory results. Through this process the author has arrived at some conclusions which he believes are fully justified by the evidence, and which agree in substance with the conclusions of a multitude of other godly people. While he has explored but a small portion of the great continent of truth, he believes that he has

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something of interest and value to report. Proceeding, then, we inquire "the reason for the hope that is within us."

We find, in our physical being, many appetites and desires. For each such appetite or desire, we find in the natural world about us an answer. There is provision in nature, or, at least, there exists in nature, something to gratify and satisfy each and every natural appetite, and every such desire may find in nature the responding element for its fulfilment. Each appetite and desire, therefore, has its correlative. Hence, each appetite or desire has within it the assertion of the existence of that which will satisfy or gratify it.

Within ourselves are other desires not capable of being gratified with natural things, but which look to a different realm for satisfaction. They reach into the sphere of moral and spiritual being, for they cannot be satisfied with material things any more than hunger can be satisfied with stones, or thirst with dust. In every life, this outreach of moral and spiritual desire is found at some time, and it usually asserts itself at frequent intervals. When desire thus looks to moral or spiritual things, only moral or spiritual things can gratify it. Some of these classes of desires we can gratify ourselves, but as for the greater part of them satisfaction cannot be found in self, nor from self. Those who repress and silence their desires may cease to realize the direction of those desires, or what is required for the gratification of them. Then, they may think that they find in themselves and in nature all that they require for satisfaction. But those who rightfully analyze their desires, or those who by any means become conscious of the direction and nature of those desires, have in their consciousness a sense of the deep significance of them. That inner consciousness speaks with finality, and with convincing utterance. Those who cultivate moral and spiritual desires, by seeking their gratification, become most conscious of

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their inability entirely to satisfy them from within. Only those who neglect, repress, or destroy their inner spiritual yearnings fail to feel the need of relations to corresponding elements from without, including relations to the source of responding, satisfying, correlative of desire.

The desire for high and holy things proves there is a source of such things, and proves by analogy, at least, that there can be a drawing from that source of whatever may be necessary to supply that deep need of our higher nature. The mind's and heart's sense of need of a God proves that there is a God, even as the appetite for natural food proves that there is natural food to satisfy that appetite, or even as the thirst for water proves that there is water to gratify and satisfy the desire. The human heart is never at rest until it is trusting in some supreme power greater than that which it has within itself. It is never satisfied until it draws its satisfaction from a source which it feels is infinitely higher and nobler than itself. This inner sense of the kind of a God the soul needs proves what kind of a God exists. Gross and sensual ideas of God come from allowing ourselves to be so influenced by those parts of our being that may be satisfied with natural things that we seek only the fulfilment of natural desires. The savage believes in a savage and sensual god, because he lives almost entirely in the realm of the natural. But wherever, even in the state of savagery, a man rises to think and desire higher and nobler things, his idea of God rises accordingly. When once his desire, and with it his idea of God, has risen above the natural, he knows from thenceforth of a realm of being higher and nobler than mere natural things.

The true idea and consciousness of God must come from that higher part of self which cannot find its gratification purely in natural things. An idea of God coming in this way is always pure,

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and corresponds with the true need of the soul. When I know my soul's own deepest desires and highest aspirations, its most earnest outreachings that cannot always be formulated in words, its unsatisfied yearnings that run out to that which is greater than itself, then I know God as he is because I know what I need him to be. There is no surer knowledge than that wordless voice that speaks in the depths of our souls.

There are those who tell us that there is no God; there are others who tell us that there is a God, but that we can know nothing of him. Such assertions can be made only by those who have stifled their spiritual desires, and have turned a deaf ear to the cry of their own hearts. For to know ourselves is to come to a knowledge of God, because God must answer to that which is greatest and noblest within us. Most persons feel that they know there is a God, that they have the same evidence for knowing him that they have for knowing anything else. That inner consciousness, the testimony of their own being, is to them fairly convincing, even without the addition of those other arguments and evidences that may be brought out to prove God's existence and nature.

To be sure, we cannot know spiritual things with our physical senses; so we cannot thus know God. Neither can we know honor, fidelity, friendship, the existence of angels, nor, in fact, any mental or spiritual fact through our physical senses alone. But we are not limited to these physical senses as the medium through which all knowledge reaches us. There are some things that we learn which are even contrary to our physical senses, and some things that in the spiritual world are contrary in principle to natural things. Nevertheless, we are capable of learning them.

But, has God a will toward man? Interest in or obligation to others affects the attitude of our will toward them. Since man is the

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handiwork of God, we may naturally expect God's will to be actively engaged in relation to man. The further fact that man is conscious of obligation to and dependence upon God is abundant evidence that he not only can know but does know God's will toward him. The consciousness of obligation to God's will can rest on nothing but a knowledge of that will. So where there is this sense of obligation to his will, there is likewise the sense of what his will is.

Some people are much more conscious of God's will than are others; hence, they are more conscious of obligation. There are reasons why some know more of God's will than others. Some have sought to know his will, while others are indifferent or even hostile to it. Even those who are hostile know it in a measure, or they could not be hostile to it. Some men know science, not accidentally, but because they have devoted themselves to an intelligent study of it. They have taken a course that brings them to such knowledge. Some know the will of the president of the United States, and others do not. Some know his will very well; others, much less fully. Some know him well because they are closely associated with him. They hear his voice expressing his will and purpose. They see his actions that reveal his will. They know his manner of thought, his likes and dislikes. There are others who never saw him, but who know his will in some particulars through having had communications from him.

We are privileged to know God. We have the capacity to know him. We may come into an association with him so that we can learn his character, his likes and dislikes, and what he desires. We may have communications from him, revelations of his purpose and will. We may hear his voice speaking in our hearts. And so we may know God and his will. To be sure, we shall know him only as a man knows, which means that our knowledge will not be absolutely

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perfect. Nevertheless, if we make use of the means to obtain knowledge of him that are open to us, we may come to know much of him.

It is not the author's purpose to discuss the will of God from a scientific standpoint, as a matter of philosophical reasoning, but to view the question from its practical aspects, and in the main, to give attention to those phases of the question which relate especially to the Christian, to the man who already believes that he knows something of God's will, personality, and character.

All Christians believe that the Lord is with his people, that he is Immanuel—"God with us." They believe that Jesus Christ is the revealer of God, that he revealed the character, fatherhood, purpose, and will of God. When they read in their Bibles that all shall know God from the least to the greatest (Jer. 31:34) and that all shall be taught of God (Isa. 54:13) and that the Holy Spirit is sent to guide us into all truth (John 16:13) they feel in their hearts the assurance that they are not following "cunningly devised fables" or being led in the ways of folly, but that they really and truly do know at least something of the will of their Father which is in heaven. We are commanded, "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). In view of these things, we seek his will earnestly, reverently, confidently, assured that he will reveal unto us as much of it as may be necessary in our own individual cases, in order that we may be acceptable and well pleasing in his sight.

We may know his will for the race—it is certain that in some things he deals with humanity as a whole. But the individual is not so lost in the whole that he has no personal relation with God, nor personal obligation to him as an individual. This being true, God has a will toward us individually. Not only should we know his will for the race, but more particularly his will for us as individuals. We

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should know it, not only in the general outline of his purpose for us as one of the race, or in the general course of our lives, but also in regard to us from day to day, in the details of our lives, where we need to know his will in order that we may be guided aright. Thus we may walk with sure footsteps in a plain path, not fighting or striving in uncertainty or darkness, not laying our course with dead reckoning, but using a reliable chart and a trustworthy compass. Uncertainty is a great bane. Having a conscience toward God, yet being uncertain of his will, loses us in a maze. The heart can be at rest only when sure it is in harmony with God, for only then is the conscience giving approval. God's promise, "I will give you rest," is a pledge that we shall not only know his will, but be able also to fulfil it, and be conscious that we are so doing.

The fact that some know not God's will, and think others do not know it and cannot know it, is no valid proof that others do not know it any more than the fact that some do not know how to count proves that there is no such thing as mathematical science, or that because someone does not know that air is composed of a number of gases is proof that there is no such thing as chemical affinity or the science of chemistry. Knowing this, the Christian is not troubled with the argument of unbelievers, stating that he cannot know the will of God. He is conscious that in some respects, at least, he does know it, and he knows when he conforms to it.

It is reasonable that God should have a will for the race, because the race is of his creation. He tells us that he created man for his own glory. He had a purpose in creating him, for he does nothing without a purpose—intelligence acts only for adequate reasons. It is just as reasonable that God should have a definite will for each one of us individually as for the race as a whole. Since he created us, he is, therefore, interested in the outcome of our lives. Being moral

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creatures, there must be a moral outcome to our lives. As a moral being, God cannot be indifferent to this outcome. We have great need of such a God as the Bible reveals. This need must be fulfilled in him, and the kind of a God we need is the kind of a God we inevitably find the God we serve to be. Since we need a God upon whom we can rely, and since we are often conscious of the limitations of our knowledge, and since the awakened heart hungers for love, we know that God answers to all these needs in being to us knowledge, wisdom, and help, and in loving us as our hearts crave to be loved.

He is “our Father”; so the interest of a father is manifested toward us. He is benevolent; therefore, he holds a benevolent attitude toward us. He is love; therefore, he has an abiding interest in our welfare, and a warm affection for us. And having these attributes which he exercises for us, he has a will for us in harmony therewith. Since he had a purpose in our creation—a purpose of his own—he is interested that we know and do his will in order to carry out that purpose. How comforting and inspiring are these thoughts! How satisfying they are to the heart that craves for a God of just such a character and such an attitude toward man’s finite weakness!

Let us turn now and note some of the effects of doctrines and beliefs that are contrary to the facts just stated. What is the effect of the doctrine that our lives are unguided, that is, guided only by human reason; of the idea that God is far off, unapproachable and unknowable; of the teaching that he has not revealed himself as the Bible declares, and as Christians believe? What is the result of such negation? Are those who hold such things profited thereby? Do those theories afford them comfort and satisfaction? Do such ideas sustain them in the hour of darkness and sorrow? Is there anything in these doctrines to ennoble or uplift the race? Not so. Instead their

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effect is to bring darkness, uncertainty, and despair. They wither all lofty aspirations, dry up the springs of joy, and becloud the pathway of life.

Did you ever see a really happy unbeliever? He may find some satisfaction in his unbelief, and even some pleasure, but it is the satisfaction and pleasure of the debater. It is the satisfaction that comes from showing an opposition to something—a sort of negative satisfaction. He is utterly devoid of that constant joy, comfort, rest of soul, peace, and quietness of spirit that comes to the believer through the truth of God. To be sure, he may have the happiness that comes from the gratification of natural desire, but such happiness has a very narrow basis, resting on bare materialism or a hazy Spiritism—it is evanescent, and soon passes away. Take the cynic of things spiritual, the hostile critic, the infidel, the skeptic. They stand only on a platform of negation. Outwardly they may present a bold front, but let their hearts be opened, let one gaze into their depths, and it will then be found that little genuine happiness or contentment is there, for their system of negation furnishes no possible basis for genuine happiness.

On the other hand, there is nothing so joyful or so abiding as the pleasure arising from Christian faith. The Bible doctrine believed is a source of true joy and rest. Herein lies the great practical advantage of the Christian faith as a system of philosophy. Negation hangs like a dead weight upon the neck of him who makes it his creed, while faith is like wings to him who possesses it. While the one sinks down to despair, the other rises above the perplexities and troubles, cares, and disappointments of life into a realm of pure joy, into a place where his soul is at rest—not the ephemeral joy of the opiate, nor the rest that it gives, but the joy of harmonious being, and conformity to the highest laws of his being.

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The wholesomeness, reality, and truth of Christian faith are shown in the power it gives one to surmount obstacles in life, and to rejoice, even in disaster. Who but a Christian can joy in tribulation, and in the darkest hours see gleams of hope? The Christian's faith is attacked, despised, jeered, mocked, and made the butt of flippant wit. It is denounced and pitied, ridiculed and misrepresented. Under all this treatment it neither fails nor perishes, but waxes stronger and more joyful, for its strength is in its truth. The more faith a man has, the more truly he believes in God and God's interest in and care over him, the more settled and steadfast he is, the more fruitful and blessed his life, and the more wonderful those spiritual fruits that he bears which the opponents of Christianity try in vain to produce.

The Christian believes that he knows God. Resting in that assurance, he goes calmly upon his way, finding in his life from day to day a thousand unanswerable proofs of the correctness of his faith. Every day there is added to his settled conviction new assurances that God is with him, that his 'times are in his hands', that God knoweth the way that he takes, and that he walks with him all that way. And so as his locks grow hoary, and as his form is bent with age, his spiritual horizon grows clearer and clearer, his faith becomes more steadfast, his assurance more certain, his rest of spirit more sweet, his peace and tranquility greater, and he has the satisfying consciousness that he is drawing nearer and nearer to the blessed fulfilment of his hope, to the full fruition of his faith. If the doubts that have obscured the lives of others, like dark clouds cast their shadows down upon his pathway, he can boldly say, "I know in whom I have believed." So he comes to his end in peace, and says his last earthly goodbyes in a quiet, confident expectation of a glorious hereafter.

Chapter II

God's Will in the Natural and Spiritual Realms

There are two realms of being, the natural or material, and the moral or spiritual. God is the creator of both. All things are the work of his hand, and came into existence through the operation of his will. He created the forces and laws of nature. He controls nature. He is the creator of spirits, and of the laws of spiritual life. In his omnipotent power he is supreme over all. If we believe his will to be supreme, we naturally ask: Is everything that happens a manifestation of his will? Is every phenomenon an expression of his will? If he is all powerful, there must be some way or some sense in which this is true. At least we can assert that he does not use his available power to prevent it.

Notwithstanding the fact that God's will must be involved in some way in all the operations of force, still he declares of many things that they are not his will. He tells us that it is not his will that any soul should perish. At the same time, he makes it clear that many are perishing. He causes us to understand that the sufferings of his children are grievous to him, and that in all their afflictions he is afflicted. We naturally ask, If such be the case, why does he not interfere in order to prevent these things? Is he restrained from doing

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what he wills? As there is no greater power to restrain him, if he is restrained that restraint must come from one of two things, namely, either from voluntary self-limitation, or from the necessities of the case. There are certain necessities that limit God, as well as man.

We know God's will best through man's will, which must of necessity be similar in its processes to the Divine will, and must act according to similar laws. We find ourselves restricted by certain necessities. These necessities are of such a nature that all will must be bound by them. To illustrate these necessities: Nature cannot be orderly, and at the same time each thing therein be independent, and each force working alone. A harmonious whole necessitates an orderly relation of the various parts of which it is composed. There cannot be at the same time both disorder and order. Planets cannot remain in an orderly system, and still move irregularly, or without regard to others. A thing cannot, at the same time, be both heavy and light. In other words, gravitation cannot be acting upon it and not acting upon it. A thing cannot be both hot and cold at the same time. One thing necessarily shuts out and renders impossible its opposite, or that which is contradictory to it.

Men do not seem to be able to harmonize God's expressions of tender care for his people with the calamities that sometimes come upon them from the action of natural forces. If the action of natural force is an expression of God's will, which Christians commonly believe, and if evil results from such action while God has control over that action, how can this be harmonized with his benevolent nature? Some, seeing the calamities that befall mankind, deny that God is just, or merciful, and say that he is cruel. The Christian who personally knows God, who has fellowship with him, and to whom the secrets of the Almighty have to some extent been revealed, knows that he is not cruel nor vindictive, but that he is the loving,

kind, benevolent Father that he represents himself to be. But if he is such, how can he permit some of the things that happen?

Two Phases of God's Will Considered

There are two phases of God's will, or two ways in which that will is revealed, or two modes of its action. It is revealed in two different spheres. First, it operates through natural law, or perhaps we may say, it is the basis of natural law. Through his will he originates and controls natural forces. Therefore, the operation of these natural forces is an expression of his will. The other phase of his will, or the other sphere of the manifestation of his will, is called providence; it is the manifestation of his particular attitude toward mankind as a whole, and as individuals. So we may speak of these two phases of his will as his natural will, or his will in nature, and his providential will. The latter is his particular will, or personal desire for his intelligent creatures. His natural will acts in the realm of the natural; his providential will, in the realm of the moral.

We shall now turn our attention to the manifestation of God's will through the operation of natural forces. One thing to be observed at the outset is that, in his nature, God is not necessitated to a specific act of the will for each action of force. Like men, he can set in motion a train of movements each related to, and dependent upon, the others. This being the case, we need not look upon each several natural phenomenon as being distinctly and directly the expression of God's will, but rather as a link in the chain of consequences of what he has willed. It is very important that Christians understand the place of God's will in natural phenomena in order that they may adopt an intelligent and proper attitude toward God in nature. It is through a misunderstanding of this subject that men are led to believe that God is cruel, harsh, vindictive, merciless.

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We must not overlook the fact that there are some necessities of natural law in the operation of force, and that these necessities must not be left out of the account if we are to adjust and harmonize our ideas of God's goodness with some of the operations of nature.

There are some necessary characteristics of natural law. A few of these we shall notice. First, natural law must be universal in its application. One law cannot apply to one part of the universe, and another to another part. Gravitation must work according to the same law everywhere in the material universe. Otherwise there would be no order and chaos would result. Since order is a necessity of nature, *natural law must be universal in its application*. We cannot, therefore, expect that on our earth natural law will work in one way in inhabited regions and in another way in uninhabited regions. We cannot expect that the forces which in one place produce volcanic action, a tornado, or a flood, should not act everywhere, under similar conditions, and produce similar results.

Second, *natural law must be of unvarying uniformity of action under similar conditions*. It must be absolutely unvarying in time and place. If man could not depend upon this unvarying quality nothing would be certain with him. Frost might come on the hottest day of summer, or a mixture that today would make paint might make cement tomorrow, or the food that today sustains life might destroy it tomorrow. It is the uniform and unvarying action of natural law that makes natural things stable, and an orderly universe possible.

The forces of nature do not always act in the same manner, but always in the same manner under similar circumstances. Under identical conditions they have no variability. But conditions constantly differ. Electricity, that mighty but unknown force, is limited in its action by the conductivity of substances. Centrifugal

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power is limited, or balanced by centripetal power, and so on through the course of nature.

The Character of Natural Forces

All purely natural forces are unmoral; they possess no moral qualities. They have, and can have, no regard for moral considerations. If I deliberately thrust my hand into a fire, I am burned. If by accident I fall into a fire, I am burned. Whether I am righteous or wicked, whether I am engaged in something laudable or something contemptible, does not alter the result. Natural forces do not discriminate. They know nothing of moral considerations or principles. The lightning knows no mercy. It does not distinguish between a man and a tree, or the house of a righteous man and the house of iniquity. The tornado knows no pity. It ruins all without consideration. The earthquake has no more respect for that which can suffer than for that which is inanimate.

God's Will in the Natural Realm

We come now to the discussion of a question that troubles many souls. They often wonder why God's creatures are left subject to destructive natural forces. They cannot understand why God permits storms, floods, pestilences, famines, accidents, fires, and the like. The argument is often made that if God loved mankind he would shield them from these things. Since, many times, he does not shield them from these, it is often asserted that he is not good, but is cruel and unjust.

The mother whose little one has been taken from her arms by the death-angel often questions the love and kindness of God, and sometimes even his justice. When a tornado sweeps through a city destroying churches, and killing Christian people, there are those

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who doubt God and sometimes even condemn him. They cannot harmonize these things with their idea of the goodness of God. This is because they do not take into consideration the two phases of God's will; that is, God's will as manifested through the operation of natural law, and God's will as manifested in his providences.

We have already pointed out the necessity of force operating in a constant, unvarying way, under the same natural circumstances. Rain is brought about through the evaporation of water and its subsequent condensation in cooling, usually by the meeting of the warm moisture-laden air with a current of cold air. This is according to natural law, and in general it works out well, for its beneficial results are everywhere seen. But there may be a combination of circumstances that brings about the condensation of an immense amount of moisture at one time, and in one locality. The result is a flood. The combined action of these natural forces producing rain cannot be controlled except through the exercise of a continual special providence, and this, too, in a way that God does not usually see fit to act. God does not will the flood, ordinarily at least, any more than the man who makes a machine wills that someone will get his fingers mashed in the cogs thereof. He makes the machine for a purpose; the mashing of the man's fingers is accidental, the result of a combination of circumstances.

Natural forces, in general, work for the greatest wellbeing of all, but must necessarily sometimes combine destructively. This destructive combination, however, is not the ordinary working of these forces, but an incidental or accidental combination that works harmfully. God's general will in nature is that all things work together for good. Who will say that they do not do so to the greatest possible extent? We must not suppose that because man is sometimes the victim of nature there is no "heart full of love at the

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center of the universe” and no will guided by love watching over man, working for his welfare. For who knows the ultimate—who knows what shall be the end? We see in part and we know in part, but when that which is perfect is come we shall see and know perfectly. When we shall know even as we are known, we shall know that “the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind” in spite of all those things which seem to argue differently in the present sphere of existence.

God's Will in the Moral Realm

God's will is dependent on his moral qualities. His attitude toward man is fully determined by his justice, love, mercy, fidelity, etc. God is not the unlimited being that some suppose him to be, in their thoughtless suppositions. While he is supreme and over all, he must have regard for the consequences of all that he does or permits. He must consider remote consequences no less than those consequences that lie close at hand. Those remote consequences are often beyond our vision, and if we judge his actions by the immediate consequences that only are visible to us, our judgment may be unjust. We read in the Bible about seeing “the end of the Lord.” By this is meant the final outcome of his attitude and conduct. We are prone to pass snap judgment on action, looking no farther than the present hour.

God must look farther; he must look to the final outcome. Hence, very often he cannot do what he would do for us if he looked only as far as immediate consequences. The parent who looks only so far as immediate consequences with his child, gives him his own way, satisfies all his desires, and places no obstacle in the way of his temporary enjoyment, and who fails to take into consideration what this will mean for the future character of the child and for his

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happiness in years to come, will inevitably do great harm to his child, and destroy that very happiness which he seeks to further.

So God must often deny us the present help, or the present blessing, or the present interference with natural things in our behalf, for the ultimate good that will come to us, or because of the ultimate harm that would come through giving us what we desire and seem, according to our way of viewing it, to need.

God is also limited by the will of man. Having made man a free moral agent, he cannot coerce him, except where conditions render it absolutely necessary. For this reason, man is left to choose his own pathway, and to use his own will, even though this results in his hurt. Then, too, God can interfere either with natural law or in the spiritual realm only where it is wise to do so. Being all-wise, he will and must act in accordance with that wisdom. This being true, he will interfere in the natural sphere only when it will accomplish some wise end. So he must often let the innocent suffer with the guilty, and the righteous be the prey of the wicked. He must often let the destructive forces of nature work, even if the temporary results are evil. God's loving desire for us must often be sacrificed to the need that only his wisdom sees. The goal to which he would lead us may require the suffering of present pain. Again, we should remember that he teaches us in the Bible that earthly loss has its compensations, and that there is another world where the inequalities, the injustices, and other things that people suffer, are adjusted, balanced, and compensated. So the present evils which he seems to allow, after all may be only the upward steps which we would willingly climb if we understood the outcome as he knows it.

It would be unwise in many ways for God to be always interfering in order to save his people from the common lot of humanity. The Christian is subject to the same laws of the natural

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world as the skeptic and atheist. So if he suffers from the action of these laws, it is only a part of man's inheritance. It is only the necessary consequence of his being a part of the natural world. There is often no way in which God can consistently save the righteous from the fate of the wicked in temporal affairs. To be sure, he could find a way by his wisdom, but the exercise of his power in this direction would often result in evils somewhere else that would much more than overbalance the good that would be done through his action. So it is God's wise intellect which, in spite of his loving heart, sees the necessity of leaving us in a present situation, unless, indeed, there be some just and adequate reason for his interference. He loves to interfere and protect his own. Tens of thousands of such interferences have declared his kindness. But he is under the necessity to preserve nature in a proper balance. Therefore, he must not interfere with it too often nor too greatly. Since nature must be preserved in order, God will interfere with that order only when he sees that it is wisest and best. But where we suffer from that order of nature, God's goodness and love will provide for us a full and complete compensation, so that at the last we shall be able to say, "Great is Jehovah, and his loving kindness hath no end. He hath dealt kindly with us, and shown his bountifulness."

Chapter III

The Nature of God's Will

So far we have stated that God has a will; that his will has a relation to us as members of the race, and to us personally as individuals; that to fulfil his will we must know what it is, so far as it relates to our own actions and our conscious conformity and obedience thereto. Not only is there, therefore, nothing amiss in our inquiring reverently as to the nature of his will, but a moral obligation rests upon us to do so. A true view of the nature of God's will of necessity will be in harmony with the facts of the natural and spiritual worlds. Failure to understand the nature of his will, or holding erroneous ideas concerning it, may react and destroy that natural harmony which should exist between God and man. Such reaction frequently causes persons to hold a wrong attitude toward God, and to neglect or to refuse attempts to conform themselves to his will. Such wrong views often restrict the operation of God's will, and often make people adopt a wrong attitude toward it. The necessity of a right view of the subject is hardly likely to be exaggerated.

Both the Bible and human experience make it plain that God's will does not always operate in the same way. There are, we may say, aside from the natural and moral phases of his will discussed in the previous chapter, three phases of God's will, or three modes of

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its operation. These we may characterize as the independent or sovereign, the dependent or conjunctive, and the passive or permissive phases of his will. In each of these phases God holds a distinctly different attitude, and acts in a distinctly different way. We shall briefly consider each of these three phases. The first phase to which we give attention is

God's Sovereign Will

We assume the correctness of the idea generally entertained of God that he is supreme over all, that all powers and creatures are subject to him, and are less powerful than his will. There are certain things that God determines. He wills that they be so. With the carrying out of these things he will brook no interference. Having all power, he will carry out, or cause to be carried out what he wills, overcoming or destroying all obstacles and all opposition.

The Scriptures set forth this phase of his will in such language as the following: "The most High [God] . . . whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou!" (Dan. 4:34, 35). "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Psa. 115:3). "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Psa. 135:6). These are forceful assertions of the sovereignty of God's will, and of the fact that none can deter him from, or hinder him in carrying out his sovereign purpose.

We see this illustrated in the natural universe, in the constancy of natural law. Every twinkling star declares it to us. The beams of

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the rising and setting sun speak eloquently of it. All the processes of orderly nature give us evidence of it. Also we see it manifested in the moral realm, as in God's choosing Israel to be his own particular people; in his raising up Pharaoh to be king of Egypt, that in him he might manifest his power; in destroying the Canaanites out of the land in order to make room for Israel; and again in the plan of salvation, which we are given to understand was formed in God's mind before the earth was created.

When God has determined anything by his will, nothing can prevent the fulfilment of his determined purpose. "None can stay his hand." What he determines, he will perform. What he wills, he will bring to pass. There is no might nor power that can stand against him. There is no will that can successfully resist the operation of his sovereign will. He is Lord over all. It is, however, a very serious mistake to suppose, as some have done, that his will has no other method nor works in any other way than in this sovereign, all-compelling way. God does not always work independently. He sometimes voluntarily limits himself, in order to produce certain desirable results. He might always, if he so desired, enforce his will, but he could not thereby produce all the results that he might wish to produce. The consideration of this fact brings us to the second phase of his will.

God's Conjunctive Will

God does not always exert his sovereign will. Having a moral relation with man, and having given to man a will, he condescends in many things to forego the carrying out of his will independently of man, and acts in conjunction with man for the accomplishment of his divine purpose. In other words, he becomes a partner with man, not only because he loves man and has the attitude toward him that

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his love dictates, but because he is also under obligation to man to whom he has given a will in order to insure man's moral freedom. To respect this moral freedom, God must limit his own will just as much as he permits the will of man to operate independently.

Man's happiness is dependent upon his moral freedom. As soon as his acts become necessitous they cease to afford him gratification. Compulsory obedience to God could have no moral worth. Therefore, God seeks to have man obey him through the choice of man's own will, not because of compulsory decrees. All the pleasure that can come to God from the obedience or happiness of man comes as a result of God's sacrifice of his prerogative of unlimited willing. Just as we often find our truest happiness in seeing the happiness of others whose blessedness has come from a sacrifice on our part, so God often finds happiness in sacrificing his will to our will in order that we may have freedom of action, and that we may exercise choice in the field of our activities. Thus, God's happiness and man's happiness both depend upon the fact that God does not at all times exercise his sovereign will, but chooses to limit it in its operations in order to give freedom of action to those wills that are less powerful than his own.

Man, having this freedom of will, is thereby able to act conjointly with God. This joint action is recognized in a number of places in the Scriptures. We are workers together with God. This joint activity through a coordination of the divine and human wills works out God's purpose, in many cases, better than it could be worked out in any other way. By this means, also, man is brought into a relationship with God that is beneficent in all its phases.

If man neglects, or refuses to cooperate with God, God's will cannot be carried out. We may help to carry out God's will, or may thwart it. So God's will, with his consent, sometimes becomes

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dependent upon our wills; and if our wills do not act in harmony with his in order to produce the desired results, his will to produce such results is rendered ineffective. Man is constantly thwarting God's will. This results in the unhappiness of man, and to the extent that it works, in the unhappiness of God. Man's ability to thwart God's purpose is recognized in many places in the Scriptures. We shall quote two: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). God does not wish to crush our wills, but to have them cooperate with His will, and so dignify both our wills and us. The exaltation of man glorifies God, and honors him, in the same way that the happiness, goodness, and prosperity of the subjects of a kingdom honor their king, and add to his happiness and majesty.

This union of man's will with God's will ennobles man. It lifts him up into a moral sphere of greatness otherwise impossible of attainment. So, on God's part the sacrifice of some of his prerogatives results in added glory to himself, the accomplishment of greater good, and the production of greater happiness than could exist if he should constantly exercise the majesty of his sovereign will

God's Permissive Will

The third phase of God's will is the passive state of his will, or his permissive will. In this phase he will not act at all, except in refusing to act or willing not to interfere with the ordinary happenings, or usual, or even unusual, operation of natural things, circumstances, etc. Though God has all power, he is economical in its use. He never uses it where it is not necessary, nor more than is necessary. We have already noticed how in his providence he

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permits storms, earthquakes, fires, pestilences, etc., and have pointed out the definite principles with which he is guided in such action. He acts according to his wisdom. This wisdom often causes him to will a passive state of his will in regard to certain things. He observes and notes all things, and interferes where and when it is necessary in order properly to guide and control so that his purpose is accomplished. This interference takes place only so far as he sees it necessary to act for the accomplishment of that purpose.

This does not mean that he is ever indifferent or neglectful. Sometimes, in our human short-sightedness, we grow impatient because God does not act. Sometimes our souls burn with indignation at the tyrannies and injustices that are inflicted upon our fellow men. Sometimes we would grow hasty and act unwisely. He is guided by omnipotent wisdom—when he wills to be passive it is always for some wise reason. He often permits things to go on until the time is ripe for his interference; whereas, if he had acted sooner, disastrous results might have been the issue.

Thus, in considering God's will in relation to our world, and to the future of mankind, it is necessary to consider these three different phases of his will, and to determine which of them may have application at a particular moment. We may as well dash our heads against a stone wall as to try to change God's sovereign will. What he has determined he will carry out. It is useless to ask him to change his unchangeable purpose. On the other hand, it is necessary that we seek to know his dependent or conjunctive will, so that we may know how to cooperate with him—how to carry forward his desires and purposes, so that they will eventuate as he has planned. We should also submit to his passive will. We should be content to let him withhold his hand as long as he desires, or sees it good. There should be no murmur found in us, no criticizing of his will, no

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judging him, or setting up our will and wisdom in opposition to his inaction. By demanding our own way, we may cause him to act, but it may be in a way disastrous to us, and may even prevent the operation of his will which would have produced results better than we could have chosen. Let us forbear to meddle with God's will, but be sure that our relation to it is sustained in a manner that will give it the greatest possible freedom in all that pertains to us.

Chapter IV

The Character of God's Will

There are abundant grounds for the opinion that God's will is not mere omnipotent authority. He has omnipotent authority, but being moral, he must have regard for moral considerations in the exercise of that authority. In other words, God's will must be a moral will, and we have every reason to believe that it is a morally good will. Ample proofs of this may be produced. A few of them will be considered later.

To view God's will as only omnipotent authority, exercised in an unlimited way, and without regard to moral consideration, is to cast a dark pall over life and to make it hemmed in by necessities on every side. It is, then, a joyless, hopeless round of compulsion, and we, the slaves of God's stern determination. "With such a view, religion will be slavish, a dull, sullen resignation, or a painful, weary round of unwelcome duties and reluctant abstainings." It will, in fact, be an unwholesome, unsatisfying religion devoid of all those qualities that make for human happiness. It can lighten no burdens, soothe no sorrows, assuage no griefs, bring the light of hope into no life. It will baffle hope, and render love toward God impossible. Such a view of God, and the religion that is based upon such a view, is not that view of God nor that religion revealed in the Bible.

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The religion of the New Testament has, all through it, the pealing of joy-bells, the warmth of love, the brightness of hope, the peace and contentment of soul-rest, the delightful sense of harmony with all that is good in the universe. This is not mere theory, nor a picture of the imagination, but, as millions have proved, it is capable of realization in daily life, in the practicality of personal experience. This fact has an important bearing upon the nature of God's will, for the blessedness of the Christian life is the fruit of the operation of that will. To the Christian, therefore, God's will is not a thing to be dreaded and feared, but that which is the ground of his hope, the source of his confidence, and the strength of his soul.

His Will Not Inscrutable

In the Book of Job, the question is asked, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (chap. 11:7). To suppose, as some do, that we can know nothing of God's will (if he has one for us) relating to our conduct or pertaining to our affairs, is to leave us in midnight darkness. As previously stated, we can and do know something of God's will. It is not hidden in the depth of his ever-veiled majesty, nor is it known only in some distant region. It is known upon earth. Knowledge of it is not confined to a few sublime souls who dwell apart in a favored relation, souls who have found some special way of rising above their fellows and living on a plain unapproachable by the mass of mankind. Neither is it so obscure and uncertain and so enveloped in mystery that we shall ever be wondering and inquiring, but never ascertaining what it is. We are commanded: "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Paul also speaks of being "filled with the knowledge of his will" (Col. 1:9).

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Since God is related to mankind in the moral sphere, it is but natural to suppose that he would reveal his will to man. And it is a well-known fact that those men who rise highest in the scale of moral being are those who suppose themselves to be cognizant of the will of God. So, when the Bible speaks of “having made known unto us the mystery of his will” (Eph. 1:9) those who have most developed their moral sense and who would be most likely to know the will of God, if it were revealed, are the very ones who do suppose themselves to know it. To them this Scripture means an actual fact in their own experience, a fact testified to by their inner consciousness. It is as much a reality to them as any other fact that they know. While they do not believe that they have found out the Almighty to perfection, nor that they know all the mystery of his will, yet they do know much of his will, especially as it relates to themselves. And this confidence that they know God’s will is to them the one great outstanding fact of their spiritual life—it is unquestionably based upon reality.

The Determining Factor

The scope and direction of God’s will is to be determined by his character. Character goes far toward determining purpose. If we know that a man’s character is good, we expect his purpose to be good. We expect the operations of his will to be a manifestation of his good character. We are told that man was created in the image of God. This does not relate to his physical image, for God has no physical image—he is a spirit. Man’s likeness to him, therefore, must be a mental and moral likeness. This signifies that man and God are both alike in the principles of their characters. So, when we know the principles of man’s character and its relation to his will, we know by analogy God’s character and its relation to his will.

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Character results from the use of the will. If the will habitually acts in an evil manner, the character becomes harmonious with such actions. Therefore, one's nature may be said to consist of the attitude of his will, or to be the reflection of his will. Thus when God's character is determined, the principle upon which his will operates is at the same time determined.

If God's will would be exercised wrongly, that is, according to wrong principles, his good character could not be maintained. He would no longer be what he is, for his character would be changed. He is not a tyrant, forcing his will upon us without regard to our rights or needs. He is not whimsical, acting without principle, as some men act. He is not selfish, nor cruel, nor arbitrary. Therefore, none of these characteristics show themselves in the operations of his will. God is under obligation to himself to preserve his character, just as a man is under obligation to himself to preserve his character. Man injures himself if he does anything contrary to a good character. So God wills, and must will and act in harmony with his character. Thus he can do nothing contrary to his character.

God's good character is represented in the Scriptures as the ground of the Christian's faith in him, and also the ground of his actions. "Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way" (Psa. 25:8). This shows that the hope, not only of the righteous, but of the wicked, lies in the fact that God is good and upright. There are two facts set forth in the foregoing text regarding the character of God. First, he is good; that is, he is kind, loving, sympathetic, merciful. Second, he is upright; that is, he is just, righteous, faithful, holy. These two characteristics of goodness and uprightness blend in his character and balance each other. They both have weight in determining what his will shall be and how it shall be exercised.

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Men, sometimes, have been so strongly impressed with the thought of God's uprightness, or righteousness, that they have lost sight of his goodness. The Puritans were an example of this. They were a stern, inflexible people, with an intense love of righteousness. They were very strict, sometimes even to harshness, and exacting in their religious and moral requirements. Their life lacked warmth and beauty many times, but they developed a moral fiber and sense of justice that has left its mark deep in the consciousness of succeeding generations.

At the present time, men have lost sight of the righteousness of God to a great extent. Much is being said about his love. His goodness and mercy are highly extolled. The idea that he will punish men for their wickedness is held to be contrary to his love. This unbalanced idea of God's character leads to serious perversion of moral truth. It is making men lose sight of the principles of justice and right, and to lose their sense of ill-desert when at the same time they are guilty of misconduct. This causes them to have wrong ideas of the will of God, and makes him appear, as a consequence, a soft, good-natured, tolerant, indulgent being, practically devoid of moral sensibilities. God is both good and upright. He has all those attributes which goodness implies. At the same time, he has all those attributes which belong to uprightness. He will not depart from uprightness to be good. He will not depart from goodness to exercise judgment. Therefore, his will acts with due regard both for goodness and uprightness—the two are never separated in their action upon his will.

We shall now refer to a few of his attributes and the relation of these attributes to his will. He declares that he is holy, saying, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." The operations of his will, which determine his activities, and the quality of his will are always holy. The reader

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has within his own mind, no doubt, a fairly clear idea of what holiness means when applied to God. It means moral perfection, purity of motive and action, and unselfish devotion to right. On the other hand, it signifies both passive and active opposition to all those things that are contrary to holiness. Since this is true, human sinfulness must ever be against God's will, and contrary to his purpose in the individual life. Therefore, he can never excuse sin—he can never wink at it. Hence each sin must have its recompense. God is also the embodiment of truth, and for this reason he requires men to be truthful, sincere, honest, and loyal to the principles of truth in their characters and in their lives.

God is just. He is absolutely just; so the requirements of his will never do man injustice. He never requires what he ought not to require. He never lays upon us duties that are too great for our strength. He never exacts sacrifices that go beyond our ability to make. He never calls for service that is unreasonable. He will not act toward us in any way that infringes upon our moral rights, or any other rights. He will never condemn the righteous, nor approve the wicked. All the injustice of mankind meets his condemnation, and though he permits man freedom of will, even when man misuses it, there is, nevertheless, a meting out of justice in the end, the balancing and evening up of all things. All the inequalities of life will be compensated. God's character and will at the last will be vindicated. His justice will shine out clearly, so that all men must eventually approve his course.

God is merciful. "His mercy endureth forever." "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment," so that all the tenderness and kindness that mankind needs are revealed in the goodness of God's will toward them. When the angel hosts sang the praises of God on the night of the nativity, the burden of their chant was "glory to God"

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and “good will to men.” His goodness sends rain upon the just and upon the unjust, and loads us with the material blessings of the harvest. He is loving—“God is love.” The will of the loving God must be good. He is faithful; he is long-suffering, and so his will is the manifestation of these qualities. He is reasonable; therefore, his actions are never arbitrary. Back of them all is a reason which justifies them. His reason may transcend human reason, but still he is reasonable, and ever acts on principle—never from whim or caprice.

Another of his qualities is dignity. There is a certain attitude of dignity that characterizes all true greatness. So there is a dignity about the actions and will of God that renders them worthy of his greatness. This fact is often lost by religious enthusiasts, who go to extremes of demonstration and do foolish and unseemly things, believing them to be the will of God. God never acts in an unseemly way; neither is it his will for his children to do so. There is a quiet dignity about the really Christ-like Christian, a dignity that has in it nothing of pride nor superiority. That dignity precludes the practice of those things which are contrary to itself. God’s dignity is the dignity of moral worth. The dignity of the Christian partakes of the nature of the dignity of God in kind, though, of course, not in degree. Every revelation of God’s will must be in harmony with the dignity of his person and character. When man understands the true import of this revelation, he is impressed with its loftiness and worthiness.

Since God’s character is very clearly revealed in the Scriptures and in human experience, we may, therefore, know the character of his will. We may be assured that if we may seek to know that will we can have the confidence that when we learn it, it will be for our best interests—for the exaltation and blessing of our lives—and in keeping it we shall find the fullest fruition of our highest hopes.

Chapter V

How God Reveals His Will

Men have learned to communicate with each other by means of language, signs, signals, symbols, gestures, expressions of the face, attitudes of the body, through characters, pictures, etc. They communicate even at a distance with the telephone, telegraph, heliograph, wireless telegraph, and other means. Even the very intensity of feeling or desire is conveyed to others about them. That man is so sensitive to the will and desire of his fellow men, yet not sensitive to the will of God, and without comprehension of it is, to say the least, most unlikely. In fact, everything is favorable to God's revealing his will to us, provided that we shall turn our attention towards finding what it may be.

The Method of Revelation

First, his will is revealed to the reason, through nature. Paul said, "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them; for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:19, 20). The Psalmist tells us that "the heavens declare the glory of God." We observe the things that are. We see them constantly changing. We inquire of their origin. We see forces working in an

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orderly way, and our reason tells us that there must be an intelligent control over all these things. We consider the immensity of space, and the mighty forces that are working, and so realize the greatness of the controlling power. The silent, solemn majesty, and grandeur of the starry heavens declare to us the majesty of the God who made and regulates them. Again we see design in creation, and this clearly points out to us wisdom and intent in God. We see God's benevolence in the gentle dew, the rain, the sunshine. Every piece of iron, every lump of clay, and every provision in nature for the good or happiness of man and the other creatures, testifies to the greatness and to the character of God. What we find within ourselves is a revelation of God's character; hence, a revelation of his will. There is also a direct personal revelation of his will to our reason. God has a way of impressing upon the human intelligence a knowledge of his will. He does this in various ways, which will be referred to further on.

Second, God reveals himself to the conscience. Paul, speaking of this, said, "When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:14, 15). That inner light "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" leaves its impression on the conscience of every soul. All who have arrived at reasoning age are morally conscious of good or ill desert belonging to themselves. They have a consciousness of moral quality in their actions. Their conscience approves or disapproves of their conduct. When conscience and reason operate together, they reveal much of God and his will. To be sure, the conscience may be seared so that it feels very little, or it may be perverted through wrong teaching until it is not a safe guide. But the

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unperverted conscience teaches us much of God's will, by revealing to us the natural principles of righteousness in our inner consciousness.

God works upon the conscience to arouse and quicken it. At such a time it becomes uneasy, restless, and troubled. This quickens the attention of the intellect, and directs it to a consideration of the moral questions involved in the conduct. The judgment of the intellect is then brought to bear. With attention and judgment brought to bear upon conduct, conscience quickens the more, and through this process God has the opportunity to reveal his will. Sometimes the intellect deals with problems of right and wrong, and of our relations with God, from an abstract standpoint. We arrive at a conclusion with the same methods that we arrive at other conclusions. But sometimes we know things without waiting for our minds to reach a conclusion through such a process.

Revelation has two sides. There is "the light and the eye, the voice and the ear, the characters and the understanding." We must supply the seeing eye, the hearing ear, and the understanding intellect, and apply ourselves to know the Word of God, if we shall know the will of God.

Revelation Through the Spirit

Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit was given he should guide us into all truth. This applies to the direct action of the Holy Spirit which makes things known to our intelligence. This revelation of truth is gradual, never reaching the ultimate of knowledge in this life, but still we are not left as some, "ever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." Christ led his apostles on step by step into the truth. We may expect to be led in the same way. As the bud gradually opens into the full-blown flower, so truth

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gradually opens to our understanding, until finally, in the world to come, we shall “know even as we are known.” When we become spiritual through the process of regeneration, we have a spiritual understanding, a comprehension of truth which is greatly quickened. The Bible truly becomes a new book to us. There are many gleams of light which shine out from its pages where before, perhaps, we saw only darkness and obscurity.

The regenerated mind looks at truth from a new standpoint, a sympathetic, understanding standpoint. It has a new view of truth, and an attitude toward truth that makes the revelation of truth and the understanding of truth far easier than before. Thus, it happens that ignorant and unlearned people are often wiser in spiritual matters than many of the learned. The wicked, generally speaking, know not God. They have no true apprehension of him or his will. This is largely because they have no desire to know him, unless it be as a matter of philosophy, from which is detached all sense of personal obligation to truth and to the God of truth. They feel a wholly impersonal relation to truth and to the will of God. They look upon it much as they would ancient history or chemical affinity. As long as people hold this impersonal attitude toward God and truth, they can never learn as the Christian learns, nor know as the Christian knows. Their method is wrong; therefore, their results are likely to be wrong. What they know of God is merely an abstraction. By the methods they have adopted, they can never learn of the real God or know him as he is.

It may also be noted that such persons have only a limited capacity to know, for spiritual things must be spiritually discerned. Young converts sometimes know far more concerning God than do some theological professors. They have not more theoretical knowledge, but more true and actual knowledge. The eyes of the

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understanding must be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. We must be able to compare spiritual things with spiritual. The unrighteous are not able to do this. Lack of spirituality makes the eyes dim, and the ears dull of hearing. Being religious does not insure that one has a correct knowledge of God, because formality often obscures light. This is clearly illustrated by the Jews. They had obscured the truth with their traditions. Their forms and ceremonies had come to mean more to them than the principles of righteousness. When the great light of truth burst in upon them, at the coming of Jesus Christ, their eyes were not able to see, nor their ears to hear. Instead of being enlightened, they went into greater darkness. This has been frequently paralleled in modern times. How many there are who are “wise in their own conceits,” but ignorant in reality! Scientific and technical language is often a jargon of confusion to the ignorant, but perfectly clear to others. So the Scriptures often present to the unspiritual mind only a maze of conflicting statements. The more people with such minds search the Scriptures, the greater their confusion; while the enlightened soul, illuminated by the Spirit of God, guided into the truth, finds the Scriptures plain, simple, understandable, and corresponding with its needs.

There are times when the Holy Spirit especially illuminates the reason, and great floods of truth seem to flow into the soul. The Spirit searches the deep things of God, and throws them before the mind as a picture is thrown upon a screen. Many times Scripture texts which seemingly have been without meaning, or imperfectly understood, are opened up and a world of meaning is then seen in them. Often, in time of need, texts of Scripture are brought to the mind that relate to the need and flood us with light. Often the Spirit takes a text of Scripture and gives it a special application to the present need, so making it a vehicle of revelation, even where the text itself has no direct reference to the thing revealed.

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Sometimes God has spoken with audible voice, as when he said to the multitude, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 17:5; 3:17; see also Isa. 6:8; Acts 9:4-7; Exod. 33:11). Sometimes he speaks words direct into the mind. They are clearly audible to the inner ear, yet inaudible to those about us. Nevertheless, there is a consciousness that it is the voice of God which speaks. At other times God suddenly flashes a great light upon our duties, or upon our privileges, pointing them out to us as we never had seen them before. We may become conscious of God's will very definitely without any realization of mental action. This may come suddenly, as through a great spiritual illumination, or it may come gradually through a growing conviction. Many tell us that these things are only the results of the working of the subconscious mind. While God can, and no doubt often does, use the subconscious mind to work out his purpose, he is not confined to any such method, but can, and often does, work entirely apart from it, or he may direct its operations. In any case, it is the fact, not the method, that is important. That we have a real knowledge of God's will is the vital thing. The process of our learning it is of little consequence.

The Spirit often uses us, if we are submitted to the will of God, far beyond our knowledge. My own experience in this matter is, no doubt, the experience of many of my readers. I have preached many things that I did not know, and have been astonished at the truths that flowed from my lips, under the anointing of the Spirit of God. Things that have always been mysterious to me, I have found myself explaining with the greatest clearness without being conscious of having reasoned them out. There is no telling what God will do for or through a soul that belongs to him! We need not be surprised at any of the manifold workings of God's Spirit, but may confidently rely upon God to fulfil our every need. The Spirit of God is not dead—he is working in the same way that he did in years gone by.

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He is using the same methods of revelation. Those who walk close with God may hear his voice speaking in their hearts, when he sees there is need to speak. They may have their minds enlightened, and illuminated, and may know the truth that makes them free.

Other Means of Revelation

God also reveals truth through human instrumentality. There are some who think that all revelations of the will of God must come direct from God, either through his Word or through his Spirit. This is not the case, however. God used human instrumentality to give us the entire Bible. He has set some in the body to be teachers, preachers, prophets, etc., and these all must fulfil their duty. It is our duty, and our privilege, to be taught by them. We may learn the will of God through public or private teaching, in conversation, and sometimes through mere casual remarks that perhaps the person making them had no thought of giving as instruction to us, but they are used by the Spirit to reveal God.

His will is also revealed through his providences. Many times circumstances point out duty and reveal God's will. God opens the way before us, or he hedges up the way. He provides opportunities. He at times acts directly in natural or spiritual things, and by his providence he often throws a flood of light upon his will for the soul who is searching to know it.

He also makes himself known through the love that he sheds abroad in our hearts. Love for God in us reveals him, for love instinctively understands. Mother-love often knows the desire of the child before that desire is put into words; so love to God often instinctively knows the will of God. The more we love God, the more likely we are to understand his will, and the easier it is for him to reveal himself to us.

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Most of us, no doubt, might have a better knowledge of the will of God if our hearts were wider open to him, if we sought more earnestly to know his will, if we so yielded ourselves to him and so sought his spiritual guidance as to give opportunity for him to increase our spiritual understanding and to make us know the deep things of God. Too many of us remain children in understanding. There are many things we cannot tell children, for they cannot comprehend them. There are many things we must put into a child's language, in order that he might understand. This language is all too inadequate to convey the full truth. So many times God can only reveal his will partially to us, because of our defective understanding. It is his will that our understanding be developed until it will be able to comprehend the heights and depths of truth, until we shall be "filled with the knowledge of God." We know the difficulties in trying to explain some complex thing to a child. Spiritual truth is complex, because principles are interwoven, but it can be made clear to the spiritual understanding. Those who put away childish things and who grow up into Christ, those who compare spiritual things with spiritual, those who dwell in the illuminating presence of the Spirit, have opened before them the realm of truth and are bidden to explore it as they will. They are provided with a Guide to direct them on their way, and to make them understand the truth as they explore it. Thus the simple-hearted, spiritual child of God may so know God's will that he rests in full assurance and peace of soul.

Chapter VI

God's Will Toward Man

God's will toward mankind is definitely revealed in the Bible so that all may know it. To understand it, we need not have a college education, nor be above the average person in intelligence. Most persons are average. We should naturally expect, therefore, that the revelation of God's will would be made in a manner capable of being understood by the average man. A desire to know his will and a careful inquiry as to what it may be, together with the use of common sense, are all that is necessary in order for the spiritual soul to know the will of God sufficiently for practical purposes. To be sure, there are many mysteries in the Bible, but these mysteries, as a rule, relate to things other than to the will of God. That which people need to know most, namely, those things which have to do with their lives and their relations with God, stand out clear and unmistakable.

The Bible is a book of the common people. It is often obscured and made mysterious, but only when attempts are made to read into it something that is not its plain intent. It is only when a strained or far-fetched interpretation is forced upon it that human duty becomes clouded, and the plain will of God hidden. However, if we approach the Scriptures as we do any other book, and read them with an open-mindedness and simplicity of heart, we do not go far astray. We

should interpret the Bible by using the same method which we use when interpreting ordinary conversation. Its direct, obvious meaning is almost always the true one. Accepting this principle, we proceed now to a consideration of the practical side of God's will toward mankind.

God's Will Toward the World

God is not man's antagonist, making war upon him. His attitude is not one of hostility. He is not looking for an opportunity to do evil to man. He has no vindictive feelings toward the race. He is not man's enemy. God does hate wickedness because he is righteous. He hates impurity because he is holy. He hates all manner of injustice and evil; his nature makes him abhor it. He hates sin wherever it is found in mankind, but while he hates the sin, he loves the sinner. There is one respect in which he hates the sinner. He hates that disposition in him to do wickedly—that disposition which causes him to prostitute his powers, debase his energies, and take the course which ruins his own soul, and brings him into a state of unhappiness. God hates every tendency of this sort in man. He hates the wrong use that man makes of his will. For all these things he will punish man if man does not repent. He hates these things because he cannot but hate them, for they are contrary to his nature, and to man's own best interests.

Though God hates man's evil-doing and evil disposition, he, at the same time, loves him, and longs for the opportunity to help him. God is not a severe judge. Men, because of their sins, fear God. They have reason to fear him, because he will not pass over their sins. This fear arises from their sense of ill desert. They are guilty, and they know it. Therefore, they fear him as a judge, one to whom they must sometime give account. But God has no desire to take

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vengeance. He does so only when circumstances compel him. He is man's judge, and as such he must sometimes be severe. He must sternly hold fast to standards of right, but back of his stern justice there is always mercy. We are told that "mercy rejoiceth against judgment," and so God is far better pleased to show mercy than to execute judgment. It is only when he cannot, dare not show mercy that he executes judgment.

He is not only a judge, but at the same time he is a father, a loving, compassionate father who has abundantly proved the tenderness of his love toward us. Here is how John states it: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). We read again that he is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9). His desire is that all men should be saved. It is said of him, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to save us. He made him a ransom for us all, and through him gave an example of his mercy to the race. He further shows his love in having the gospel preached, in sending his Spirit to strive with the souls of men, and in the many providential acts through which he seeks to turn men from evil.

Why All Men Are Not Saved

If God wills that all men be saved, and has made provision that all may be saved, as the Bible definitely declares, why, then, are not all who hear the gospel saved? We have not far to seek for the solution. The texts quoted express God's attitude exactly. But God created man a moral and an intelligent being. For man to be morally responsible and to be happy as a moral creature, his will must be free. Therefore, man's salvation is not, and, in its individual

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application, cannot be an operation of God's sovereign will, as some have mistakenly supposed. If God wills that all men be saved to the extent that he will override the will of man, and subject man's will wholly to his will, then all mankind will be saved. But men are not saved in this way. They are not saved by decrees. They are not saved by an overwhelming act of grace. The Bible makes it plain that God's will and man's will must act in conjunction if man is to be saved. Only by taking this view of the subject can we explain those texts of Scripture that make it plain man has a very important part in his own salvation.

Man has the power to thwart God's will in those things that pertain to his salvation. Therefore, if man will not cooperate with God, God cannot save him. Jesus said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). He also made it plain that he would have gathered the Jewish nation to himself and blessed them, but they "would not." They erected a barrier of their own will, which prevented the carrying out of God's will. Men generally do this through indifference; they do not value what God has offered to them. Some are too intent upon their own way, too much occupied with other things, and too set in their determination to do as they please. They will not submit to God in order to be saved. There are others who cannot be saved because they will not repent. God cannot safely pardon the impenitent as long as his heart remains hardened, hostile, or indifferent toward him. As long as he will not surrender himself to God and become his servant, God cannot safely forgive him. Even though God did forgive, it would not change the attitude of the impenitent's heart nor his course of life. So God has said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," and that, of course, would be through no fault of God's.

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There are others who are misled. They trust in good works, or acts of penance, or are led astray by false doctrines, so that they do not come to God. There are also those who seek amiss and do not find, because they distrust God. They do not accept his promises. They falter in faith. They are filled with unbelief; so cannot appropriate his promises to themselves. Then there is the multitude who are satisfied with less than a real salvation. They are content with a reformation, or with breaking off some of the grossest of their sins, or they are satisfied with a formal, lifeless profession, or with doing religious duties, or with something else that, in a measure, satisfies them, but does not change their moral state. It is God's will that we pass from death unto life, and that we know we are children of God. It is God's will that we have a present realization that we are saved, to the same extent that we have a realization of any other fact. We may know that we are saved now. We may have a positive, definite assurance of that fact in our inner consciousness, which assurance will satisfy us, and satisfy God. Anything less than this definite knowledge possessed by us is less than God wills for us. But we can have this perfect salvation only by submitting to God, obeying him, and confidently relying upon his promises, in full submission to his will. It is God's will for all mankind that they come into this condition and be saved.

God's Will Toward His People

God's will as it relates to his people covers a wide scope and reaches into all the relations of life. It is not possible to note more than its outlines within the limits of this chapter. We shall note certain phases of God's will toward his people in their relations with himself. First, their relations with him naturally affect their characters. They cannot be his people unless they possess certain characteristics. To be sure, all are his people by creation, but there

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is a higher and a deeper sense in which we become his people through redemption, when we are regenerated, adopted, reconciled, forgiven, cleansed, and “brought nigh by the blood of Christ.” This experience changes our characters, our outlook upon life, our desires, and affections. We are no more the old sinful creatures that we were, but have become “new creatures in Christ Jesus.” We have received new characters, so far as their moral aspect is concerned.

When this work has been wrought in us, it is God’s will that this new character be maintained. Therefore, his will for his people is that they be holy, as he has said, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” To be a Christian means to have a Christian character, especially in those underlying principles which differentiate one morally as belonging to the kingdom of God rather than to the kingdom of Satan. We are told that “this is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). Having, then, been washed from our sins, we are to live a sinless life from thenceforth. We do so as long as we abide in him, for it is written, “Whosoever is born of God sinneth not” (1 John 5:18). And again, “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not” (1 John 3:6). The manner in which God wills for us to live in this present world is stated thus, “That, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:12). We are also taught that we should “serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74, 75). Space forbids the multiplication of texts bearing upon this point, but enough have been quoted to show us definitely God’s will in regard to our living holy lives.

God wills for us to be earnest, not being occupied with foolish and frivolous things, but holding an attitude consistent with the greatness and significance of life. He desires to see in us a sincerity that rises above all pretense, a faithfulness that will not deviate from

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right, a conscientiousness that makes our actions valuable. This conscientiousness, however, should not be allowed to become bondage. It should have its issue in loving service, not in tormenting fear. He would have us unselfish, thinking of others, willing to sacrifice when there is need therefor.

He desires us to be gentle, yet strong; amiable, but without softness; reasonable, but steadfast for truth; to have a due self-esteem, without haughtiness or pride; to possess an unassuming modesty, coupled with proper confidence and energy. We should be broad-minded in our thoughts toward others, and toward truth, trying to see things from different points of view.

In other words, God desires us, in our character, to be the reflection of himself, to be in his moral image. John, speaking of the true Christian standard, said, "As he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). To be sure, it is not possible for us to rise to the height nor reach to the breadth of God's greatness and perfection. The Apostle means nothing of that sort. He means that, in manifesting a true Christian character, we shall show to the world those characteristics which are godly and noble, which are manifestations of truth and of that truehearted love which is the foundation of all righteousness. God's revealed standard and requirement of Christian character is not something that is out of our reach. When we let his Spirit come into our hearts to abide and to work God's pleasure, we bear the fruits of the Spirit, not through great effort and struggle, not through hard self-repression nor severe self-denial, but as naturally as the fruit-trees blossom, bear fruit, and bring that fruit to perfection under the blessing of the rain and the kiss of the sunshine.

Again, God has revealed his will with regard to our fellowship with himself. Our fellowship is to be a companionship with him in the spirit. This is a harmonious blending of our purposes, desires,

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hopes, expectations, and affections with his. This spiritual companionship with God, the realization of his presence with us, is the richest and sweetest of life's privileges. God has said, "I will walk with them." The blessed consciousness of his presence and of our communion with him, of his understanding sympathy, his helpful strength, and his guiding wisdom, enriches and blesses our lives. That eternal relation with him which will be ours in that future world of bliss has begun here and now. It is not something for which we need to look to the future. It is not something from which we are now shut out. Even now we have our citizenship in heaven. We are raised up together with Christ, and made to sit in heavenly places. The very blessedness of heaven has begun in the soul who is trusting, obeying God, and walking in the holy pathway where one is raised above the contaminating influences of sin. We may shut ourselves out from the sweetness of this heavenly experience with our doubts or fears, in drawing back from God's will with an unwillingness fully to submit to his will, or in letting the attractions of the world divide our interests and draw us away from our sacred walk with him. However, none of these things need be found in us. He makes it possible for us, even under existing conditions to walk with him in white robes, with hearts attuned to his, and with a blessed realization that he is walking beside us on life's way.

Christ's walk with us is not confined to those times when the sun shines and the soft breezes blow and our hearts are light with joy. He has told us plainly that in this world we shall have tribulation, but that his presence will illumine our darkness, and his strength will be our strength. That some shadows should fall upon our lives, even God cannot help. Many difficulties arise in the affairs of human life, difficulties incident to our state and situation, from which there is no escape. God cannot wisely prevent our having trials. Sometimes these trials test the very fiber of our souls, and

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cause us not a little suffering. All the world has its sorrows, and we must share the common lot of humanity. A thousand perplexities beset us, and the way is often obscured before us. How much easier it would be if God were always to make our way light! If he were to soothe our sorrows as soon as they came upon us, if he were to lift us out of our trials and troubles immediately, how many things we should be spared! God could deliver us from all these things, but he makes it plain that it is not his will to do so. It is not a condition of ease, comfort, and freedom from annoyances or suffering that makes manly men, that develops noble character, that creates lofty ideals, that strengthens good purposes. It is the stress and the strain of life, the overcoming of obstacles, the conquering of difficulties, the enduring of hardness, that creates moral fiber and worthy character.

Happiness cannot exist without a basis. The true basis of real happiness is holiness. God's purpose is to have us holy in order that we may be happy, not only here, but hereafter. Therefore, we must suffer those things that develop a holy character, that refine and strengthen the will and the affections, draw us nearer to God, and give us a clear comprehension of moral values. God cannot wisely make of his people a class separate and distinct from others of the race in natural things. To do so would require a constant succession of physical miracles, which would not be conducive to holiness and humility. Such action would also excite the envy of others; so it would be a barrier to their salvation.

God wills, therefore, for us to suffer the things that others suffer. But while this is true, and while the heart is often torn with anguish, and the tears of sorrow flow, and while we must endure many things in this world and fight hard battles, there is also a present compensation. God gives to his people spiritual blessings that far exceed in true value any mere freedom from natural or seeming

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evils. We can know the sweetness of his comfort only after we have felt the anguish of sorrow. We can feel the almighty help of his strength only when we realize our own weakness. We cannot fully appreciate the joy of his presence until we have felt that we are alone and forsaken. We cannot feel the full value of his love until we sorely feel the need of love. Thus, all the hard things that it is his will for us to endure, or that we must endure because these things belong to life, only make possible those spiritual blessings which are the rich heritage of those who walk with the Lord.

Since God cannot wisely prevent the difficulties of his people, he offers to, and does, share with them in these things. "In all their affliction he was afflicted" (Isa. 53:9). And again, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me" (Rom. 15:3). He shares the bitter cup with us if we permit him. We find it blessed to have his presence with us, and to share his sympathetic, comforting help in the midst of our tribulations. It is more blessed to endure the tribulations, and have his comfort, help, and sympathy, then realize that we have them, than to be free from tribulations. Tens of thousands of his people prove this every day. Many of them say in their hearts, "I willingly suffer the tribulation, so that thou mayest be with me, and that thy consoling balm may be my heart's portion."

No matter how many tribulations we may have as a consequence of the unfolding panorama of life, one thing stands out clearly—we need have no difficulties with God, any more than a child needs to have difficulties with a loving, compassionate parent. Jesus assured us that "the Father himself loveth you." He is all-wise; so he will never misunderstand us. He is infinitely good; so he will never wrongly blame us. He is infinitely compassionate; so he will always show mercy. He is perfectly just; so he never asks us to do what we cannot do, nor what we ought not to do. He asks us to do

only what is best and wisest for our own interests. So if we hold an attitude which is just and proper toward him, we need never fear that any difficulties will arise between God and ourselves.

God's Attitude Toward Our Shortcomings

There are two extremes of teaching in regard to what constitutes a true Christian. There is often a want of good judgment displayed concerning the Christian and the Christian life. One man may place his standard so high, theoretically, that he can hardly find anyone who fits his definition of a Christian. The Christian life that he pictures is impossible of practical attainment, for he teaches that the Christian must be, in himself and in his life, absolutely perfect and faultless. He finds no place for defect or weakness. He has an ideal that is extremely high. On the other hand, there are those who place the standard so low that it is not a true Christian standard. Those whose lives conform only to such a standard are not true Christians, for they generally teach a sinfulness, and a constant coming short, to a degree that places the Christian on a practical level with the non-professing sinner. We should avoid both of these extremes, not only in our teachings, but in our thoughts, and face the facts as they exist in human life and as they are stated in the Bible.

The Bible does, indeed, teach that the Christian should be perfect. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). But no man of clear perception, with an understanding of human nature, supposes such a thing to be possible in the absolute sense. There is some sense, however, in which it is true, or Christ would never have commanded it. This brings us face to face with the fact that the Christian may be perfect, and yet imperfect; faultless, and yet faulty. How can this possibly be? Well, it is so. Every Christian has an ideal. That ideal represents

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his highest conception of truth and right. But while he has such an ideal, and while his purpose is to live up fully to that ideal, he has often within himself a consciousness that he comes short of reaching it. He realizes that to purpose is one thing, and to perform is another. He is conscious of his imperfections, of his faults, mistakes, weaknesses, and the failure of many of his purposes. However, if he is striving to attain his ideal, if he is, to the best of his ability, making his ideal the law of his life, he is not coming short of God's will for him in that relative sense of God's will which we have to take into consideration.

God's absolute will for us all is a perfection like his own. Since he knows this is not attainable, because we are finite, he requires only a relative perfection, a perfection that is consistent with the necessary imperfections, or those imperfections which are unavoidable in human life and endeavor. To be a perfect Christian means only to be perfect in the heart's attitude of loving devotion. It does not mean to be perfect in wisdom, or strength, or self-control, for try as we may our wisdom will always be partial, and our strength often inadequate. We may never be perfect masters of ourselves, or be able entirely to control our emotions. We may never reach a place where we shall not be influenced by the opinions and acts of others. These influences may cause us to deviate in some degree from our purposes and our devotion, just as the steel hull of the ship causes a variation of the needle of the compass. We may sometimes shrink from duty through weakness or fear, or through love of ease. We may miss opportunities for doing good or accomplishing God's purpose and feel grieved afterward. We may do or say things thoughtlessly, or weakly, or carelessly that we afterward regret. We often intend better than we do, and are disappointed in ourselves.

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Many times our strength does not prove equal to our purposes, and we fail to carry them out. We resolve, but our resolutions do not become realities. Sometimes the opposition to us is greater than we expected, and our strength less; so we fail. God knows that all these things will come to pass. Therefore, his practical requirements for us are not such that they do not take these facts into account. He knows the intents of the heart, and the inner springs of action. If the heart purposes to do his will, and makes a conscientious effort to do it, even though there is a partial failure in carrying out the purpose, God understands. He does not chide us for our weakness, or our lack of understanding. He will not excuse sin. Iniquity is hateful to him; he cannot overlook it. But he does pass over those faults and weaknesses, those shortcomings that are natural to humanity, and that are not sinful, because they do not involve a wrong use of the will. He looks at the heart's purpose, and judges us accordingly.

Sometimes the Christian heart is momentarily drawn away from the will of God, or for the time being, made to lose sight of that will, but God knows immediately when it regains its former attitude of submission and obedience. His loving heart is patient, kind, and just. He deals in a forbearing way. Sometimes he must chide, but if he must chide, it is in order that he may bless. Sometimes he must scourge, but if he must scourge, he is ready to apply love's balm to heal. He knows whether our shortcoming is a failure or rebellion. He does not treat a failure as he treats rebellion. But even should there be momentary rebellion, or should that momentary rebellion lead to a long-continued rebellion, it is quickly forgiven when there is true penitence—when the heart turns from its rebellion to submission, when it gives up its own will and again chooses his will.

Our Relations with Each Other

God's will for us in our relations with one another is expressed in the Golden Rule. Simple and whole-hearted obedience to God's will, by all mankind, would at once turn this world into a blooming paradise. Hatred, malice, resentment, bitterness, anger, jealousy, fear, injustice, tyranny, and the whole brood of evils that are so prevalent would disappear overnight, and their places would be taken by those things that make for human happiness and the glory of God. There would be no need of any treaties to maintain the peace of the world, nor of any of those laws which are intended to bring justice and equity among men.

The saddest feature of the present situation is that even those who profess to be Christians often do not show a Christian attitude toward each other, nor treat each other as brethren. Division and strife among Christians are things that shame the name of our Redeemer; wherever found, they are a blot upon Christian character. God's will concerning this point is thus expressed, "Be at peace among yourselves," and again, "Follow after the things which make for peace." It is God's will that Christians love each other. "Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." Love is kind, gentle, easy to be entreated, and full of mercy. True Christian love, if allowed to manifest itself in a normal way, will rise above all sectarian distinctions, above all natural differences of nationality, race, color, or condition, and embrace alike all the people of God.

The cure for the divisions that exist among Christians today is divine love shed abroad in hearts, until they are so charged with love that love overleaps the barriers and brings the loving hearts together into the fellowship of love. The love that God wills every Christian to possess will enable all to live in peace and really be brethren. Strife and envy wound God's heart—division puts him to an open

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shame. It is God's will that we show kindness, mercy, and long-suffering toward each other, that we be tender-hearted, forgiving, faithful to each other, that we esteem others better than ourselves. If these things are seen in us, it is not hard to convince people that we are Christians. But if the opposites of these things appear in our lives and conduct, then are we living contrary to God's will. The Golden Rule life is the life of peace, that life in which our brethren and sisters in the Lord are exceedingly dear to us. When their prosperity is our joy, and their happiness our rejoicing, when to be with them is to be in the elements of heaven, how blessed are the ties of Christian fellowship! But this fellowship is possible only where the will of God is done.

God's will for his people in relation to the people of the world is that his people set before the world a worthy example of Christian character. It is that his people will so live that they can say to others, "Follow me as I follow Christ." A blameless character is the loudest sermon. It is God's will that we hold an attitude toward sinners that is helpful and winning. We should never act superior nor have a "holier than thou" attitude. Our religion should be so real that it is just like any of the other real things in our lives. We should hold an attitude toward it like that which we hold toward any other phase of life. This simple, natural attitude is the consistent Christian attitude. We should never be patronizing or coldly indifferent. It is God's will that we be interested in others and manifest that interest in sympathy, kindness, and helpfulness toward all, no matter what their rank, station, or character. By patterning after our Lord, and following in the way that he trod, we shall do good to all men. Then our lives will be a benediction wherever we go.

In our lives we should be examples of holiness, consistency, moderation. We should be free from worldliness, from ostentation,

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and the vanities that are ruining the world. It is God's will that we be not of the world in the tenor of our lives, in the motives that move us, in the purposes that actuate us. In all our relations with mankind, we should show a sweet temper, kindness, meekness, gentleness, forbearance, patience, reasonableness, cheerfulness, magnanimity, and all the other things that go to make up Christian character. These characteristics manifested in our relations with worldly people show the will of God working in us. If our attitude and manners manifest the opposite, God is grieved, and we can hope to win no one to Christ, for we ourselves are not displaying the elements of true Christianity.

Even though the world admires Christian character in the abstract, it is, nevertheless, actively hostile toward those who manifest the spirit of Christ, because it is permeated with the spirit of evil, and the righteous lives of God's people are a rebuke to the sins of the world. Therefore, as sinners do not like to be rebuked, they often oppose and persecute Christians. The will of God for the Christian at such a time is that he bear persecution patiently, that he show kindness and pity, that he do as did his Lord who prayed for his murderers, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," and as did that first Christian martyr, who prayed, "Lay not this sin to their charge." The more ignominy is heaped upon us, the more we are evil-spoken of, the more we are shamefully treated, the more we should love and the more kindly we should act toward our persecutors. God does not will that we should try to avenge ourselves, nor that we should hate those who oppose us, but that we should manifest the spirit of our Lord with all Christian fortitude and kindness.

God's will for us regarding the vanities of this world, the desires that have their root in worldliness, and the questionable customs of

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the world, is that we do not imbibe them. Jesus said of his own, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." He had chosen them out of the world. The same apostle who tells us this, said later, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him: for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15, 16).

Unworldliness is a characteristic of true Christianity, and is found in all those who do the will of God. The multitude of worldly professors who call themselves by Christ's name, but who, in their lives, and in the worldliness of their hearts, deny him and put him to an open shame, are not Christians at heart, nor Christians in anything but name. Their religion is only a veneer that covers a heart of sin. They dare not say that they are not of the world, for they are actuated by the spirit of the world, and they love the things of the world. To be at heart a Christian, means to be severed in spirit from the vanities of the world, from the pride, fashion, display, and pretense of the world, from its love of pomp and power, its hypocritical pretensions, its characteristics that sometimes look fair outwardly, but which do not reach to the heart. To be abiding in God's will means to be separated from the spirit, desires, aspirations, and hopes of this world, as really and as truly as Jesus was. It means, not only to be so, but to act the part, to live out in the life those things that definitely mark one as having his hopes set on something higher, his aspirations on something nobler, and his interest in something greater and more lasting than the things of the world, than the fashions and frivolities, the pleasures and amusements that war against the soul and against Christ.

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The will of God is that his children have victory over the world, but not that they be in bondage to the world, to public opinion, to unwise customs, and the thousands of things that would bind one down so that he could not live his own natural Christian life. It is God's will that we have regard for public moral sentiment and show due consideration for ordinary conventionalities insofar as they are proper. A Christian will do this naturally, because of the innate spirit of delicacy that he feels, but, at the same time, he will rise above those opinions that have an unworthy source—he fears not those elements that would try to hold him back from Christian service. It is God's will to give us so much grace that we can triumph over the world; that we can live by Christian principles, not by the principles of the world; and that whatever comes upon us for so living we can meet victoriously and our souls remain calm in the sincere love of Christ. Public opinion is all too often on the side of evil. Public sentiment is not a safe guide. He who will do the will of God must rise above these things, judge righteously, and do righteously, regardless of popular clamor or popular sentiment.

God's People and Satan

Satan and his demons are at war with the kingdom of Christ; so they are at war with the Christian. We must meet their opposition, and this is often not a small matter. God permits the opposition of Satan and his hosts because he cannot change their hearts, and he does not yet see fit to use his authority in order to separate their influence from man. Hence, they are allowed to use their powers against us. But God limits the use of those powers. It is his will to protect us against them. Therefore, we need not fear them. They can work against us by tempting us, alluring us, afflicting us, or harming us, just only so far as God permits. God allows only what will work out for our good, or the good of others, or to his glory. Whenever he

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sees that things have gone far enough, he steps in, overturns the power of Satan, and scatters his legions.

What matters it if there be a devil and his legions of demons? It is God's will that we shall be able to stand, for none is able to pluck us out of his hand. God is not willing that any soul should perish. Therefore, he wills to use his power so that all of his people may be saved and brought to eternal peace in heaven above. To encourage us, he has said, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." Assured of this fact, we have no reason to fear Satan, for God working in us will always work triumphantly. Man was made for heaven. God means that all who are willing shall be brought safely to that place. Therefore, all who will permit him to work his good pleasure in them, all who will submit to him, and who with their whole hearts will say, "Thy will be done," will find that his will is always goodwill, and that it is always his will to help them. So the Christian rests calmly content in his God. He sees himself victorious. He sees himself the child of a loving Father, whose help is freely given him in his hour of need, and whose goodwill toward him is greater than all else.

Chapter VII

How to Know God's Will

God is not only willing to reveal his will, but he is desirous that we know it. We cannot know it unless he reveals it to us. But the loving God is ever the self-revealing God. It is a characteristic of love that it reveals itself to the object loved. God's wisdom will find a way to reveal his will and himself to us in a way that is intelligible to us; otherwise, there would be no revelation. He speaks to us in various ways in order to reveal himself, but if we are to know him and his will there must be a responsiveness on our part that makes it possible for us to know his will.

Many say, "Oh, if I only knew God's will," as though it were something past finding out. But there is a way to find it out—there is a way to know his will. The first step toward learning it is to establish within ourselves favorable conditions for learning it. As the telegraph operator sends his message over the wire, so God sends the revelation of his will to us through the various means he has of revealing himself. If there be no instrument to repeat the message at the other end of the telegraph line, or if that instrument be out of order, no message will be conveyed to the intelligence of those who are there. In like manner we must be in a proper attitude and condition in order to learn the will of God as we ought to know it.

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If we desire to find out God's will, we shall have opportunity to learn it. There must first be that desire.

Many people have no desire to know his will. Their hearts are in rebellion against it. They have no interest in learning what it is. It is the seeking heart that finds. It is the yearning heart that understands. It is when we draw out our hearts toward God that God is drawn out toward us, as it is written, "Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you." So the more earnest our desire to find out God's will, the more likely we shall be to learn it. The earnest desire to know creates a favorable condition for the revelation of his will. It causes a receptiveness of our intellects, a comprehension by our souls. Many never find out God's will who pray to know it, because they never desire to know it with sufficient fervency to impel them to seek with earnestness and diligence.

To find out God's will, *we must be willing to be led into his will.* To be led into his will means to be led away from the world. The world is at enmity with God. Worldly-hearted professors who love pleasure more than they love God need have no expectation of entering into the secret place of the Most High, nor of having him reveal the secrets of his will to them. Only by leading us away from the world can God lead us to himself. Only by developing in us spiritual mindedness can he create that understanding sympathy within us that enables us to comprehend his will. So we must choose between God's will and the world. To know his will we must "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," but love righteousness and truth, and desire to be unworldly and Christlike. The more we become like Christ in our characters, the less we shall be like the world, and the more we shall understand God and his purposes.

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We must also be *willing to be led away from our own ways*. We have our own ideas about things. We have our own inclinations, our own plans, our own purposes. We must be willing to turn our backs upon these things in order to be led into God's will. Dear reader, are you willing to be led away from the world? to sever every tie that binds you to its worldliness? Are you willing to be Christlike? Are you willing to give up your own way? If so, then you may find out God's will.

The purpose of God's revelation of his will is in order that we may have a knowledge of his purpose, character, and will, so that we may be obedient to him. We must be willing to do his will and to inquire what is his will, for without having a sincere purpose to do that will is to mock him. So long as there is any reluctance to obey, there is a barrier to the revelation of his will. If we desire to know his will through mere curiosity, we shall not learn it. If we desire to know his will so that we may condemn others who are not doing it, we shall not learn it. If we desire to know his will with a reservation in our hearts that after we learn it we shall act as we please about doing it, we shall not learn it. All these things are barriers to his revelation. He may, and sometimes does, overleap the barrier and make known his will, or we may learn his will from the Bible, or otherwise, but to have divine guidance there must be an open heart and a receptive mind. Jesus said, "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching" (John 7:17, A. S. V.). Willingness to do his will must precede the learning of his will in many things. Our hearts must have the responsive willingness of true submission and the meekness of self-surrender. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Psa. 25:9). Here is clearly set forth the state of those who are guided in judgment and taught the ways of the Lord. This meekness means

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submissiveness, a willingness to obey, a sincere desire to conform to God's will.

We must love God's will so that we can say with the Psalmist, "O, how I love thy law." Love of God's will is a characteristic of the true Christian. The more devoted he is to God, the more he loves God's will, and the more he will know of it. Love makes intuition and perception keen, and revelation easy to give and receive. Love gives to us a listening ear and a seeing eye. The voice of God may be ever so distinct, but if we do not listen we shall not hear. His will may be manifested ever so clearly, but if we have not the seeing eye we shall not observe it. If we are careless and indifferent to his will, too much occupied with the things about us, intent on our own purposes, or following our own fancies, we shall not know God's will, at least that part of it that must be sought in order to be found out.

We must quiet the hindering voices that we may hear. How many voices cry in our ears when we need to be still and listen for God's quiet words! He has said, "Be still and know that I am God." And so we must silence the voices, the babel of which fills our ears, continually drowning the voice of God and keeping us ignorant of his will. Among these voices that must be silenced, we note, first, our own will. How its desires clamor! How many things we wish to do! How many treasures we desire to possess! Our desires are constantly thronging before us like a crowd of children, each shouting to drown the voice of the other in order to get what he wants for himself. How can we hear God in the midst of this clamor? How can we find out his will under such conditions? How imperious and clamorous for its own way is selfish desire! How it urges its plans! How it argues on its own behalf! What demands it makes! How it pleads for gratification! But we must silence all its voices.

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We must bring it into quietness. When we have arrived at the place where we can say, "Not my will," and keep that will from breaking out in rebellion, then we may hope to hear an expression of God's will, but not until then. How many times our desires override God's desires, and keep us ignorant of them! How many times our plans get in the way of God's plans! Thus we not only miss knowing God's will, but miss the blessedness that results from doing it.

Second, the hindering voice of the heart must be silenced. Its selfish fears and hopes, its vanities, its self-praise. When our heart fears, our attention is on the object of our fear, not upon God. So when we seek God's will, our fears often baffle us because their cries ring in our ears so loud that we cannot hear the voice of God. The effect is similar when the high anticipations of selfish hope buoy up our souls until we see nothing but the object of our hopes. Hope sings in our heart, expectation rejoices, but the voice of God is drowned. Then, too, the heart is often set upon its own vanities. The little affairs of its own claim its attention and speak loudly in its ears. So the voice of God goes unnoticed. How often, too, the voice of self-praise tells of one's own goodness in tones that sound so sweet to the ears, and bring such a feeling of self-complacency, that they drown out all else! How this voice tells us of our good qualities, of our accomplishments, of what we are and will be! How hard it is for us to become willing to silence this voice of our heart, so that we may listen to God! These voices of the heart keep many Christians from hearing God, and from knowing his will. The heart must come quietly before God. It must sink into silence. It must listen attentively. Then the still small voice of God, which has been speaking all the while, may be heard.

Third, the voice of the mind must be silenced. When we go to seek God's will, often a thousand thoughts call for our attention. A

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thousand interests seem to gather around us and demand our notice. The affairs of business, of pleasure, of numerous responsibilities, all speak with their various voices. The roar of the market, the clanging wheels of commerce, the voice of the auctioneer, the soft voice of alluring pleasure, all these in chorus speak to us. It is not at all their will to be silenced. But before we can hear God, we must master them.

Fourth, the voices of the body must be silenced. The desire for gratification of the senses, love of ease, indolence, all strive to make themselves heard. They demand attention. They echo their calls in our ears like a flock of blackbirds, till we do not know whether or not God is speaking.

We must silence all these voices. We must come to quietness and rest. We must silence all waywardness and selfish desire. All fears, all doubts must be put away. Our anxious struggles must cease. There must be no voice of clamorous self-desire nor of contrary purpose. There must be no indecision as to our attitude toward God's will. When we have attained to this silence, then we must wait on God and circumstances. We must wait in "perfect consent of the whole inward nature, in submission and quiet confidence before God." We must be resigned to his will, whatever it may be, without trace of rebellion or reluctance. "Resignation is silence of the will." In this attitude, the voice of God will sound exceedingly sweet to us, and the soul will understand when he speaks.

When we have once silenced the voices that cry in our ears, we must not suppose that they are silenced forever. Soon they will begin again, and if we listen they will soon become a babel, drowning the voice of God. We must keep the voices silenced. This is not always easy, but it is necessary if we would enter into that nearness to God

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where with the listening ear we hear his quiet voice. As soon as we listen to the voice of one selfish desire, all are encouraged to speak, and the voice of God cannot be heard in their confusion.

After we have silenced the voices, we must be patient and wait God's time of revelation. "The beginning of spiritual life in the soul is revolutionary, but the increase of that life is evolutionary." It is like the slow unfolding of the bud under the springtime sun. God does not at once transport us into the fullness of truth, but leads us on as we are able to go on. He could reveal all his will at once, but we should not be capable of comprehending it. Therefore, we must be content to let him lead us as we are able to follow. But if we pray with the Psalmist, "Teach me to do thy will" (Psa. 143:10), provided we earnestly desire to do his will, he will patiently teach us his will, never growing weary even though we should be dull of hearing and slow of apprehension.

Sometimes when we desire to know God's will, he does not reveal it at once. We are earnestly seeking to know it in the way that we understand is best to find it out, and yet his will is not revealed. Our way is obscured before us—we do not know what to do next. We cry to God, but there is no answer. Why does he not reveal himself? Why does he not speak, so that the soul may hear? If he is silent, let us be assured that there is a good reason for his silence. Perhaps the time is not yet ripe for the revelation of his purpose. The premature revelation of his will would often thwart his purpose. Sometimes it is necessary for God to leave us in ignorance of his will, in order that he might work it out, and accomplish his designed purpose. Many times our unsatisfied longings, our thwarted purposes, our sufferings of anguish, all work together to accomplish his purpose. I am sure that had God revealed his purpose concerning myself to me instead of letting me pass through these long years of

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poignant suffering, I should never have learned to know him as I now know him. If I should have understood his purpose at the beginning of my affliction, I could not have cooperated with him, and so he hid his purpose until it was accomplished. Then he let me look back over the way in which he had brought me, and my heart is glad that I had not known his will.

So in many a life God must hide his will in order to accomplish his purpose. Though ignorance of his will may cause anguish of spirit, that anguish is all compensated in the end, when the soul has risen to higher heights and has sunk down into deeper depths than would have been possible had the way been made plain and the will of God made manifest all the time. Sometimes it is said that the submitted soul always knows God's will, but many a Christian can look back to times when he did not know God's will, when he was perplexed and troubled because he did not know it. But he can now see that his ignorance did not hinder God's working out of his own purpose. So if we do not always know God's will fully, we can still trust him, and in God's own time we shall know it, for he will not fail to reveal it when it is necessary for us to know it.

Sometimes we are not in condition to know his will; so he must delay its revelation until our hearts are prepared. The delay is often more of a blessing to the person than the immediate revelation of his will would be, because it works in him patience and trust. The waiting may be bitter, but the end thereof is rejoicing. If we grow weary in awaiting the revelation of his will and ask, "Why?" impatiently, we may grieve him and may ruin the precious fruit that might have come to perfection through patient waiting. We are exhorted to wait patiently on the Lord. Waiting may be hard; we may long to know now; it may seem all-important that we should know now. We may not be able to understand why God is silent. We

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may even feel that he has hidden his face from us. But let us be patient; let us trust and wait. The silence will be broken in due time, and our souls shall be made to rejoice when the wisdom of God's silence is revealed.

We must not choose the manner of the revelation of his will, except when he shows us that it is his pleasure for it to be so revealed. If we choose the manner, and require God to manifest himself after that manner, he may be forced to answer us with silence only. Unbelief seeks a sign. The Jews said, "Show us a sign and we will believe." They said this because of their unbelief. If we put out our "fleece" to make a test, we may find dew on both the fleece and the ground, or it may be that there is dew on neither. Sometimes God gives a sign when he sees that it is expedient to do so. But people often ask for some sign, and when it does not come, they draw a wrong conclusion. When we choose a way for God to reveal his will to us, we hamper him in his method. We shut him up to one way of answering. It may not be wise for him to answer in this way. If we get no answer, we may, under such circumstances, conclude that his will is something that it is not.

Sometimes people ask God to give them a dream in order to reveal his will. Then they have some strange dream, jump at some conclusion concerning it, and take that to be the will of God when, perhaps, God had nothing to do with the dream. Perhaps he was trying to show them his will in some other way, or perhaps they knew his will already and only wanted him to confirm it. If we know his will, there is no need to ask him to confirm it by some sign. Sometimes a person opens his Bible and takes the first text of scripture that his eyes fall upon as God's answer. Sometimes this works all right, and sometimes it does not. Very little dependence is to be placed in such signs. There are better ways of finding out

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God's will. If there is no knowledge of his will, and he does not reveal it to our consciousness, after we have taken the proper steps to find it out, then we may well take it for granted that it is his will for us to stand still and wait. When we do not know his will, the best thing to do is to do nothing. If we run ahead, we are likely to find ourselves in the wrong path. If we do not know his will, let us begin to search for the hindrances to our knowing it. If we find no hindrance, let us patiently wait until he speaks. If we find a hindrance, let us get it out of the way, then seek for his will until it is revealed. We should always leave God free to speak as he wills in his own way, not in our way.

He wills us to know his will insofar as it is necessary for us to know how to act in order that we may please him. When we earnestly seek it, we may cast the responsibility of its revelation upon him, being assured that he will not be silent when he ought to speak and that he will speak plainly enough for us to understand when he does speak. Thus we shall be "filled with the knowledge of his will" and be able to walk pleasing before him.

There are many things in life concerning which we do not need to know the will of God. This may seem strange, but it is true. There are many of them that do not involve any principle of right or wrong. It does not matter whether we do them or not. In these things God lets us have our own choice. In them we may follow our own pleasure. This choice is a matter of no special importance to him, because it does not involve any moral consideration. Many people trouble themselves to try and find out God's will in these matters which he leaves to their own choice and in which he has no active will. In these things we may have God's guidance where it is necessary, even when he withholds any especial revelation of his will because he has no special will concerning them. But he will

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watch over our ways to keep us from going astray when we are trying to please him, and this, too, in the little, common details of life. There are many things that we have wisdom enough to determine. In many things he allows us to choose and follow our own pleasure. Ordinarily, he does not care whether a man is a merchant or a banker, whether he wears light clothes or dark clothes, whether he drives an automobile or a horse, whether he paints his house or leaves it unpainted, whether he goes to the town that is to the east of him or to the one to the west of him, whether he lives in the city or in the country, whether he eats three meals a day or only one, whether he eats cooked food or raw food, whether he whistles, or sings, or is quiet. In a thousand things God gives us our own way and lets us follow our own inclinations. His will enters into the matter only when our conduct involves some moral principle. If any of these things would draw us away from him or would hinder the operation of his will in us, or the carrying out of his purpose through us, then his will enters and our ears should be open for his guiding voice.

The mother does not tell her child everything she wants it to do. She knows that the child will do many things of its own inclination. It will eat when it is hungry, it will play at the proper time, it will go to sleep; many things that she desires, nature will work out. She will guide it only when it needs guidance. She will turn its course from what it would naturally do only when she sees it is proper to do so. God deals with us in the same way. So we need not expect him to guide us in all of the things that come up in our lives, for he has given to us intelligence, judgment, wisdom, instinct, and a variety of faculties that guide us under normal conditions. Yet while we go forward following our own inclinations in these things, there is ever the possibility that for some wise purpose of his own God may step in and direct the course of our lives into some unexpected channel.

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At such a time he should find in us a readiness to obey. But when our choice is left free, we may exercise it without fear that we shall be transgressing his will. If God is silent, he is not indifferent nor neglectful. He will speak in order to make known his will to his obedient children whenever there is occasion for him to speak.

Chapter VIII

Motives That Lead to Obedience

There are four motives, or four considerations, that lead people to try to do God's will. They are hope of reward, fear, duty, and love. The quality and content of the obedience depend upon which of these considerations prevails in the mind. There may be times when more than one of these are involved, but usually at least one of them has a preponderant influence. We shall, therefore, notice each in turn, together with the results produced or the kind of obedience rendered when people are moved by these considerations.

The First Motive for Obedience Considered

We shall notice, first, hope of reward. There is a reward in serving God. There is a reward that follows obedience to his will. It is not wrong to consider the reward of serving God. It is not wrong to look ahead to the end of the way, and consider what is there. To do so cheers the soul while on many a weary mile of life's pathway. It brightens many a dark place. It helps us bear many a heavy burden, and nerves us to endure many a hardness. It helps us to ignore many things that if noticed might keep us back, and causes hope to spring eternal in the human breast.

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God offers us a reward, and holds it before our vision in order to encourage our faltering footsteps, but hope for a reward is based wholly upon self-interest. Service and obedience rendered to God that is moved by the hope of a reward which may come to us from that service and obedience, are essentially selfish. There are many professed Christians whose chief motive for trying to serve God is the hope of getting to heaven. When Christ was upon earth some people followed him for the loaves and fishes. They followed him because they were fed—not because they loved him; not because they desired to become like him; not because they wished to be ennobled in their characters; not because they wished to do him honor; but that they might be fed. Service based upon the hope of reward, or obedience for what we can get out of it, is utterly unworthy. This can never rise to the dignity of true service, or to the loyalty required for true obedience. This motive dwells ever in the plain. It can never climb to the height. There is no loftiness nor grandeur in service so inspired. One in this condition cannot have the content of rich joy and satisfying pleasure nor the divine approbation that comes to those who serve from a higher motive.

It is perfectly proper for us to enjoy in anticipation the things laid up in store, at the end of the race, for the Christian. It is perfectly proper for us to look forward to them with joyful eagerness. But this hope for reward, this self-interest, must be secondary to love as a motive if our service is ever to rise above the plain of selfishness. We must hold the attitude of rendering service for love alone, just as if there were no reward. This is a fair test of our service. If we should suddenly receive a revelation from heaven that God had changed his plan, and that no particular reward would be given for services rendered, would we continue our service with the same earnestness and zeal that we give to it now? Or, losing our hope of a reward, would we at once lose our zeal, our interest in God's will,

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and our purpose to obey it? The Book of Job tells us that Satan asked God, “Doth Job fear God for naught?” (Job 1:9). In other words, ‘Is Job’s obedience and worship actuated by an unselfish motive? Is it not true that he serves thee because of the blessings that reward him for such service?’ The trial proved that Job’s service had a higher motive behind it than that of self-interest. Service whose only motive is hope of reward has in it no element of acceptability to God because it does not consider God or his interest. It overlooks all unselfish considerations that would lead to true service and obedience. In reality such service is not directed toward God, but toward ourselves.

Even slaves are commanded to serve their masters from an unselfish motive. They are to serve, “not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men” (Eph. 6: 6, 7). Here the common, everyday service that is to be rendered to our fellow men is to be based upon goodwill and to be done from the same standpoint as though it were service rendered to God. If human service is to be put upon such a plane, certainly divine service should not be upon a lower one. If God takes note of service rendered to our fellow men from this higher motive, as verse eight declares he does, how much more will he take note of such service rendered to himself!

A reward is offered to stimulate service. It is all right to anticipate our reward and rejoice in it, as God has said, “Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” But the rendering of acceptable service must be the primary, and the reward for serving the secondary consideration in order for us to render a high type of service, or any service which is worthy to be remunerated with such a reward as God offers. Selfish service is

worthy of only a fraction of the reward that is merited by unselfish and loving service. So while the promised reward cheers our hearts, lightens our burdens, speeds our feet onward, and thus adds to the zest of our service, yet we should look beyond this reward and serve God for what he is and obey him because he deserves to be obeyed, because he is worthy to be obeyed, and with a feeling in our hearts that we should serve him just as freely and earnestly as though no reward had been promised to us.

The Second Motive for Obedience Considered

The second motive for obedience is fear. A realization of God's greatness, of his love of holiness, and of his abhorrence of sin, and of his expressed disposition to punish those worthy of punishment because of their evil-doing, tends to excite fear in the heart. Fear tends to produce obedience in order to avoid the penalty of disobedience. The service that comes from fear is essentially selfish. This consideration in the mind, leading to obedience, is prompted by self-interest and self-preservation. Fear moves to obedience where there is no love, or but little love. Where there is a heart of filial affection which looks up and says, "Our Father," there is no slavish fear which brings bondage and torment.

Fear and love are opposites. He who obeys God because he is afraid of him, because of the sword of vengeance which God holds, can never render to God the sort of service that comes from love. The fear of hell keeps many people from doing things that they otherwise would do, and it causes them to do many things that they otherwise would not do. Thus, it has a salutary effect, from a moral standpoint. But service to God that is rendered because we fear he will cast us into hell if we do not serve and obey him is a low, selfish,

degrading service. It degrades both God and man. It is a dark, irksome, repelling service. It has neither present nor future reward.

Fear torments the soul, but sincere and whole-hearted love casts out selfish fear and leaves only that fear which is filial reverence. Love never questions God's faithfulness, his justice, love, kindness, tenderness, etc. It draws near in full assurance of faith, while selfish fear shrinks and trembles and would fain flee away from the majesty of God, whom it considers the severe Judge and austere Master. Fear questions and distrusts. The farther away from its Lord's presence it feels safe in going, the better it feels. Love, however, draws near to the throne, and though it desires that its service should be more perfect, it prefers to perform its tasks under the eye of its beloved Master rather than apart from him, for it has the consciousness that its service is the outpouring of itself. Love ever craves the presence of its beloved, but selfish fear cannot abide to draw near to God. Its obedience is a compelled obedience, not a willing service.

The Third Motive for Obedience Considered

The third motive for obedience, duty, may be no higher than those motives already considered, or it may rise to a considerably higher plain, depending upon the consideration from which the sense of duty arises. A lively sense of duty may come from fear, or be the effect of fear. One may feel under strong obligation to obey God, and he may obey him as the moral ruler of the universe to whom he is bound as a slave to his master, a citizen to his sovereign, or a moral being to his Creator. A sense of duty may also arise from man's moral sense of justice. He may feel that because God has done certain things for him, he owes to God a binding obligation of obedience. He is in duty bound to serve him. Or, again, the sense of duty may arise from a feeling of gratitude and appreciation of God's

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kindness, and his other noble qualities. It is proper that we should feel that service is a duty, but duty-service is still a lower type of service than that which is taught in the Bible.

The sense of duty that arises from fear drives one with the lash of the taskmaster. Its compulsion ever goads the conscience. It often is a thing that one would gladly evade did he dare do so. We must often nerve ourselves with stern resolution and compel our will with iron determination. Such service, from its very nature, can never be easy and joyful service. A Catholic priest, in a sermon published in the press some time since, expressed to his congregation the results of this kind of service, in the following words: "Your religion does not make you happy. Your faces show you are not happy."

This could be just as truly said of a multitude of Protestants—their religion is not a joyous religion; there is no glow of warmth or fervor, there is no joyous, spontaneous praise. The whole situation is summed up in saying, "Their religion does not make them happy. They have a hard row to hoe." Take away their fear of hell, and they would lose all their religion in a day, except that which goes to make them respectable in the sight of men. They serve God in order to placate him, as the heathen attempt to placate their gods whom they fear and the demons that terrorize them. How different in its nature is the service that makes the 'faces of the people to shine'! When the minister who is preaching the will of God to his congregation looks down into their happy faces and sees them responsive and glowing with satisfaction, he knows that their service comes from a higher motive than this low sense of duty which has its origin in fear.

What does service to his god bring to the heathen? It brings something, and something very real, if not something satisfying to the full desire of his heart. It brings an allayment of his fears, and a consciousness that he has done what he supposes to be his duty. It

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brings a temporary respite to his conscience, but it can produce no love for, or delight in, the object of his devotion and service. The heathen would fight to the death for his god, but he cannot love it. There is nothing, in his view of the character of his god, or of his relations with it, that can draw out love. He serves his god because he fears it, but that he does not love it is indicated by the fact that many times men punish their gods. Sometimes when the heathen's prayers are not answered he will shut up his god in a dark closet in order to punish it, or he may even beat it.

The Christian who serves his God through this type of fear and the sense of duty arising from it, will defend his God against the atheist and infidel, and fight for dogmas and doctrines with ardor and determination. He must preserve his God and his religion, because he fears for himself. His service may be reluctant and forced, but he dare not discontinue it nor suffer it to be abused by others. From this service of fear has flowed the bitter persecutions of past ages. All the wranglings, strife, and hatred between religious partisans have been the fruits of this kind of religion. Those who love God do not hate their fellow men. Those whose service is animated by love do not try to bind a compulsory service on others. It is a religion based on fear and duty that eventuates in using forceful methods other than that compelling power—love, which constrains the heart to serve.

The feeling of duty which issues from the sense of God's desert is a far higher thing than that which comes from fear. It possesses elements of nobility. It may have many good qualities. It may produce a considerable degree of willingness in service. It may remove much of the hardness that is found in the service of fear. It may react so as to produce a degree of happiness and self-satisfaction. This is because God, not self, is mostly in view, and

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because the feeling of duty arises from a consideration of God's worthiness, and does not have in it the consideration of self-interest. But no matter how high this duty-service may rise, it must still come far short of being the highest type of service.

The sense of duty that arises from appreciation of God's goodness and of gratitude to him is the highest form of duty-service. But still this is far below the New Testament standard of service, both in character and effects. It is still duty-service, and so has in it, at least, the sense of moral compulsion. This sense of moral compulsion robs it of the richest quality of free service. "Ought" pushes to action, but vitiates in its reaction any inner sense of satisfaction and true joy. It may bring an approving conscience and a sense of satisfaction because of duty performed, but never the sweet fruition that comes from service which proceeds from an overflowing affection.

The Fourth Motive for Obedience Considered

The greatest and highest incentive to obedience is love. It rises to a lofty height, far above all other motives for service. Hope of reward, fear, or duty can never inspire to obedience and service as love inspires. God's greatest appeal is to our love. What we will not do from fear or from a sense of duty, or for a reward, we will do from love. "Thou shalt" prefaced many of the commands of the Old Testament because from the very nature of the case God could not appeal to the highest motive. Few people in that day had learned to love God. Few, therefore, could serve him from the highest motive. And since the whole nation of Israel were to be his servants, as a people, the "thou shalts" were necessary, and even then they often failed in their purpose to produce obedience.

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In the New Testament we do not find the multiplied “thou shalt.” The emphasis is here laid upon love. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, and only he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God. So Jesus could say, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” He could make no stronger appeal. No “thou shalt” is necessary to love. So it is said, “He that loveth hath fulfilled the law.” Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words”; so if there is love, there is obedience. The one who loves obeys not because he must, but because all his heart’s desire is bound up in doing what will please his Lord. The language of his heart is, “I delight to do thy will.” Love’s service arises to that sublime altitude where fear is forgotten, and the sense of duty fades. Love yields transcendent service, because within itself it is transcendent devotion, and the object of its affection fills its horizon. Only a divided love is double minded in service. Only a divided love finds service irksome or compulsory. When we love God with all our hearts, his service is the delight of our hearts. Love to our fellow creatures does not divide our love to God. It is simply that love overrunning. The higher the flood-tide of love rises Godward, the more it overflows to mankind. Because of this, the Bible teaches that if we love God we shall love our brethren also.

There is no selfish fear in love; so he who loves serves not from fear. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” and then it follows that “him only shalt thou serve”; not because it is a thing commanded, but because it is the gushing forth of love’s pent-up fountain. “Love not the world,” is not so much a command as the condition of possible service to God. God’s “thou shalt not’s” are not meant to imprison us, to shut us up behind iron bars and to limit our activities, but they are meant to be walls of protection for us. They are not meant arbitrarily to limit us, but to enclose the waters of our activity so that they will run deeply in the channel of his will

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and accomplish something effectual instead of spreading out by the pull of gravitation of our lower selves “to run ever in shallows or be swallowed up in the sand.”

The love of God in the heart is like the gas in the balloon. Through this love we rise above the mire and mist of sin, above the low levels of moral darkness, into the azure heights, there to breathe the pure, life-giving air, while the landscape of sin below us seems almost a part of another world to which we do not belong and with which we have nothing in common. When love has thus raised us up into the heavenly places, we can truly realize that we are not of this world, and that we do not have its spirit, nor desire what it desires. We are not inclined to walk in its ways, for the sweet fruition of love is so much more satisfying that our souls have no inclination to descend in order to feed upon earthly vanities. If we obey God only because we hope for a reward, or from fear or from a sense of duty, such language as “joy unspeakable and full of glory” will be a foreign tongue to our souls. It will have a strange sound in our ears and be void of meaningful content. The spirit of grace and of glory rests alone on those who by love, serve. The joy-bells of heaven ring only in the souls that love.

One characteristic of loving service is, the more we love, the more imperfect will our service seem; the less adequate it will appear to fill the measure of what we feel should be the service that is deserved by our beloved. We may be conscious that we are doing our best, but when we have done our best, we shall feel that our best is not good enough. The more we love, the more our spirits cry out, “Oh, that I might serve him more worthily!” The man or woman who feels that he or she is giving to God the full measure of service that God deserves to have given to him, is looking so much to self that God is lost sight of.

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The service of love is a humble service. The heart cries out, "How great is my Master; how worthy is he!" When the heart begins to feel, or say, "How great am I!" it proves that self-love waxes and love to God wanes. We may have an inner satisfaction that we are pleasing God, that our service is acceptable to him; we may have the testimony of his Spirit that we are well pleasing in his sight, and yet if we love him fervently, despite all this, we shall not be satisfied with the service that we are rendering, for love ever spurs on to more devotion. It ever incites to greater and more perfect service. He who is thoroughly satisfied with the service he is rendering to God is thoroughly self-righteous. Love loses sight of self in the adoration of its object. It can never satisfy itself in service, and service is never hard where the heart truly loves. Love is the highest of all motives of service; it produces the highest type of service, the greatest service; it ennobles him who serves and glorifies him who is served.

Chapter IX

Mistakes Concerning God's Will

That many people suppose themselves to have a knowledge of God's will, who, at the same time, are mistaken in their supposition, is not to be doubted. History abounds with instances of such errors. Perhaps we shall never be wise enough in this world to know the will of God always, but we may have understanding enough to avoid serious errors in regard to it. Many errors have been made, and are being made, that need not be made, and would not be made, if common sense and sound judgment were displayed in determining what is his will. His will is always consistent with his divine wisdom and his majestic dignity. It is, therefore, always consistent with good common sense. The extremist and fanatic are ever setting up false and impossible standards, and calling them God's will. Men of sober sense are not misled by such errors.

We shall note a few of the more common types of mistakes concerning God's will. First, people come to the conclusion that certain things are God's will which are contrary to, or inconsistent with, his revealed will as expressed in the Scriptures. Nothing is ever God's will which is contrary to the principles of righteousness revealed in the Bible, nor which is inconsistent with his expression of his will as found therein. The unchanging God does not declare

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one principle of truth today and a contrary one tomorrow. God is righteous; so his will is always righteous. Therefore, it can never be his will to do any unrighteous thing, nor to have man do any unrighteous thing.

Men have often argued that it was right to use almost any sort of means to accomplish a desired and good end. It is never right to do wrong, no matter what the purpose. Paul condemned very strongly those who said he taught people to do evil that good might come. We are not authorized to set aside, even temporarily, any principle of righteousness, and to act contrary to it. Therefore, to consider anything to be God's will which involves setting aside the principles of righteousness, or requires the deviation from right in any degree, is erroneous. Some religious teachers say that it is all right to lie to others if we have mental reservations. They also say that it is according to the will of God that one should lie in order to promote a good end. Speaking on this point, Paul said, "If the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?" (Rom. 3:7). He makes it plain that even though good should come from his act, the condemnation of God would rest upon him for the unrighteousness of that act. The righteous God can never justify unrighteousness. The use of wrong methods is never acceptable with God.

Doing anything contrary to his Word can never be doing his will. Whatever we may suppose to be God's will should be tested by his Word. If it is contrary to his Word, or to the principles of righteousness therein revealed, it is not according to his will and should be rejected. It matters not how sincere people are, if they are mistaken concerning God's will their sincerity will not justify them in wrong-doing. Sincerity in a wrong never makes the wrong right—it makes the act less culpable, but it does not make it righteous. Since

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God has given us his Word as a revelation of his will, we should use it to test all things that we suppose to be his will, rejecting all things that do not agree with it. We should never adopt any plan, purpose, or method that is not consistent with the revealed will of God.

Being too zealous, or being unwisely zealous, often causes people to mistake the will of God. There is a class of zealous persons who are continually making themselves ridiculous, or obnoxious, with their blunders and inexcusable errors concerning God's will. I have seen persons who had read in the Scriptures that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Therefore, they sought and welcomed persecution, and many times brought ridicule and opposition toward themselves through their unwise conduct from people who had no thought of opposing the true principles of righteousness or real Christian conduct. The opposition was not opposition to real Christian service or Christian work, but to the folly of the zealot, who, in his zeal, had lost his senses, and no longer carefully weighed his principles of conduct. When opposition comes to such a person, he does not realize he is only being buffeted for his faults, but glories in it as being persecution which he bears for Christ's sake.

Persecution which is really for Christ's sake may be gloried in, but the glorying in opposition that comes to us because of our own folly is glorying in our own shame. How much of this there is in certain sections of the religious world today! Such persons delight to play the martyr. They have much to say about their persecutions. If they would behave themselves in a way becoming to the gospel of Christ, if they would rid themselves of their mistaken zeal, and use good common sense, they would avoid persecution. Of course, this would leave them nothing in which to glory. This would rob them of their inspiration and make life tame for them. The

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consistent, sane Christian does not rejoice in persecution from this standpoint at all. He pities his persecutors and prays for them. He does not rejoice that he is persecuted, though he may rejoice that he has grace to bear with patience the persecution when it comes, and in quietness to rest in the will of God.

Blind zeal often causes people to have very perverted ideas of the will of God in relation to their conduct toward others. It makes them suppose his will to be exactly the opposite to what it really is. Jesus told his disciples how this blind zeal would work among the Jews. He said that the time would come when "Whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God's service" (John 16:2). We see this manifested a short time later in the murder of Stephen, recorded in the eighth chapter of Acts. We see it characterizing Saul, in his persecution of the Christians, as related in Acts 9. He verily thought that he was doing God's service, but he was working directly contrary to God's purpose and will. The same disposition has been manifested in various religious bodies down through the ages. The Roman Catholics have persecuted millions of true Christians, and martyred tens of thousands of them. Protestants have likewise been guilty. They have persecuted Catholics, and even other Protestants. Today the Mohammedan thinks it is an act of great merit to kill a Christian, and supposes himself to be acting in complete harmony with God's will in doing so. No one need make such a mistake as this, for God's character, as he reveals it, is justice and love, and a just and loving God will have a just and loving will. Persecution can never be the outgrowth of such a will. He who does God's will, will be acting in harmony with God's character. Whatever, therefore, is contrary to God's character is contrary to his will.

Another common mistake is to confuse our own ideas with God's will. An idea may become so fixed in the mind that it comes

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to have the force of truth, is accepted and taught as truth, and is made the standard for all Christian people, when in reality it has no foundation in the will of God and no support in his Word. We shall note a few errors of this sort out of a multitude that prevail in the world. I have received a number of letters from persons who teach Christian communism, or the idea that Christians should have all things in common and that there should be no private property among them. This idea is based on the fact recorded in Acts concerning the early Christian's selling their property and while, perhaps, it was in harmony with the will of God at that time under those particular circumstances, we have no intimation that it is God's will under ordinary circumstances. In fact, the contrary idea prevails throughout the New Testament. Another similar teaching is common; namely, that it is wrong for Christians to own homes. This is taught in the face of the fact that the early Christians owned their own homes so far as they were able, and no word was raised in opposition to it.

Again, there are those who teach that we should sell all property and give it away because the Bible, in a certain place, tells how Jesus said to one man, "Sell that thou hast, and give." We must use discretion in our application of the Scriptures. A command may be perfectly proper under certain circumstances which would be altogether out of place under other circumstances. Jesus saw many other men to whom he gave no such command, and he never expressed it as a general principle. It is the utmost folly to take a command meant to fit only a certain set of circumstances, and try to compel all, under any and all circumstances, to apply it to their lives. There are others who will have no photograph taken, and will allow no decorations in their homes—no pictures, curtains, nor musical instruments. Not content with such extremism in their own personal conduct, they try to bind similar principles upon all other Christians,

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and they cannot have confidence in these other Christians unless they subscribe to their principles and follow them out. Such teaching is not based on any Biblical principle. It is simply the private idea of a fanatic read into the Scriptures and supposed to be the will of God.

A few years ago I met some men who took the text, "Be not ye the servants of men," and applied it literally. They would not enter the employment of any man, holding it to be a sin to do so. This was, of course, a very convenient doctrine for men who did not like to work. Perhaps many of my readers will remember when certain teachers went through the country, years ago, teaching people to kill their hogs, and to destroy all their meat and lard, saying that it was a sin to eat pork. Such people were quite unaware that the division of animals into clean and unclean, from a religious standpoint, is not brought over into the New Testament. It has no relation to Christians. Jesus made all meat clean, Mark tells us (Mark 7:18, 19, R. V.). (Compare also 1 Tim. 4:4, 5; Rom. 14:14.) There are others who go even further than this, and teach that it is God's will that all of us should be vegetarians, eating no meat whatever. Others imagine it to be God's will that they dress in an outlandish fashion, or in some peculiar way, or that they wear long hair and beard, refraining from shaving. Others use a peculiar form of speech. Almost countless things of this sort are supposed to be God's will, when they are many times not even consistent with common sense. It is not God's will that makes us extremists and fanatics if we are such, but our own ideas, and our failure to use the intelligence God has given us.

Many times people mistake their own desires for the will of God. They come to desire something. That desire increases, until presently they become convinced that it is God's will. The stronger

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their desire becomes to do a certain thing, or to have a certain thing, the more they are convinced that it is God's will that it be so. God's will and our desires may run parallel or contrariwise; so it is needful for us to consider matters quite apart from our own desires. However, desire is often so strong that reason is not allowed to function. To illustrate: Sometimes persons desire to preach, or to go as missionaries when they are utterly without qualifications for such work, having neither the judgment nor the ability required and perhaps being even without a settled religious experience. In fact, this is a frequent characteristic of those who are unsettled in their experience. On the other hand, it is sometimes the reason why the experience is unsettled. God does not call people for such work who have not the necessary fundamental qualifications. They may lack many things, but they must have the background, or the foundation—those qualities that may be developed so as to qualify them for the work. God can add to what we already have, but unless we have the natural foundation he will not build up and develop other abilities.

Sometimes a person gets the idea that he or she could do wonderful things for God if it were not for his or her family. The author knows of at least two cases where individuals got an idea of this sort, and being married, they prayed God to let their companions die so that they might be free for his work. Such a prayer is an insult to God, and reveals an utterly wrong disposition of heart. Jesus said he came to save men's lives, not to destroy them. His will has not changed in this matter since that time. I have known others who desired to be freed from their marital relation by divorce, so that they could do something for God. They felt that it was God's will that such should be, when God in his Word plainly condemns divorce, except for one cause. Personal desire lay back of the idea of separation, and led directly contrary to the will of God.

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We may get our desires so set on something that we want to come to pass, that we decide it is God's will for it thus to be. There is a test by which we can measure our desires in order to determine whether they are merely selfish desires or whether they are according to the will of God. This is the test: Are we just as willing to have things some other way, if that other way is God's will? Are we willing to lay our desires in God's hand and say, "Do with this desire as thou wilt if thy wisdom sees a better way, do that way"? If the heart draws back, or rebels and objects to it being some other way, and demands that the desire be carried out, then we may rest assured that our desire is not according to the will of God. If I am desirous of having a thing God's way, my desire is submitted to him, and I am willing that his wisdom should choose how it will be. When desire points the way and says it must be thus, it is self, not God, that is directing. Strong desire that a thing be as we think it ought to be is not inconsistent with God's will, if it be submitted to him. So strong desire of itself is not wrong. It is wrong only when it rebels against God, and demands its own way. When desire says, "Thy will be done," it may distinguish that will. If it does not distinguish it, it will be submissive to it anyway, and instead of being rebellious it will choose God's way.

We often miss God's will by getting into a rut and doing things according to an established custom. God works in an infinite variety of ways. He adapts his working to the need. He who takes God's will for granted, and follows out the customs of others, is very likely to become formal, and his worship and service will lose that individual quality which gives it real value. Custom often becomes law and stands between the soul and God so that it often hides God's will from the individual. Let us not be so bound by custom that we fail to inquire for his will. Let us not take God's will for granted, nor

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suppose that we shall find a revelation of God's will for us and go in his path when we are merely stepping in the footsteps of others.

Then, too, we often take God's will for granted just because we were led in a certain way before, or because someone else had been led in a certain way, or because they followed a certain course. If God did lead us in a certain way at one particular time, under certain circumstances, he may lead us quite differently next time. If, instead of seeking special guidance, we merely repeat what we have done before, we may easily miss his will and perhaps make a serious mistake. We may learn from our past leadings, or the leadings of others; we may take lessons from the example of others. But none of these things will take the place of direct leadings for today. The Holy Spirit's guidance will attend our feet today. His voice will sound in our ears today, if we listen. Perhaps we shall not always have definite leadings. We may not always be perfectly conscious of God's will, but we shall, nevertheless, have divine guidance if we trust him for it. We shall return to this phase of the subject later on.

Some persons fail to distinguish between God's will and the impressions that come to them. God does impress the mind, but all impressions are not from God. Many impressions that we have come from our subconscious mind. A thought is forcibly projected into the conscious mind. This thought may be very impressive, but such a thought is not necessarily from God. It may be, or again, it may not be. We must discriminate and distinguish—not merely follow an impression because we have an impression. God has given us a safer guide than mere impressions. Many impressions arise from suggestions. These suggestions may come from individuals or from things. Some may come from Satan as temptations. Very frequently he impresses one to do something which, when we come to examine it carefully, we see would be unwise, or improper. In such a case the

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suggestion may be a temptation to us. When we have an impression, the first thing to determine, if possible, is its source. If we cannot determine its source, then we should judge the wisdom and propriety of following it, before acting. "Men who simply act on untested impulses, even the most benevolent, which spring directly from large Christian principles, may be making deplorable mistakes." Wisdom and judgment are given us to guide us in determining what should be done. An impression is often the dynamic which will stir reason to attention, and arouse zeal. Thus it may serve a good purpose, but we should never act lightly and without consideration on impression.

The fanatic takes his impressions as being the will of God, and acts without regard to considerations or results. The wise man ponders. He takes time to consider. He looks forward to the result of his actions. "The difference between a fanatic, who is a fool, and an enthusiast, who is a wise man, is that the one brings calm reason to bear and an open-eyed consideration of circumstances all around, and the other sees but one thing at a time and shuts his eyes like a bull in a field and charges at that."

As examples, some of the impressions which actuate people and which illustrate their mistakes are here noted. A lady of intelligence felt deeply impressed that she should leave home and go to a city some distance away in order to do gospel work. Believing this impression to be the will of God, she left her home, left her children in the care of her husband, and spent some weeks going from place to place trying to do good by teaching people the gospel. She went to a number of places, but things did not work out as she supposed they would. Later she found that she had only followed an impression, and one which was not the will of God. Another instance: A gentleman was awakened in the middle of the night and

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strongly impressed that he should get up and go to the house of a neighbor. He arose, dressed, and went, but when he arrived he found no one at home. Of course, such an impression did not come from God.

Many impressions are from God. However, we should never act hastily, although we may sometimes need to act without understanding why we act. As an illustration of an impression that came from God note the following incident: A lady, the wife of a minister, was going to the store to purchase a pair of rubbers for herself, when she felt strongly impressed not to do so then, but to send the money to another person. She prayed over the matter and sent the money as she felt impressed. When the money reached the other lady, she took it and purchased a pair of rubbers for herself, which she needed very much. She wrote back to the first lady, thanked her for the money, and told her of the use that she had made of it. Meanwhile, the first lady had received a present of a pair of rubbers from another source; so by following her impression both she and the other lady were supplied with the needed rubbers.

Another instance: A young minister was very much in need of some money. An old lady came to him and said, "I have fifty cents that I feel God wants me to give to you." The young minister took the money very reluctantly, and went his way. Sometime later he returned to the same place and the same lady said to him one day, "Do you remember that fifty cents I gave you when you were here before?" "Yes," he answered. "Well," she said, "that was fifty cents I had saved to buy some peaches, but I felt impressed to give it to you instead; so I gave it to you, and that same afternoon a man brought me more peaches than I could have purchased for that amount of money." Just by following her impression, both her need and the minister's were supplied. God will help us to discriminate

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between those impressions which come from him, the following out of which will glorify him, and those impressions which if followed out would lead to evil consequences. Impressions are sometimes one step in the way of divine guidance. We may rest assured that divine guidance will always be in harmony with the Word of God,

We are not to fall into the error of supposing that a conviction of duty or a conception of truth is of divine origin because it is strong, but the true test of the divine origin of either is its correspondence with the written Word, the standard of truth and life. Impressions which are not of divine origin may often be followed with profit, and disregarded with serious consequences. We must carefully determine which are wise to follow.

We note also that dreams and visions often cause people to fall into error. Some dreams and some visions may come from other causes and have nothing divine in them. In fact, divinely given dreams are probably much more rare than many people suppose. Dreams usually arise from natural causes—they come from the functioning of certain parts of the mind while other parts are asleep. One may also see visions with which God has nothing to do. Optical illusions are by no means rare. People see things in the mind, and suppose they see them with their eyes. An instance of this appeared in the press just a few days ago, when a number of individuals declared that they saw a man moving about near the top of the Soldiers' Monument in Indianapolis and tried to point him out to others, when there was no man upon the monument. Visions, also, are often seen when people are under the influence of narcotics or anesthetics. They are also very common among Spiritualists, and others, even unsaved people, whose mental temperament is favorable to such manifestations. It is not so much what people dream or the visions they see, as the interpretation they give to these

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dreams and visions which leads to errors. Many times people have dreams and interpret them to mean certain things, or have others interpret them for them, and then lay out a line of conduct from such interpretations. The sequel often proves them to have been mistaken, and their course of conduct to have been unwise. Just because a dream is vivid does not indicate that it is from God, for often the most striking dreams have no meaning whatever.

Divinely given dreams and visions have some definite characteristics that need not be mistaken. First, the message conveyed is definite. Note Peter's vision of the calling of the Gentiles, and Paul's vision of the call to Macedonia. We see by these that the visions and dreams that God gives, whether by day or by night, are definite, having a definite message to guide the individual in a plain path, and that the revelation is just as plain as the revelation given with some other method. In Peter's case, the symbolism of his dream was explained by the Spirit, so that its meaning was clear and unmistakable. So if God sees fit to communicate a revelation of his will to us in this way, it will not be left in obscurity—the interpretation will not be far-fetched. I have been asked to interpret a number of dreams for individuals when they were of such a rambling nature, though perhaps very striking, that it was evident God had nothing to do with them.

God will not give us a dream when he desires to convey a message in order to reveal his will, or give a warning to us, or tell us something else that he desires to get to us for our profiting, without making the dream understandable. To do so would be contrary to God's wisdom. We may be assured that whatsoever God does is consistent with his wisdom; so he will not leave us in the dark concerning the meaning of any dream or vision that he may give us. Perhaps not more than one dream in ten thousand has any

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signification; so it unwise to trust in dreams. If we pray God to give us a dream, we may have a dream, but the fact that we dream then is no indication that the dream is of God. It is unwise to trust in dreams. God can convey truth to the mind much more readily when it is in a state of normal activity than he can through dreams. So he generally uses the ordinary method, and speaks to our intelligence when we are awake and in a state to understand, to reason intelligently, and to draw rational conclusions. Sober, sane, solid individuals give little heed to dreams, while the enthusiast, the fanatic, and the extremist dote on them.

To dream about some person is never sufficient grounds upon which to judge him. In hundreds of instances people have been condemned because someone dreamed something about them, when there were no grounds whatever upon which to condemn them. Serious errors have occurred by following such unwise methods, and souls have suffered severely and unjustly. We need something more definite than dreams upon which to base our dealings with souls. We must know facts. There must be no guesswork.

The way to avoid making mistakes concerning God's will is to live close enough to him so that he can communicate with our souls directly. We can then have that spiritual feeling and hold that spiritual attitude that makes us responsive to God and gives us an understanding of spiritual things. When we are not sure of God's will we had better wait until the assurance comes before acting. If action is necessary and the will of God is not known, we may go ahead, trusting him, using our best judgment, and relying upon him to keep us from going astray. When we do this, he is under obligation to guard us from going astray. Thus, we need not be always hesitating. The trusting, obedient soul who is seeking to do God's will, will not be permitted to go astray and to act contrary to

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his will for lack of knowledge of what it is, for God will not be derelict concerning his duty—he will reveal to us and make plain our path before us so far as he sees that it is necessary. However, he guides sometimes when we do not know that he is guiding us. The result is the same, though, and if we avoid making those errors that are commonly made, by using our intelligence and good judgment and by seeking earnestly to know God's will, we shall be able to walk securely in a safe path.

Chapter X

Thwarting God's Will

“I would . . . Ye would not.” These words make clear the fact that God's will may be frustrated, and his purpose thwarted. The history of the children of Israel stands out as a series of examples of thwarting God's will, and the consequences that follow. Submitting to and carrying out God's will always brought them prosperity and happiness. Resisting God's will always led them to dire consequences. Sometimes when they turned away from Jehovah they seemed to prosper for a time, but their very prosperity led to their undoing. It tempted the kings about them to make war upon them, and to take from them the riches that they had gathered together. In times when they served Jehovah, he protected them from their enemies, granting them wonderful deliverances. When they turned away from him, they had no protection from these enemies; therefore, their territories were laid waste, and they were brought into the greatest misery.

God would have led the Israelites directly into the Promised Land, but they listened to the fearsome tales of the ten spies, disbelieved God, and refused to obey him. Consequently, they had to take the long, dangerous, and distressing circuit around by way of the Peninsula of Sinai, with its desert waste, its burning sand, its dearth of water, its serpents and scorpions. There was no other way

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for them to reach the Promised Land when they refused to go by the way God would have led them. Many a soul is now in its Sinai Desert because it resisted God's will, and would not be led in the shortest way to peace and happiness. Many persons looking back over their past lives, can see where by resisting God's will they brought upon themselves unhappiness and weary toils, and had to travel in a desert way, when they might have had a fair and pleasant way had they been content to submit to God.

It was God's purpose to give the children of Israel a home free from foreigners, who, being pagans, would be a constant temptation to them. Instead of making a full end of the inhabitants of the land, as they had been commanded to do, Israel left many of them still alive and settled in the land. Israel resisted God's purpose, and chose her own way. Israel's history from this time forward is a record of the evils that came upon her, many of which had their root in this one refusal to obey God. Israel was a wonderful nation, yet it was only at rare intervals that she rose to the heights where she might have dwelt all the time had she not resisted God's will.

This same fact may be stated of the nations of today. How glorious might be their heritage if they would submit themselves to the will of God! Their wars, their calamities, their internal strife, and their multiplied miseries, all come from resisting God, whose purpose it is to make all men happy by making them holy. Every prison, every gallows, every electric chair, every policeman, every soldier, every book of criminal law, is an open declaration that men are resisting God's will and not only that men resist his will, but that they successfully resist it and that their resistance has consequences that man himself must take steps to limit and control. This world might be as the garden of God if its inhabitants would submit to God's will and put in practice the principles that he has revealed as

his will. They will not do so; therefore, they are reaping the consequences in wretchedness and misery, in unhappiness and sorrow, in suffering and death.

How Men Resist God

First, they resist him willfully. The charge made against Israel was, ‘Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye’ (Acts 7:51). Again and again the children of Israel were charged with being stiff-necked and stubborn. These are not characteristics that belonged only to Israel, for they characterize the generality of mankind throughout the world. God gave man a will in order to enable man to cooperate in God’s plans for the race, but straightway man assumed kingship of his own life, ruled God out, and began to use his will in a way to thwart God’s purpose. To this day the majority of mankind have not ceased so to act. They know the kind of life God would be pleased for them to live. They know the attitude that they ought to hold toward God, but notwithstanding the fact that this knowledge is clear to them to a considerable degree, they go on living lives that are inconsistent with this knowledge, like the Jews, who are represented in the parable as saying, “We will not have this man to rule over us. We will rule our own lives.” So they are going on in rebellion, trampling upon the rights of God, and reaping in themselves the fruits of their doings. Yet so perverse is man that even though he is perfectly conscious that his life is not what it might be, that he might be better, and happier, and nobler, that he might have a conscience at rest, and a soul at peace if he would serve God, still he will not do it, but rebels more and more. What stupendous folly! Can the end be anything but disaster?

Men will not submit to God. They will not do his will. Even many professed Christians know that they are coming short of his

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will. They are conscious within themselves that they are unwilling to do some things that God desires that they do. They shrink, they draw back, they resist. Still, they call themselves Christians. They may delude themselves into believing that they are acceptable to God, but it is a vain delusion, and one from which they will awaken with a start of terror to realize that by their own resistance to God's will they have separated themselves from him, have unfitted themselves for his society, and have rendered themselves incapable of enjoying the things of his kingdom. They act contrary to God's will, shutting their eyes to the consequences. What will their reaping be?

Men resist God's will, not only in refusing to submit to it, and in doing things contrary to it, but in doing nothing. "The Pharisees and lawyers rejected [margin, frustrated] the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (Luke 7:30). They frustrated God's purpose in *not* being baptized; that is, in doing nothing. And so it is in this age—men know the will of God and yet they do nothing. They ignore his commands; they are not interested in his purposes; they treat them as though these purposes did not concern them; they act as though they themselves were exceptions, and did not come under God's laws.

There are people who like to see others become Christians. They approve of people living right. They criticize those who do not live right, but they themselves are making no effort to live right. They do not conscientiously make one effort to be obedient to God or to carry out his will in any way. Their hearts are stubbornly rebellious, but they do nothing. It will not be charged against them that they have committed murder, or similar things, if they have not done so. Their condemnation will be, "I would . . . but ye would not." When we hold back from God's will and do nothing, we are

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not less guilty than we should be if we did something that he strongly condemns. Willfully to refuse to do is as bad as willfully to do what is contrary. “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Again, people resist God ignorantly. Paul says that when he persecuted the Christians, and when he blasphemed the name of Christ, he “did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13). He does not excuse himself for his action, but calls himself the chief of sinners. His ignorance was inexcusable, because it came from unbelief. Had he believed the promises of God in the Old Testament, with which he was familiar, had he earnestly sought to know the truth concerning Christ, he would not have been ignorant. He might have learned the truth as well as those who accepted Christ, but his unbelief shut him out from learning. It kept him from making any attempt to learn, or having any disposition to learn. Thus, many people are willingly ignorant today because they have no desire to know. They have no desire to know God’s will because they have no disposition to carry it out if they did know it. Therefore, they are as guilty as though they did know it and refused to obey it.

Paul’s description of the Gentile world is a true picture of the world in this age. He says that they walked “in the vanity of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness [margin, hardness] of their hearts; who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” The people of the present age have their understanding darkened because of the hardness of their hearts. As a consequence, they are alienated from the life of God and having no conscientious scruples to obey God, because they have seared

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their consciences in unbelief and rebellion, they give themselves over to all forms of evil.

But it is not only the non-professing class who are thus ignorant of God's will, and who resist his will ignorantly in unbelief. There are many who call themselves Christians, who follow the forms of religion, and who consider themselves very respectable Christians, yet who willingly remain ignorant of God's will. The Bible is left unread. There is no seeking for the revelation of God's will or for divine guidance. There is no earnest desire to know his will, in order to carry it out; there is no inner yearning to please God. When they hear the Word of God preached, they give little heed to it. When they might be enlightened, they remain in darkness. No one need remain in ignorance of God's will. No one need resist God ignorantly, for the submitted heart is ready to be led. It seeks direction. It delights in obedience. It is well enough acquainted with the operations of the Spirit of God to be easily guided. It is sensitive enough to the will of God instinctively to realize when it is going contrary to his will; therefore, the submitted heart will not go contrary to it.

There are many persons who thwart God's will in neglecting to know it; not because of enmity toward his will, but because they allow themselves to be too occupied with carrying out their own wills, or in allowing their attention to be centered upon other things to such an extent that they do not sufficiently seek to know God's will. Therefore, they often ignorantly go counter to it. They prevent the operations of God's Spirit in their lives and hearts, and live upon a much lower plain than it is their privilege to occupy. Many real Christians are thus careless about seeking to know God's will. They let their daily cares and responsibilities, their interests and their activities, come between them and a knowledge of his will. They

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neglect the Bible and prayer, and often do not even thoughtfully ask themselves, "What is God's will?"

They often consult their own wills, lay their own plans, make their own decisions, and order their own lives without bringing God into the matter. They seem to forget that he is to have a part in everything and that nothing can be a success unless he does have a part in it. They seem to forget the constant responsibility to do God's will that rests upon them. So, in their careless, heedless way they often ignorantly resist God's will. The consequences of such conduct cannot be avoided. Even if they should continue to make a profession of religion, their profession and their lives will lack the qualities that give them true worth and genuine spirituality. The blessedness that comes from walking close to God will not be realized by them. They may be largely ignorant that they are resisting the will of God, and thwarting it in their lives, but when they come to look back over their lives from the standpoint of eternity, they will realize what they have done and what they have missed.

Men also resist God in desiring their own ways. They thwart his will by coming to mistake their wishes and plans for his will. It is very natural for us to judge how things ought to be done, and to set up our judgment as a standard, thus hindering God from directing in a better way. Our plans and our judgment seem adequate. We are so satisfied with our ideas of how things ought to be that we neglect to seek to know whether God would be pleased to have things some other way. And often this very desire to have our plans carried out, and to do as we think best, stands in the way of God's leading us into the better things which he wills for us.

If we should look down into the bottom of our hearts, we might sometimes find that we do not wish to have God's will differ from

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our plans. We might find a disposition to carry out our plans whether or not they are God's plans. This disposition often makes men unconsciously resist the will of God. The need for us to submit our plans to God cannot be overemphasized. The need of care lest we should resist his will and thwart his purpose should be ever before our minds, leading us to the fullest submission and the most earnest seeking of his will. How many good things we shut out from ourselves with our own plans and purposes, and through seeking our own way! Many times we rob ourselves, thinking we are benefiting ourselves. God's way is always best. Choosing our own way often shuts out joy and blessing. Setting up our will or desire against God is the surest way to misery—self-will always leads us out of the land of blessing, for the land of blessing is bounded by God's will. God knows what is bread for us and what is a stone, although oftentimes we may not be able to discern between the two. What we think to be an egg may be a serpent that will fill our being with poisonous virus. Our desires often clamor, so that we cannot hear God's voice. We want our own way so much; we do not desire his will if it is something contrary. So we resist his will, consciously or unconsciously, but with the unavoidable consequences that we choose for ourselves less than the best. Men often maintain relations with God that are less blessed and less near than it is their privilege to maintain. Resisting God's will is the source of a thousand evils, and of not a single good.

Again, men thwart God's will in shrinking from what seems hard in it, in fearing to do it, and through doubting God. Instead of ignoring all of the consequences that may come as a result of following God's will, and going ahead trusting, they timidly draw back, fearing both the real and unreal difficulties that their minds present and picture before them. So while they are partly willing to do God's will, and partly submissive to it, they lack that whole-

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hearted submission which leads to true blessedness and to the full doing of God's will.

Sometimes people resist God's will by following the advice of others, contrary to their own convictions. When we have inner convictions of right, we should not let ourselves be persuaded to go contrary to them. No matter how many arguments nor how plausible arguments may be presented to us, we should never act unless we act in good conscience. We should never act contrary to that inner monitor which warns us against the impropriety of a certain course. The voice of our conscience is to us the voice of God. It is not only the voice of conscience that speaks within us, but often the Spirit of God checks us through the inner voice from going in a certain direction, or from adopting a certain attitude. We may not know clearly just what course to pursue, but that intuitive consciousness that we should not go in a certain direction should not go unheeded. It is God's way of safeguarding our souls. We should not follow the advice of another person unless we can do so conscientiously and freely, or unless we are fully convinced that it is the proper thing for us to do. It is true that the conscience, where it has been wrongly taught, sometimes holds one back from a proper course of activity, but where it is rightly instructed, it is a safe guide. That other inner guide that, perhaps, none of us can explain, which speaks as the voice of God, should never be silenced nor ever disregarded.

We may sometimes resist God's will by becoming so satisfied and contented in some good thing that we are not willing to change. God can only get us into or lead us on to better things, in some cases, by first taking away the lesser good. We may sorrow and pity ourselves because of our loss, not realizing that we are resisting God. God's providences are always manifestations of his love. Therefore, when we resist his providences we are resisting him. It is a blessing

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to us when God takes away the lesser good, in order to replace it with the greater good. So, when we resist the taking away of the lesser good, we are resisting to our own hurt, and hindering God in his leading us into greener pastures and into fuller enlightenment and blessing.

Chapter XI

Ways of Doing God's Will

People who try to do God's will do not all approach obedience from the same standpoint, nor hold the same attitude toward it. The quality of the obedience is not in the act, but in what lies back of the act. It is the right attitude toward God's will and the right intent in doing it that is the true essence of obedience. Obedience may be given in a way that magnifies and glorifies the obedience, or in a way that robs it of most of its value. A retrospective view of past history, and perhaps even of our own lives, may furnish us many illustrations of the different kinds of obedience that may be rendered. We shall notice some of these kinds of obedience.

There is a partial obedience which, with the will of God well known, draws back from a part of it. It does not fill the cup of obedience to the brim. It does not follow the entire specifications. It falls short of the full demands of duty, even when that duty is well known. We have a striking example of this in King Saul. The will of God was definitely revealed to him. He did not stand in doubt concerning it. He was to destroy utterly the Amalekites and all that was theirs. He went with his army, fell upon them, and slew, not only the people, but many of the cattle; but when Samuel went out to meet him, perhaps to congratulate him upon his success and upon

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his obedience to God, he found that Saul's obedience had not been full and complete.

The Prophet heard the lowing herds, and the bleating flocks, and saw King Agag, who had been reserved alive for some future purpose. Did Saul appear, acknowledging his guilt, with the consciousness that he had not fully obeyed? No, he came to the Prophet with the full-voiced assertion of duty completed, of the will of God fully performed. Perhaps there was a secret sense of unrest and fear in his soul, but he did not show it. He boldly declared that he had done the will of the Lord.

There are many Sauls today. They do a part of the will of God and make much of what they have done, but say nothing of what they have not done. What has not been done takes away all the virtue of what has been done. Saul, instead of receiving approval for what he had done, was severely condemned for what he had not done. When we obey only partially, our obedience is not acceptable to God, for it leads only to rebellion. When the obedience has gone as far as there is willingness to obey, it comes to a wall of rebellion, to a will set on disobedience, which is exceedingly hateful to God, and which shows that the partial obedience that has been rendered has not come from a genuine disposition to obey, but from some other consideration. Where there is a genuine disposition to obey God, there is no choosing of what part of his will we shall do. One part of his will is then just as acceptable as any other part of it.

Another series of examples concerning such partial obedience is seen in the various reformation that took place under different kings of Israel and Judah. After telling what good things had been done, how the idols had been destroyed, how the worship of Jehovah had been renewed, again and again we find this statement, "Nevertheless the high places were not taken away." The kings did

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well so far as they went, but they stopped short of their full duty, and so left a continuous temptation before the people, who, in secret, still worshiped at the high places. This secret worship, as soon as the people dared to make it such, again became public worship.

When we turn to God, we should not leave the high places standing in our lives. But many are doing just this. There is not a complete yielding to God's will. There is not a complete severing of the ties that bind to the world. There is still a secret attraction that is drawing worldward. This secret attraction draws the soul away from the fullness of God's will, and prevents the fullness of that communion with him that makes the Christian life so blessed. These high places that are left undestroyed in the life are elements of continual danger, and are hindrances to complete obedience. Thousands of souls have drifted away from obedience altogether back to the old world-life, back to the old rebellion, because in the beginning of their Christian lives they did not completely do the will of God, fully sever every bond that held them to the world, and become wholly, unreservedly, and for all time only the Lord's.

We repeat—partial obedience is rebellion. It is rebellion because it puts our will above God's will. We determine within ourselves what part of God's will we will do, and what part we will not do. This puts God in the second place. This makes his will subject to our will. This sets our will upon a throne above his will, and no acceptable service can be rendered while we hold such an attitude. Not all persons who only partially do God's will are bold to declare they have done the will of God as Saul declared. In the secret depths of their heart many of them have a feeling of guilt and shame which tortures them. They may hide this from the eyes of men. People may suppose them to be very good Christians, but they themselves know the canker that is eating at their hearts. There is a

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lack of spirituality in their lives, a lack of those Christian graces and virtues and that whole-hearted trust in God and reliance upon him that it is the privilege of those who do God's whole will to have. To do God's will fully, to throw one's whole heart into it, to have the conscious assurance that our service is acceptable, brings a satisfaction and rest to the soul which cannot be put into words. This is one of the most blessed experiences of the Christian life, and only he who has experienced it can know what a glorious thing it is.

There are those who do God's will fully, or try to do it fully, yet who do it reluctantly or hesitatingly. They are driven by conscience, or by constraint of duty, or by the fear that they will be lost if they do not do it, or that God will chastise them, or let something evil happen to them unless they obey him. So, like the slave, they obey, even when they prefer not to do so. Or, perhaps they fear that their pastor or church will discipline them if they do not accomplish their duty: or they are driven to obedience by what people will say of them if they profess to be Christians and do not obey. Reluctant obedience is never acceptable obedience. Compulsory service can never bring pleasure to the one serving or to the one being served. It is unsatisfactory to both, because it lacks the elements that give it worth. Reluctant obedience is, at bottom, disobedience, for the will does not obey—it is coerced. When it shrinks from obedience it lacks the disposition of obedience, and lacking this disposition, it can never offer anything higher in the way of service than that which the task-driven slave renders to his master.

There are others who obey, not reluctantly or hesitatingly, but carelessly and half-heartedly. Like a poor workman, they care more about getting through with the job than about doing it well. They may be partly absorbed in other interests, so that they are not enough concerned about the doing of God's will, or perhaps they shrink

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from the effort necessary to do well what they undertake. Such service robs them and God of the pleasure that comes from careful and whole-hearted service. Careless and half-hearted Christians are always lukewarm Christians, and they themselves cannot be satisfied with their Christian lives.

There are others who obey, not simply for God's eye to see them, but because they have a disposition to do things so as to attract the attention of those about them. They have a desire to be noticed. There is something in their actions which straightens itself up self-righteously and says, "See what I do." Like the Pharisees, they blow a trumpet to call attention to their good deeds. Jesus said, "They have their reward." That is, the reward they receive for such service is the reward that they get from men, for their service is not directed toward God, but toward men. As the Indian warriors delighted to recount the tales of their prowess around the campfire for their own glorification, so these persons delight to tell what they have done. Nothing is more sweet in their ears than the praise of men. Verily, they have their reward, but it is not a heaven-sent reward. Such service can never be acceptable to God. It is always based on selfish considerations and is done for self, or at least this element more than any other enters into it.

Acceptable Service

Acceptable obedience to God has in it certain characteristics that give it its acceptable quality. First, it must be a sincere service, directed toward God. It must be done in view of his will, and with the earnest purpose of fulfilling his will in an acceptable manner. It must be based solely on the intent to obey. In such service there is singleness of heart, earnestness of purpose, zealous faithfulness. These qualities give even the lowliest service the same qualities and

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worth that characterize the highest service in the greatest things, and thereby lowly service is glorified and brought upon a highly exalted plain.

Acceptable service is willing service, a service that is gladly rendered from choice. The language of the soul is, "I delight to do thy will, O God!" and as Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." In such service there is no feeling of constraint or compulsion. It is the outflowing of love, the carrying out of the heart's desire; and so all tasks are made light and all service a pleasure. The nature of obedience is inward; that is, it begins with desire in the heart. Nothing is true obedience that is not cheerfully given and prompted by love. It is never a sullen yielding to necessity; it is never task-work; but it is ever the soul's joyous oblation.

Acceptable service is humble service. It is not done to be seen of men, nor for the purpose of bringing their praise to us. It is not done for their esteem, but simply to please God. Pride and display are inconsistent with true service. Sometimes people plan a course which they hope will lead to preferment in the church, or which will give them influence and leadership. These are the things for which they are working; therefore, their service cannot be an unselfish, devoted service, a humble and consistent service, such as is precious in the eyes of God. In seeking such rewards for service, men miss the true and great reward of service, and at the same time fail to give God the service that is due him.

Acceptable service is patient service. Life often seems long and the round of service sometimes grows wearisome; so we have to put patience into our service, lest we grow weary in well doing. The kind of service that counts is not some spectacular service today, and then little service tomorrow—it is the everyday round of doing duties and

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rendering cheerful obedience that counts. If we can be relied upon to be at our post and render never-failing obedience, no matter under what circumstances, then God and men can trust in us. What each of us should do is to purpose to do God's will from day to day—purpose to do his will during our whole lives; that is, have a settled determination that God's will shall be done, a fixed purpose to do his will. We shall not then approach God's will doubtfully. Whether we shall obey or disobey will then have been determined already, before the question arises; and having decided to obey God's will, there is no indecision or hesitation.

We shall approach his will with only one thought—that of doing it. We shall meet hindrances in doing God's will, hindrances within ourselves, hindrances in circumstances, hindrances from our fellow men. If our purpose to do God's will is sufficiently strong, it will enable us to surmount all these hindrances and to go forward, rendering acceptable service. We shall be able to shut our ears against what people say that would otherwise hinder us. We shall be able to surmount the obstacles that they place in our way; and no matter whether the world approves of our obedience to God or disapproves of it, our purpose to carry out what he wills will enable us to go forward undismayed. The tongue of the gossip, the criticism of the critic, the sneers of the scoffer, the misrepresentations, and misunderstandings of our motives, and whatever may come to us as a result of our obedience to God, will then be borne with quiet patience and not allowed to hinder us in our service.

Three Steps to Obedience

There are three steps we must take before we can render acceptable service. The first is to have a right view of God. The idea of God that is most prominent in our minds will be most potent in

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forming the idea of his will that we shall entertain. If the text, "From everlasting to everlasting," expresses our predominant idea of God; that is, if we look upon his majesty and greatness, his eternity and unchangeableness, as his supreme characteristics, we shall stand in such awe of him that our service will be inspired by fear more than by love.

If we look upon him as the august Sovereign, we shall most easily render obedience from a sense of duty. But if our greatest thought of God is expressed in the words, "Our Father," then we can realize that his will toward us is the will of a father—a kind, loving, devoted father. Then we can serve from love, and put fear and duty in the background. Service to our Father "instead of being slavish, is filial; instead of being reluctant submission to a mightier force, is glad conformity to the fountain of love and goodness; instead of being sullen resignation, is trustful reliance; instead of being the painful execution of unwelcome duties, it is the spontaneous expression in acts which are easy because of the indwelling love." And so the character of our service to God is determined by whether or not we have this sense of his fatherhood. If we lack this, let us draw nigh to him. Let us seek him until he comes and fills the palace of our hearts with himself, and we come so to know him that instinctively our hearts will call him Father.

The second step in acceptable obedience is to say, "Not my will be done." So many try to say, "Thy will be done," when their hearts are saying, "My will be done." Jesus was the greatest of all servants. He set us an example of obedience, being obedient even unto death. He says in regard to his attitude toward the father, "I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). He exemplified this all through his life. In his prayer in Gethsemane, we hear him saying, "Father, if thou be

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willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” Every desire that our own wills may be done is a barrier to our doing God’s will. So we must fight the hot battle, and perhaps the long one, of conquering our wills, so that we can say, “Not my will.” Right here is where so many fail. They try to say, “Thy will be done,” they try earnestly, they struggle desperately, and yet in the depths of their hearts they find a reluctance, a hesitation, a shrinking from God’s will. Why is this? They have begun at the wrong place. They have not yet crucified their own wills. We may say, “Thy will be done,” from our lips, but never truly from our hearts, until we have first said, “Not my will.” But when we have crucified our own desires, when we have mastered ourselves so that we can say without reluctance or hesitation, “Not my will,” then we have laid well the foundation for acceptable service.

The third step is to say, “Thy will be done.” Having taken the other two steps, this is easy, because it is the soul’s most earnest desire. But there are many who say, “Thy will be done,” who do not comprehend what a scope in their natures and lives this covers. First, it means “Thy will be done in me.” It means a surrender of the heart, its desires and purposes, its ambitions and hopes, its plans and expectations. It means to submit to God that he may make in us such changes as are desirable to him. It means for us to allow him to refashion us, to cleanse, to prune, in fact to make of us what he desires.

“Thy will be done” means “Thy will be done *for* me.” This means that we shall allow God to choose the future course of our lives, and turn them into whatever channel he wills. It means that we will allow him to do what he will with all that we call ours—our possessions, our relatives, our friends, our business, our reputation, our standing with the world. It means that we will allow him to

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choose for us, to will for us, to plan for us. It means a full submission of all things into his hands, with our hands taken off, and our claims given up in order that we and ours may be his fully, irrevocably, eternally.

It means “Thy will be done *by* me.” This requires the dedication of all our powers to the active performance of his will, without hesitation or reluctance. It means making this the chief purpose of our lives, the purpose which runs through all other purposes and lies back of all of our activities, under all circumstances and conditions, amid all influences and environments, whether things go easy or hard, whether circumstances are favorable or unfavorable, whatever desires may arise in ourselves or in others, whatever sacrifices are demanded. “Thy will be done *by* me” means all this.

“Thy will be done” means “Thy will be done *through* me.” “Whatsoever thou mayest desire to accomplish through me, I yield myself as the instrument of thy will, whether it be through honor or dishonor, through sickness or health, prosperity or adversity, good report or evil report, whether it means service at home or in a foreign land, to the high or to the low, in life or in death, whether I may understand or not—thy will be done *through* me.”

And finally it means “Thy will be done *to* me.” If it be needful to God’s purpose that we suffer persecution and endure the malignant hatred of his enemies and that our names be loaded with reproach, if it means the prison or the cross, “thy will be done *to* me.” It means the meek suffering of persecution and opposition, and the patient endurance of hardness of whatsoever sort. Although it does mean all this, it also means the joy of God’s salvation, and the presence of his loving Spirit with his strengthening, comforting influences. It means joy unspeakable that no man taketh away. It means the abiding “peace that passeth all understanding.” It means

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having a sense of God's approval. Finally, it means eternal glory at the Father's right hand forevermore.

When we have said, "Thy will be done," from the heart's depths, there is no jealousy or envy of others when they excel us. There is no holding back from God's will and no undue pushing forward into things without considering his will. We are content to await the revelation of his will, knowing that he has promised to lead the way. When the heart says, "My Father, not my will, but thine, be done," it enters the vale of sweet content to feast in the green pastures by the still waters. While storms may come into such a life, there is a deep, undisturbed calm that the winds of trouble cannot ruffle, nor can the waves of tribulation reach its depth. Here we dwell hard by the gate of heaven, ready to enter in when the Master shall bid us.

Many times people find the will of God hard to do. Wherein does the hardness lie? It is not so much in what must be done, though that may require earnest endeavor; the hard part lies in the heart. It is caused by unwillingness or unbelief, hesitation or reluctance. When the heart is willing, we shall always find "his yoke is easy and his burden is light," but a very small burden may be heavy to the unwilling heart. The glory in service comes to the willing-hearted. So let us follow the three steps earnestly, faithfully, till we reach the place where we can do his will without shrinking, or without wishing it were otherwise, but content to have things as he will have them, and fully satisfied in his will.

Immediate Obedience

When Paul, after having been for a time without a knowledge of the will of God concerning him, was made aware of that will in a vision, his responsiveness was shown by these words, "After he had

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seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go” (Acts 16:10). This disposition should characterize every Christian. If the heart says, “Thy will be done,” there is no occasion for delaying, but immediate obedience can be rendered. What does delay indicate? First, it indicates a lack of fervor, a want of zeal. When love is warm, obedience is ready; so a lack of responsiveness to God’s will shows a lack of love toward him. Secondly, delay shows a disinclination to do his will. It shows either a desire that his will were otherwise than it is, or a reluctance to make the effort necessary to its accomplishment. Thirdly, delay leads to disobedience. A disagreeable, or difficult duty always becomes more so by delay. The Psalmist says, “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments” (Psa. 119:60). “Delayed duty is present discomfort.” The heart can never be quite at ease with a sense of duty undone. The longer it is delayed, the harder it becomes to do that duty. Immediate obedience is the only satisfactory obedience, the only easy obedience, and the only kind that opens the gates of blessing to the soul.

Delayed duty means loss of opportunity. When the business man sees an opportunity, he is quick to grasp it. How many times the Christian sees opportunity and delays taking advantage of it, only to see the opportunity pass unused, perhaps to regret it for years! Immediate obedience, therefore, is the only safe way. Failure to obey means an hour of duty left empty, and that hour of duty once left empty can never be filled. If that neglected duty ever is done it fills another hour that might have held another service, and so an hour of service is lost and lost forever. And shall not those empty hours mock us? Shall not the slighted opportunities rise up to condemn us? Therefore, let us fill each hour with its duty, with its loving service, and thus we shall have no regrets.

Faithful Service

Faithful service includes the doing of the little things, and the doing of these seemingly little, unimportant things with the same care and earnestness and with the same faithfulness that we put into the greater things. The true disposition of our hearts is revealed in our attitude while doing the little things. Jesus said, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" (Luke 16:10-12). Here the principle is revealed that unfaithfulness in one thing is inconsistent with faithfulness in anything else. In other words, if we do not show a faithful spirit in the small things, we shall do the greater things, if we do them, not because of faithfulness, but from some other consideration. Jesus said that those who broke the least commandment, and taught men to do likewise, should be least in the kingdom of heaven. The spirit of true obedience makes one esteem the smallest portion of the will of God. He who can neglect God's will in the little things cannot rightly esteem it in the greater things. He who has not the true spirit of obedience in the little things does not obey in the greater things because of faithfulness.

It is not a question of the importance of the thing commanded, but of the importance of obeying or rebelling. It is one's attitude toward God's authority. Many people who will obey God in the greater things because they feel the constraint of conscience, neglect or ignore a multitude of little things which are just as much the will of God for them to do as the greater things, and still feel no compunction of conscience. When people do only that part of God's will which they wish to do, it is not obedience to God; it is obedience to self. Many times in the past God revealed his will through the

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prophets. The people listened and approved, but they did not obey. This spirit is manifested today in ten thousand instances. People sit under the preaching of God's word; they approve what the minister says; they go away, and straightway do the opposite. They do not feel bound to obey. They read in the Bible things that reveal their duty, but they shut the Book and go on as though they had not read it. Have these a true spirit of obedience? Not so. They have a spirit of disobedience. They disregard God's will without any consideration of what attitude of heart is thereby revealed. Such persons cannot hope to be in the spiritual condition where joy, peace, and contentment is their lot, or where the approval of God will rest upon them.

Lacking the disposition of heart to render obedient, cheerful, faithful, loving, and full obedience, we lack what nothing else can supply, and it is impossible for us to be pleasing and acceptable to God, and to reap the reward in our hearts and in our lives that it is God's good pleasure to give to those who render unto him whole-hearted service.

Chapter XII

How God Leads

God works in many ways, and divine guidance operates through many channels. God guides according to the need. Sometimes we need more guidance than at other times. On some occasions we need different guidance than at other times, but the wisdom of God knows just how much and what kind of guidance we need, and he has promised to give that guidance. We shall note some of the methods of guidance.

God leads with his hand. "I, the Lord thy God, will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, fear not" (Isa. 41:13). As a father takes his child by the hand, and leads him along the way, supporting him if he stumbles, assisting him over the obstacles, guiding him into the smoothest places, so God leads his children. We are often conscious of such guidance. He has said, "My presence shall go with thee." So he walks with us along life's way. He meets all our need for guidance. He often smooths the pathway before us, gives us strength for our difficulties, and we have the sweet consciousness that we are not left alone, nor left blindly to go in our own way. This character of divine guidance is very blessed, especially in times of difficulty. But divine guidance never assures us of an easy road. It assures us that we shall be holden up, that we shall not be overcome, and that we shall be able to walk in a way that will please the Lord. Of course,

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God does not literally hold our hand, but he guides us as though he did hold our hand—the results are the same as though we could feel the touch of his hand upon ours.

God guides us with his voice. In Acts 8:26 we read: “And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip saying, arise and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.” We are not told whether there was the appearance of any form, but there was a voice of guidance, a voice that revealed the will of God in a definite and understandable way. Philip knew that the instructions were from God; so he immediately followed them. In verse 29 we read: “Then the Spirit said unto Philip, go near and join thyself to this chariot.” We find another instance recorded thus: “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2). Paul, speaking of his journey to Jerusalem, said, “I went up by revelation” (Gal. 2:2). We do not know the exact method employed in these instances, but we do know that the message conveyed was plain and definite; it was understood to be the voice of God, was unhesitatingly obeyed, and the results of obedience were good.

God often speaks into the conscience, causing us to have an inner conviction of duty that is as unmistakable as though an angel from heaven stood before us, and gave us a message from God. God often speaks to our reason, bringing to our attention things for our consideration, illuminating our understanding, bringing texts of scripture and various other things to our remembrance. By this means he often makes plain his will.

God spoke to Peter and to Cornelius in visions. His language was definite and his purpose made clear. He spoke also to Joseph, warning him to take Jesus and to flee into Egypt. Such things were

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not chance visions or dreams, neither were they things which they imagined they heard. It was the voice of God giving them definite instructions; and more than that, they recognized it to be the voice of God. There was no question as to what their conduct should be. Things that come to us and leave us in uncertainty, that tend to confuse and bother us, should not be regarded as the voice of God. We may not always understand, at once, all that is meant, and the instructions may be only partial, but they are sufficient for the time being. When the voice said to Peter, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat," he did not know the full application of the words. They conveyed to him only a part of God's message, but in due time he was given the understanding. And so, if God makes his will clear in part to us, we should wait till the full understanding comes, at least a full enough understanding to make our course plain and our duty clear, though many times we have to go forward in obedience without knowing what the final result will be.

God often guides in judgment. The spiritually enlightened mind judges wisely. He who sincerely desires to know God's will, and holds an attitude of submission to it, may be assured that God's promise, "The meek will he guide in judgment," will be fulfilled toward him. The exercise of a divinely enlightened judgment which takes into consideration the principles of divine truth, is one of the safest of any guides in which to trust. Sound judgment and discretion will save us from many blunders; keep us out of many errors; keep us balanced; and will keep us safely within the will of God.

Many times we have divine guidance in judgment when we have no especial consciousness of guidance. The man who trusts God for guidance receives that guidance, but many times he needs no other guidance than the enlightenment of his judgment. However, to trust to our judgment without seeking divine guidance may result

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in acting upon our own judgment independently of God. When we use our judgment, with a prayer to God for guidance, we shall not err in the way, or if perchance we should, that error may after all prove to be God's way of guiding us.

God guides us with his eye. "I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psa. 32:8). How does God guide with his eye? He cannot speak to us with his eye. He cannot hold our hand with his eye. He cannot instruct our judgment with his eye. How, then, can he guide us with his eye? Here is a form of guidance that is often unrealized. God may be giving us definite guidance, and at the same time, we may be wholly unconscious of it.

When God guides us with his eye, he watches the path before us. He sees that which threatens, and fortifies us against it before we reach the place of danger. He drives away the enemies that lurk in wait for us. So the promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye," means much more to us than we can comprehend. Many times when we seem to be walking alone, God's eye is leading us. So dark a night never comes to us but that the eye of God pierces through its gloom, in order to guide our footsteps in the way of truth.

God leads us in giving us directions. In this day of automobiles, many people ask directions. They are going over a strange road. They wish to know how to go. So we say to them, "Go so far straight ahead, then turn to your right, then after you have gone to such and such a place, turn to your left. That road will lead you where you wish to go." Such directions guide a traveler over his way, just as though we had gone with him. In like manner, God gives directions on the way to glory. These instructions are found in his Word. There is guidance in the general teaching of principles, also by precepts and examples. This guidance is both negative and positive—it shows us what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. Very

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often the Scripture is given a special application to us by the Holy Spirit in order to enlighten us concerning God's will. In all questions that involve moral principles, the Bible is the standard. No guidance that goes contrary to it is divine guidance. No inner impressions that go contrary to it are divinely given impressions. God's Word being the standard of human life and conduct, we should go to the Word first for guidance. When the Word speaks, it is useless to seek other guidance. When duty is made clear, it is presumption to seek other guidance in the duty that is already known.

But if the Word reveals duty only partially, or only the principles of duty, it may sometimes become necessary to seek special guidance in the application of those principles in order to go forward in the duty. The application of Biblical principles to an existing situation may require further divine guidance. That guidance may be confidently expected, if earnestly sought. We should not take one isolated text alone for our guidance, but the general teaching of the Bible, for many times one text is modified by other texts, or its meaning illuminated by other texts. We need to get the broad, general idea. Suppose we take the text, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," and give it a universal application without making any exception whatever. We may then suppose that we are not to love anything or anybody. To receive guidance from this text, we must learn the Bible definition of the world which we are not to love. Where the Bible says, "Give to every man that asketh of thee," we must not take this text in its unlimited sense, but find out from its connection and from other scriptures what limitations God puts upon it; then follow it out in this limited sense. That is, give to those who are in need, and ask.

The Scriptures are a safe guide when properly used, but when improperly used they may lead us into the wildest fanaticism and far

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away from the will of God. So we must use our intelligence, our best judgment, and make a careful search of what is taught in the Word, in order to have reliable guidance from it. One thing stands out clear, however: it is never safe to go contrary to the teachings of the Bible. The Psalmist said, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psa. 73:24). The Bible is full of wise counsel. When we follow its counsel, we walk in a safe path. When we disregard it, we walk in slippery places.

God guides us by his providences. Sometimes he does this by creating favorable conditions, or by permitting things to happen that reveal opportunities or duties to us. Sometimes God places barriers in our way in order to turn us from the path we would have chosen, into the path of his choosing. We have an example of divine guidance in the sixteenth chapter of Acts. Paul and his company were upon a missionary tour. They went from church to church until they had made the rounds of those congregations where they had preached before. Then something else was to be done. A new course was to be struck. It seems that they had planned to go on through Asia Minor, but they "were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia" (v. 6). When God says, "No," what shall we do? They tried to go some other way: "After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not" (v. 7). Again God said, "No."

Has not this experience been duplicated many times in other lives? We lay our plans and start to carry them out, when suddenly and unexpectedly God says, "No, not this way. You must give up your plans." And when we give up our plans, what next? Well, we generally try to do something else. We plan again. We should not do this if we knew God's will, but like Paul and his company, we do not know his will, and circumstances compel us to do something. So

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we do the best we can, or the best we know, and start out in some other direction. This they did only to run into another wall, another “No” had stopped them short in their course. Surely, they were perplexed. They had started twice in ways that seemed favorable to them, ways that seemed best under the circumstances, ways they supposed each time to be God’s way, but God said “No.” He gave them no other instructions. They were left almost in bewilderment. Then they turned backward to Troas. They supposed that they were going back, but the event proved that they were on their way to the place to which God was sending them, for when they had come down to Troas, God showed Paul his will definitely in a vision. Then they knew what they were doing. Troas was a city on the seashore, a port from which vessels sailed over the very course that they must go in order to reach Macedonia. So God’s two “no’s” turned them, without their knowing it, into the very course that he intended they should take. They went on that course without knowing that they were upon God’s chosen course going toward the destination that he had chosen for them.

There is a great lesson for us in this experience of Paul and his company. If we are left in perplexity, if God says, “No,” when we think we are sure we are on the right way, we may have some disturbing experiences. For the time being we may have to strike out blindly, as it were, without any definite knowledge of what is before us, or of what are God’s plans. At such times we may cry out, “Oh, if I knew what to do. If I *only knew*.” Sometimes we must wait at “Troas,” and, perhaps, wait till the ship that we thought would take us has sailed away, and still we are left to question and to wonder. But presently, in God’s own time, the “man of Macedonia” calls to us and we learn God’s will—learn it in plenty of time to work out God’s purpose.

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God's "no" is not always the same, nor does it always come in the same way. Sometimes it is a mere consciousness that God will not have us to do what we had planned, or what we had thought to do, or even what we had supposed it to be his will that we do. We should not go contrary to these inner warnings of the Spirit. It may seem better to go ahead, and stopping where we are may leave us in the greatest uncertainty for the time, but when God says, "No," in our spirit, we should heed it. Sometimes he says, "No," by placing an obstacle in the way, which effectually bars our progress. Sometimes he lets things happen that seem to destroy all our expectations, and bring our plans in ruin at our feet. Sometimes it seems that the very worst possible thing has happened. Never mind, perhaps it is only God's "no" that he says in order to turn you into the way that he has chosen. At any rate, you can go to "Troas" and wait there until directions come.

When obstacles arise in our way, we must carefully discriminate between those things which are difficulties to be overcome and those things which are intended to divert us into another course. Many things are obstacles which God cannot take out of the way, but which must be overcome by our own efforts, assisted by his grace and power. So we must not be too hasty in concluding that a mere obstacle in the way is God's effort to change our course. It may be; it may not be. But it behooves us to find out definitely, for if we turn back from that which is a mere obstacle, we shall be turned out of the way of God's will. If we fight through and overcome the obstacle that God has meant to change our course, we shall be going the wrong course. We must learn the meaning of God's providences, and not be in too big a hurry to decide. When uncertainty exists, there should be the most careful consideration before determining the future course. After Paul had his vision at Troas there was doubtless a consultation as to what it meant. The

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words “assuredly gathering” in verse ten literally mean “laying things together.” They evidently discussed the question carefully from every angle, took into consideration all the facts, and then when they had done this they were all agreed upon what was God’s will.

Obstacles, instead of being hindrances, may sometimes be helps. “If my supreme will is to do God’s will, then nothing which is his will and comes to me because it is, can be a hindrance. A Christian man whose path is simple obedience to the will of God can never be turned from that path by whatsoever hindrances may affect his outward life.” Here is the secret of turning hindrances into helps; that is, that our supreme will shall be to do God’s will.

God sometimes leads his people through human instrumentality. God “that led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm” (Isa. 63:12). God was their leader, but he used Moses as the human instrumentality. The Psalmist said, “Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses” (Psa. 77:20). The means by which he made Moses capable of leading his people is told in Isa. 63:11: “Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his Holy Spirit within him?” It was the Holy Spirit in Moses that made him a capable leader. So God puts his Holy Spirit in men nowadays and teaches them the will of God, so that they can instruct others.

He who is too self-willed, or who reposes so much confidence in himself that he cannot be instructed by others, even by those who are older and more experienced, cannot be led. Such a person many times falls into serious errors, and suffers severely for his temerity. The humble are glad to be instructed. Sometimes people ask advice of those who are capable of giving them good advice, then go and

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ask the advice of someone else whom they know to be no wiser than themselves, and then often follow the advice of the less wise person, to their own hurt. God has made some wise with the wisdom that cometh down from above, and they give good counsel. We should not follow advice blindly, but we should not treat it lightly when it comes from one who lives close to God. It is never safe to disregard, without consideration, the warnings of holy people.

Sometimes God leads us into the wilderness, as he led Jesus, of whom we read, “And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness” (Luke 4:1). He was led away from the crowd, where it seemed his work lay; away from the land of usefulness, or seeming usefulness; away from human habitation, away out into the wilderness. He was led away from human counsel and sympathy, into a strange land where all was new and life seemed barren. If our Lord was thus led into the wilderness, we need not be surprised if we have a similar experience. Under such conditions many souls have come to the conclusion that they have strayed away from God, that God has forsaken them, and that they are in a place where his will is not being done in them. Jesus might have concluded thus too, but the Word tells us that he was “led by the Spirit into the wilderness.” He did not go there of himself—he went in obedience to God. You and I may find ourselves in the wilderness without knowing God has led us there, but if our trust is in him, though we stay there forty days and no angels come to minister unto us, let us not suppose that God has forsaken us, nor that we are outside his will.

Jesus was led into the wilderness for a definite purpose. We read, “Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (Matt. 4:1). Luke tells us that he was tempted forty days. What these temptations were, we do not know. We are

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told only of the ones that occurred at the end of the forty days. But this we do know, that when Jesus came forth from the wilderness and mingled with men again, he was prepared for his mission. He was ready to do the works of God. He “suffered being tempted” (see Heb. 2:18). It was not a mere holiday excursion upon which he went into the wilderness. The spirit led him there for serious business. Many times nothing but a wilderness experience will develop in men and women that moral fiber and that courage and fidelity to the truth, and give that wisdom and understanding of God and of his purpose, that will prepare them for their life-work.

Then, too, it is sometimes necessary, if we should get too self-confident, too self-reliant, too sure of ourselves, or if we should grow careless, or lose the keen edge from our zeal, that we be led into the wilderness, there to suffer and to be tempted until we have regained what has been lost and have been prepared to go back and take up our duties again and do them better than before. Or, it may be that there is some experience ahead of us for which we are not yet strong enough. It may be that there will be praise from men, prosperity, difficulty, or suffering for which we are not prepared and which might be disastrous to us if it came before we had a proper preparation for it. So God leads us into the wilderness, and there we suffer until he has wrought in us that preparation which he sees is necessary in order to carry us through our difficulties and make us equal to the situation that confronts us. So if into the wilderness we must go, let us go trusting in God, not supposing ourselves to be rejected, nor condemning ourselves, but let us go patiently, as doing God's will, for when we come forth from the wilderness, it will be to work the works of God.

Life has many different experiences for us. Sometimes we must go into the wilderness of uncertainty, and sometimes to the desert,

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where our lives seem barren. Sometimes we are permitted to go up to a lofty height of spiritual exaltation, there to have things transfigured before us and spread out like a great panorama at our feet. We behold wonderful things in God's law, and in God's purpose and workings. Again we must go down into the valley of humiliation or suffering, but when our shame is gone, and we are humbled, and satisfied to be humbled, or when the sobs are stifled and the soul comes out into quietness and submission, then God comes down like the dew. All these and many other experiences may come into a single life, but they all work out God's purpose and help to mold us in his image and prepare us for his service.

Sometimes we wait too long for guidance before acting. It is often necessary to start in some direction when only a step is clear before us, but when we take that step further guidance will be given. Taking that one step which we see, when all is dark beyond it, is a test of our loyal obedience. Having met this test, we have prepared ourselves to be led farther. We must not wait until we see the end from the beginning. One of the secrets of being led is not to require that everything shall be explained in advance. We may draw a very good lesson for ourselves from what Abraham's servant said, "I being in the way, the Lord led me" (Gen. 24:27). Sometimes we have to start out upon a way that leads we know not where, but if we are in the way and obedient in the way, the Lord will lead us to the desired destination. So let us be content to go as far as we can see, expecting that when we arrive there further directions will be given us.

Sometimes people can learn only through their mistakes, or can learn better through their mistakes than through any other method. So God lets us make our mistakes, if we will be led in no other way, or can be led in no other way, just as a parent when he sees his

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child's course is unwise sometimes lets the child do as it thinks best, saying of the child, "Let him go ahead, he will find out"; that is, his error will teach him—he will be convinced when he learns by experience. So if we make mistakes, let us be taught by those mistakes. Let us not be crushed by them, nor prevented from making further effort, but let us learn through them and be more easily led the next time.

The way in which God led Israel from Egypt to Canaan, and their experiences on that way, teach us many useful lessons. There was a short, easy way between the two countries—the regular caravan route. It was a way by which they might have readily gone, with very little suffering or inconvenience, but God did not choose this way for Israel, and he tells us why. "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt" (Exod. 13:17). He saw that if they went on the easy way by which their father Jacob had come from Canaan into Egypt, when they faced the situation they must face in conquering Canaan they would be discouraged and would turn about and flee back into bondage again. So we read, "But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea" (vs. 18). He led them through this desert, and opened the sea before them, thus placing an obstacle behind them, the consideration of which would make them hesitate to turn back. Just so God must lead you and me sometimes in a path of difficulty. He must confront us by our Red Sea; then make a way through it, in order to make sure that we shall continue on our way and not turn back.

God then led them up to the borders of the land at Kadesh-Barnea, but here their faith failed and they refused to go forward.

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They were affrighted at the story told them by the ten spies. When they disbelieved God and hardened their hearts against him, when they would not listen to his promise of proffered aid, nor to the counsel of Joshua and Caleb, God turned them back into the wilderness and sent them by a roundabout way through the desert of the Sinaitic Peninsula, a long, hard journey of forty years, before they reached the Promised Land. His purpose in this is thus related: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. 8:2, 3). They had to have this hard experience in order to teach them obedience, and to teach them to humble their hearts before the Lord and do without murmuring what he commanded them to do. So disobedience and murmuring may cause you and me to have our journey through the wilderness. We may hunger and thirst, or we may get footsore and weary before the end of our way is reached, but if the journey teaches us submission to God and makes us to know him as he is, it will not have been in vain, but will have been a blessing to us, even as this long desert journey was to Israel.

In whatsoever test may come, we have the assurance of God's guidance. He says, "I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them" (Isa. 42:16). But God often requires faith on our part. If we feel and believe that we are not being guided, we bring ourselves into a condition that renders it very difficult for God to guide us. When we

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rely upon him for guidance, when we look up into his face and say, “Thou wilt guide me in all my ways,” and then trust him to do it, we shall be guided, whether we are conscious of that guidance or not, for with his voice and his eye and his hand he will lead us in his way in paths of peace and righteousness for his name’s sake.

Chapter XIII

Submission to God's Will

Our wills are naturally selfish. We love to have our own way. It is not easy to submit to the will of another, unless there is some strong motive that impels us to submission. The carrying out of our wills in a selfish way only leads to more selfishness and to a stronger inclination to have our own way. It is this selfish inclination in the will that makes it necessary for God to demand submission from us. His will is never selfish, but always benevolent. The cheerful doing of it always leads to an increase of benevolence in us. Therefore, when God demands us to submit our wills to him, he is doing that which is best for us. The more consideration for others and true benevolence is developed within us, the more our natures are purified and exalted and the more we are able to fulfil the purpose of our creation.

Submitting to God is often the hardest of all tasks, yet it is the most necessary if we are to be exalted to fellowship with God and enjoy the highest development of our faculties and powers. Selfishness always tends to degrade. It is ignoble—its exercise tends to dwarf and blight the finest things in our characters. The adoption of a submissive attitude toward God and his will paves the way for the natural development of those qualities within us which are most

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worth developing, and which ennoble us most when they are developed. The more our souls run out Godward, the more like him we become; and the more like him we become, the happier and more useful we are. Unselfish devotion to benevolent service toward God and toward our fellow man enriches the heart and life as nothing else can do, and leads the way to happiness, peace, and contentment which make one truly blessed.

Submission to God is the one necessary thing in order to enjoy the Christian life. The more fully we are submitted to his will, the more cheerfully we can carry it out, and the sweeter and richer will be the joy of doing it. Reluctant submission to God is not real submission. Reluctant obedience is never real obedience. It is only when the heart responds to God willingly and cheerfully that the power of such service to make one happy is realized. We must conquer our reluctant wills. "The essence of sacrifice of self is the sacrifice of the will. Unwilling offerings are a contradiction and in fact there are no such things. The quality of unwillingness destroys the character of the offering and robs it of all sacredness. Reluctant Christianity is not Christianity."

True nobility of both the inner and the outer life comes from submission to, and cooperation with, God. The nature of our relations with God depends upon the extent of our submission to him. This is well illustrated in the relation of husband and wife. When two marry, and there is no merging of the wills and purposes, but each retains his or her individuality, standing apart from the other in wish and desire, in choosing and willing, their union can never be a happy one. They must yield themselves to each other. There must be a merging of their wills into each other, a combining of their purposes, a consideration of each other, a sacrificing of the individual will. The husband and wife who really love each other

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can enjoy each other's society and draw near to each other in spirit and affection. This makes their union a blessed reality, and a source of more true joy than any other natural relation. Those who thus enjoy each other are the ones who have sacrificed self and lost sight of selfish considerations; each desires to please the other and each finds his or her happiness in the happiness of the other.

In the Scriptures, Christ is represented as being the husband of the church, and the church is taught to submit to him as a wife should submit to her husband. The wife submits to her husband because she loves him—if she submits from any other reason she must be unhappy in her submission. The submission that comes from love, and is the willing response of love, is the source of the deepest and truest happiness that can come from human sources. So the submission to God which is acceptable to him, and which reacts in blessedness to the soul who submits, must be based upon love. The secret of such submission is thus stated by John, “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us” (1 John 4:16). So he exclaims in the next breath, “God is love.” Only the truly submitted heart can fathom the love of God, or can love God with that self-enriching love which inspires devotion and causes us to delight in God. The fervor of love softens the will and makes it flexible. When we love it is easy to obey; it is easy to submit. All the irksomeness and compulsion is taken out of religion when the heart is full of love toward God. The more we love, the easier it is to serve, and the more joyful is that service.

Self-surrender is the heart of all true religion. Paul told the secret when he said of a certain church, that they “first gave their own selves.” Then they could endure persecutions. They could bear with patience the things which came upon them, and still be full of joy. The yoke of God was not galling to them. The sufferings that

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came upon them were not hard to be borne. They were overrunning with love. Their hearts were knit together with bonds stronger than death. They could be exceedingly joyful in all their tribulations, because they had first given themselves. Oh, the barrenness and unhappiness that are in the lives of many persons because they are trying to give service when they have not given themselves! They are trying to serve God, but at the same time they are serving themselves. They try to combine these two services, and what an unsatisfying, irksome service they find it! How often their will is contrary to God's will! How often their will breaks out to claim its own way! This conflict of wills shuts out from their lives the blessed sense of God's nearness and approval which is granted to those who have first given themselves; who have yielded their all without reservation to God; who have surrendered themselves, and their wills, and now find a continuous inspiration to service in the delight of their own hearts in serving. A religion which is not based on self-surrender is a mere form. It is of no more value than the religion of the pagan, for it is the same kind of a religion that he has. True religion is love—love flowing out in devotion, and service, and self-surrender. The forms of religion are nothing without the real inner substance. If we have the form, without the inner content, we are poor indeed; but if we are thoroughly submitted to God, we have the inner content of religion, no matter in what form it manifests itself.

The attitude of our wills toward God is thus beautifully expressed by one writer, "A man's will should be an echo, not a voice, the echo of God, not the voice of self. It should be silent as some sweet instrument is silent till the owner's hand touches the keys." It is self-surrender that tunes all the strings of our hearts to a unison of purpose, and makes them responsive to the touch of the Divine Musician. And when we are attuned to God's will through self-surrender, our hearts will be filled with his melodies, there will

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be celestial harmonies in our lives, our hearts will join with the angels in their chorus of praise, and we shall be raised up together with Christ and made to sit in heavenly places with him. Self-surrender is the key that unlocks all the riches of our own natures, and causes them to bud and blossom and produce rich fragrance. Every noble thing in us is made more noble by submission; every beauty is rendered more beautiful—a thousand new beauties and riches are brought into the life that were not there before. Self-surrender empties our hearts and makes them ready to receive divine treasures. Love, joy, faith, peace, contentment, and all the blessed fruition of righteousness have their roots sunk deep in self-surrender.

Many people seem to think that surrender to God impoverishes men, and that it is a wholly one-sided thing, but God asks that we be emptied of self only that he may fill us and that he may give himself to us in the fullest measure of our capacity and willingness to receive him. If we hold to anything of self, or of the world, it is because we are not willing to be filled with God and do not believe that he will be to us more than all else beside. All lack of submission shuts out God from that part of our nature which is not submitted, and prevents him from having control of that part of the will which remains unsubmitted.

Open the door of thy heart wide. Unlock its every chamber. Hand over the key to God. Entreat him to come in, and fill you to your fullest capacity. Empty your heart of self, of all selfish plans, purposes, and desires, every reluctance of the will, every hesitation to obey. Give him your all. Let not one thing be kept back. When all is his, the floods of his grace will flow into your soul till you will wonder why you ever hesitated to yield your all to him. He yields his all to us. He withholds no good thing when we are yielded to him

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fully. So the yielding is mutual, although he gives more than we, because he is greater than we. He asks the surrender of our wills only that he may guide us into paths wherein we never could walk without his guidance—paths of peace beneath the sunny skies of his love. Cheerful self-surrender has a wonderful power to banish the gloom and the clouds of human life. The unsundered life is like the mountain whose top is ever veiled in clouds.

It has been said, "Peace is to will as God wills." We all desire peace, but this is the secret of peace. When we have said, "Not my will be done," the conflict of wills has ceased. Then we can will as God wills, and his peace which passeth all understanding will fill our hearts; then in the quiet, joyous eventide the dew of heaven will fall upon our souls, refreshing and blessing them, and calm content will overspread our life like the quiet of the evening twilight.

True happiness is predicated on perfect conformity to God's will by our wills, both in our characters and in our conduct. The surrendered life is necessarily a happy life, for it possesses the elements of true happiness within itself. The unsundered life is an unsatisfied life, always filling itself with evanescent joys which fade away as soon as they are grasped and leave nothing of satisfaction and contentment behind. "The one misery of man is self-will; the one secret of blessedness is a conquest over our own wills. To yield them up to God is rest and peace." Self-surrender "means that our wills are brought into harmony with his, and that means that the one poison drop is squeezed out of our lives, and that sweetness and joy are infused into them, for what disturbs us in this world is not trouble, but our opposition to trouble. The source of all that frets, and irritates, and wears away our lives is not in external things, but is the resistance of our wills to the will of God expressed by external things."

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It is fighting against circumstances that makes them hard to bear. Self-surrender smooths our way, lightens our burdens, fills our hearts with a song of joy, and gives us courage for the battles of life. Where obedience is free, and not reluctant, constant, not irregular, spontaneous, not constrained, we never feel that we have a “hard row to hoe,” for God’s sustaining grace and the joys of his salvation give such strength of soul and such buoyancy of spirit that life’s conflicts are all won, and our lives are kept sweetly victorious.

The submitted will is not weakened because of that submission. We do not have to be passive and feeble in order to submit to God. Submission frees the will from the bondage of sin, and it can then act normally. The submitted will is the will acting with God instead of against him. The unsubmitted will acts against him. The submitted will is an active, vital, powerful will, acting in conjunction with God’s will and directed by his will. Submission does not mean the destruction of our will; it only means that our strength will be turned into the right channels, so that we shall desire God’s will. The cooperating will loses none of its strength through submission. It joins its strength with God’s strength, and being directed by him into the most effective channels, it can accomplish what would be impossible for it to accomplish without being surrendered. Our wills should speak after God’s will speaks. If our wills speak first, they may bring us into many miseries and troubles and be the cause of many failures and sins. We must let God speak, and then when he speaks, echo the same thing. Thus shall we be workers together with God in the accomplishment of his grand and glorious purpose.

People like to have their own way, and often think that if they surrender to God they cannot have their own way anymore. However, when we have chosen God’s will as our will, we always

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have our own way when God has his way. Some are afraid to submit to God's will lest they should have to give up their own cherished plans or ambitions; lest they should not be able to choose for themselves. But we can always choose for ourselves if we choose what is best, for God's will is that which is best. If we do not choose God's will, but choose some other way, we are choosing less than the best for ourselves. Therefore, we are robbing ourselves of that which is best for us, and we thereby lose the joy and peace that are the fruits of choosing his will.

Some fear to take God's will, because they distrust God's fidelity to them, and feel that they can choose best for themselves. This is doubting God's wisdom and love, for God is wiser than we—his tender love for us will cause him to choose what is best for us, just as a loving parent will choose for his child that which is best for it. We must submit to God in faith. A submission that is full of doubts concerning God's faithfulness and love is always a hesitating submission, and that very hesitation robs it of the joyfulness that comes from confident, trusting submission.

When we are fully submitted, he sometimes lets us choose our own course. The author has had a number of such experiences, one of which will be mentioned. There was a time when two courses were open, and a choice must be made between the two. To follow either would be doing the Lord's service, but which would please the Lord to follow was not clear, though earnest prayer was made to know the will of the Lord. For a time, there seemed to be no answer. Then one day God said, "You can do just as you choose; you can go ahead as you are or you can take up the other line of work." This proved a great source of comfort and inspiration to my soul. To feel that God saw in me sincerity enough to do his will to let me choose for myself what sort of work I should do, inspired my heart to

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faithfulness and to devotion to him, as perhaps nothing else could have done.

In order for God to allow us the privilege of choosing for ourselves in such matters, the will must be wholly surrendered to his will. But what a blessed sense of soul-rest and what enriching of the nature come through this self-surrender! All the blessedness of which we are capable comes to us through the channel of the submitted will, but any drawing back from God's will closes the channel and robs us of the blessedness that he would otherwise send.

Chapter XIV

God's Will Concerning Suffering

It has been said that nature is exceedingly cruel. Wherever we turn we are confronted with the mystery of suffering. The human race have their part in a common suffering, of which Paul speaks in the eighth chapter of Romans. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (read verses seventeen to twenty-two). Why is it that there should be so much of suffering in the creation of the merciful and loving God? Perhaps we shall never understand it in its fullness until we "know even as we are known," but all of us are confronted with the fact that so long as we live in this world we must have a part in its suffering.

We understand some of the uses of pain in the physical world. Pain is nature's safeguard. This was illustrated just a few moments ago. The end of my finger began to tingle with pain. My attention was attracted; I began to examine it, and found that in some way I had cut it. The pain that I felt was nature's call for help. If we run a splinter into our flesh, nature, by means of the pain that follows, not only calls our attention to the injury, but demands the removal of the

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intruder. If we did not feel the pain when our flesh was burned, or cut, or bruised, our lives might be endangered many times. So pain is our safeguard in the physical realm. It is no less so in the mental and spiritual realms. Without the sense of discomfort that comes to the conscience as a result of wrongdoing, we should have no safeguard against wrong-doing. And so, after all, pain and suffering are God's blessings given to us in his mercy.

Seeing that such is the case, we need not be surprised to find suffering classed as one of God's gifts to us. We read, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29). God's gifts are all blessings, and so, whether we can understand it or not, suffering is God's gift to us—the manifestation of his merciful kindness. To be sure, not all the suffering in the world is according to God's will, for much of it is unnecessary and is the penalty of a broken law. Yet who can say that even this suffering does not work out a benevolent purpose? In 1 Pet 4:19, we read of "them that suffer according to the will of God." In chap. 3:17, we read, "It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing than for evil-doing." These texts make it plain that it is God's will that people suffer. From a physical standpoint, we note that it is impossible for suffering to be avoided, because in order to have the capacity for physical joy we must also have the capacity for suffering. If our sensory nerves respond to favorable influences, they cannot avoid responding to unfavorable ones. It is so throughout the whole scope of life.

The possibility of pleasure carries with it the possibility of pain; so the Christian, even when he is doing the will of God, will suffer. He will suffer spiritual conflicts with the powers of evil; he will suffer under the power of temptation—sometimes very sorely—and he will have mental conflicts with doubts, fears, and perplexities; he

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will have physical temptations. We sometimes ask why this continual warfare must be. It is one of God's mysteries, but we know that out of this conflict the spirit rises to higher heights, to nobler attainments, and to finer achievements than would be possible under other conditions. The most of us have things in our dispositions that must be overcome. We should like to remake ourselves, or to have God remake us! But we must war against these tendencies, master our dispositions, and conquer ourselves. It is this conquering of self that makes us kings. The blood of Jesus Christ is the antidote for sin; yet these things of which we have been speaking are not sin, but natural dispositions and traits—things inherently in us. These things grace does not obliterate, though its high tide often overflows them.

The Christian has also to meet the opposition of evil persons. Jesus said to his disciples, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." The call to Christian service in any capacity is a call to suffering. Jesus appeared to Saul in order to show him what great things he must suffer in the new life to which he was called. This suffering Paul explains to us, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake which is the church" (Col. 1:24). Satan hates Christ and is constantly warring against him, but since he cannot reach Christ directly, he attacks him through his followers. He stirs up the hatred of evil men who hate righteousness and love iniquity, and causes them to persecute the children of God, and he makes bitter enmity in the hearts of these evil-doers against not only God's children, but against the Christ who is in their hearts. When Christ was in the world he suffered many things of the people, and had he continued in the world in the flesh, he would have suffered many more things ere this. Since he has left the world, the remainder of that suffering falls, not upon him directly, but upon us. As the stripes fell upon his physical body then, so now they fall upon his

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spiritual body, and we, making up that body, suffer with him that which remains of his suffering.

But it is not only his suffering in which we share. There is something else that goes with it, and this something else, which is the fruit of the suffering, is a divinely blessed thing. We read, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation" (2 Cor. 1:5-7).

There is nothing sweeter than the consolation that Christ gives, and this consolation can come only after suffering. The offense of the cross has not ceased. Satan has not gone out of business. It is God's will that we still be here in this world suffering the things consequent upon this life, and our present environment. But out of it all shall come a richness of experience, a strength of soul, a likeness to Christ, a holy disposition, and an unshaken fidelity that will prepare us for the eternal blessedness that awaits us, and will thus assure our holiness throughout all the ages. We have already pointed out that God's purpose in this world, primarily, is not so much to make us happy as to make us holy; but being holy, we are happy as a natural consequence. And so he lets us suffer those things that develop Christian character and assure our holiness. The things that we suffer in the process are God's will for us. We should not lament nor murmur, but should willingly suffer the will of God, knowing that it will work out for us a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

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Sometimes we suffer for doing well. We are often misunderstood. Holiness is never popular with evildoers, but we are told that “If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (1 Pet. 2:20). The Christian can rejoice in tribulation. Like the early Christians, he can rejoice that he is counted worthy to suffer affliction for the name of Christ, for he remembers the promise that has been made to him. We have the promise, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim. 2:12). Almost anyone would be willing to reign with him, but are we willing to go with him through Gethsemane and take the rugged way to Calvary? Are we willing to be crucified with him and then to bear the reproach of the cross and the opposition of evil men and demons, and to suffer the various things that may come upon us in this life? The reigning will be glorious. We shall be crowned with crowns of righteousness at his right hand. We shall sit with him in the throne. How glorious all this is to anticipate, but the suffering must come first. The humiliation must come before the exaltation, the labor before the reward, the suffering before the consolation. So let us suffer what we must needs suffer with patience, looking forward to the hope that is set before us.

God has certain things he desires to accomplish in us. These things can only be accomplished through suffering. He wills to accomplish them through the only possible means; so here is the result: “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet. 5:10). Suffering is the gateway into these things. We need to be settled, established, and made to be vigorous, virile Christians, and this is God’s way of making us such.

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Some of the finest paintings that have ever been made have been painted by half-starved artists in the midst of the direst poverty, in garrets or cellars. Most of the great achievements of the world have been wrought by men whose lives have been full of suffering. The strength that has made their achievements possible has come through suffering, through patient endurance, through loyally striving against obstacles.

The grandest views are seen after the toilsome and perhaps dangerous scaling to the summits of the mountain-peaks. The mightiest triumphs come after the sorest conflicts. The story is told of a young lady who had a beautiful voice, who had studied under eminent teachers until she had perfected her technique, and was ready to appear before the public. She entered confidently upon her life's work, but as she sang to the great audiences she failed to meet with the response from them that she had expected. After many determined efforts to succeed that ended in sore disappointment, she went back to her former teacher and asked him what the reason was that she could not move her audiences. He replied, "You have never suffered." He knew that it took suffering to put into the voice that quality which appeals to the heart of the hearers. So God knows that it takes suffering to put into our voices, and hearts, and minds, the quality that he desires in them. He lets us suffer, but in the end compensates us for it all. Looking back over our lives from eternity, we shall value the things which we had suffered far more than the things which had then seemed most desirable, for the "peaceable fruits of righteousness" wrought in us are, in the main, the fruits of pain.

Chapter XV

Praying According to God's Will

Prayer is an important part of the Christian life. Jesus said that “men ought always to pray.” But prayer, to be effectual, must be of a certain kind; it must possess certain characteristics in order to render it acceptable to God. Without these characteristics it may as well have no existence. We read of some whose prayers were an abomination to God. That was because their prayers were not of the right sort. In these people were elements that were displeasing to God, so that he could not accept their prayers, nor answer them. There is a kind of prayer, however, which God delights to hear. It comes up as sweet incense to him. The incense that was offered on the golden altar in the holy place of the Temple was a type of the prayers of God's people. And so, prayer of the right sort is a sweet fragrance to God.

The God who invites us to pray, and who takes pleasure in our prayer, is the God who delights to answer prayer. It is he who, by his Spirit, inspires within our hearts the disposition to pray. Prayer in God's will means prayer in the manner and with the attitude of heart that is according to God's will, also prayer for the things that are according to his will. We shall do well in considering this question if we first view this subject in its negative aspect. There are certain kinds of prayer that are not in God's will. There are certain

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things called prayer which rather merit another name and which rise to God, not as incense, but as something which is displeasing.

There is, first, the dictatorial prayer. It brings its desires to God and tries to get God to accept them. Its language is, "I want; I want." Perhaps it is not so expressed, but that is the cry of the heart. It is not considering what God wants, it is thinking of self, and self looms so large that God is left out of the question. It not only knows what it wants, and desires it very much, but sometimes it demands it peremptorily. Such prayer lacks submissiveness. It lacks consideration of God's rights. Its own imperious will to have its desires gratified stands out above everything else. Not only does it voice its desires, but it would dictate to God just how he shall answer. It wants things thus and so, and no other way. It argues with God in order to convince him that its plans should be carried out and its desires ought to be granted, because its way is best. But God is on his throne and he will take no dictation from us. When we approach him in this way we cannot pray in his will. Selfish desire speaks so loudly that we can hear nothing else. We ask to know nothing else but the gratification of our own desires.

Then there is the grumbling prayer. This, that, or the other has not been going right. God is blamed for not answering prayer. Through the prayer there is an attitude of dissatisfaction. There is a frown in it. Things are not going to suit those who are praying; so they are displeased, and consciously or unconsciously they throw the blame for existing circumstances which displease them upon God. Better never open our mouths in prayer than to pray such a prayer. Again, there is the complaining prayer. It is a petulant recital of the faults of others. So many people are like children who run to their parents with complaints about their playmates. They whine, and sniff, and feel themselves very much aggrieved, and want to

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pour it all out into God's ear. God wants us to put away childish things and approach him like right-minded, sensible, intelligent, grown-up individuals. It is bad enough to be pitying ourselves, and whining, and complaining in our hearts, to say nothing of pouring it out to God.

Then, too, there is the resentful prayer, the prayer that comes from a heart which within itself is saying, "I have prayed and thou hast not answered. I have cried and thou hast not helped." It is not satisfied with the manner in which God answers, nor with the time when he answers. It is a disgruntled prayer that is full of rebellion. It is dishonoring to God, and is hateful to him. Such prayers can only stir his wrath.

Perhaps the most common of all prayers that are unacceptable is the doubting prayer; not the prayer that is merely uncertain of God's will because it has not yet been learned, but the prayer that questions him, that doubts his fidelity, or his willingness to hear and answer. It is the prayer that puts a question-mark after his promises. It distrusts God. It cannot believe that all his promises are yea and amen to it, that his storehouse is wide open, that his loving heart yearns to pour out blessings. It is full of uncertainty and hesitation. It is not sure of its ground. It is full of fear and trembling. It is the very opposite of that expectant, hopeful, confident prayer that faith inspires.

There are prayers that are insults to God. Who has not heard the pompous prayer. It is very evident that such a prayer is only a prayer of the lips. It is a hypocritical prayer, and no such prayer was ever answered, nor is there any expectation that it will be answered. Such a prayer is merely a pompous form, with no more of real prayer substance in it than there is of solid material in the inflated balloon. But this is not the only form of hypocritical prayer. People ask for

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what they do not really desire, and for that which they do not expect to be granted. Some deliver prayers to an audience, with the audience, not God, in mind. Some prayers are like that recorded of the Pharisee, who recognized God by addressing him and then spent the remainder of the time in glorifying self.

There are also hypocritical prayers, prayed by people who seem to be very good and who have no idea of being hypocrites. One prays, "O Lord, save my neighbors," yet he makes no effort to do anything toward their salvation. He desires them to be saved, yet he goes on his way very complacently, having no compunction of conscience, because he does nothing to lead them to Christ. Another prays, "O Lord, save the heathen. O Lord, raise up missionaries to go," but in his heart he says, "But don't take John or Mary; leave my children with me. I have other plans for them. Send somebody else's children as missionaries." Another prays, "O Lord, send forth laborers into thy vineyard," but his heart says, "Don't send me or any of my children." One prays for God to provide the means to carry on the Lord's work, but his heart says, "Let others give it; let me keep what I have." Congregations pray for God to send them a preacher, when they have no disposition to submit to or obey him if God should send one. Perhaps they have already proved this by their conduct toward those who have in the past labored with them. Some pray, "O Lord, bless our pastor; help him to build up the work here and lead us aright." At the same time, they will not submit to be led by him, and perhaps murmur at him and find fault with him. All these are examples of hypocritical prayers, and all such prayers are an affront to God.

Leaving the negative, let us look at the positive side of the subject. Prayer according to God's will, first, is sincere prayer. There is nothing Pharisaical or hypocritical about it. It is the

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yearning of the heart, which is moved by right motives and animated with a deep sincerity. Every word is the honest sentiment of the heart. It is not mere lip-service, it is not mere form. It is always characterized by humility, for humility is always a characteristic of godly sincerity. It is also the prayer of simplicity. Its language is not stilted nor pompous, for there is little thought of effect. It is the simple cry of the child to its Father.

The prayer that is prayed according to God's will is always a submissive prayer. It does not press its own desires. The language of the heart is, "Thy will be done." It does not argue with God. It does not choose the way he shall answer; in fact, it has no requirements for him. It trusts in divine wisdom, counts God faithful, hopes all things, and believes all things. It is the prayer of confidence, not the prayer of doubt. It believes God, and is ready to write, "This is true," and set its seal to all of God's promises.

Prayer that is prayed according to God's will always puts God and his desires and purposes first. We have a wonderful example of what prayer should be in what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer. In it are dearly shown the components of holy prayer. It is many times repeated by those who have no conception of its content. Note how it runs: "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." First, there is consideration of its object. The heart looks up to God, recognizes its relation to him, and love bursts out with the cry, "Our Father!" There is a drawing near to the throne. Not a selfish personal desire, nor the thought of self, but the thought of God fills the soul, and filial love runs out to him in a warm, rich current. After this loving contemplation of God, inspired by love and the natural fruits of love, the heart cries out, "Hallowed be thy name." First love, then worship—reverential devotion, a sense of

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God's greatness and worthiness, and a desire that it will be recognized by all.

Then, hard upon the worship of the praying heart comes the desire that all other hearts will worship him, expressed in the words, "Thy kingdom come." The heart that loves and worships reaches out to embrace all the world, and bring it to Christ, to have the world know him and adore him as it does. Then the heart breaks out, "Thy will be done." In glad submission, it asks not its own will; it casts away its own plans, purposes, and desires, and bows submissive to God's will. And not only so, but in its desire it brings all the world to submission to him. It crowns him Lord of all. It sets his throne above all. It must do all this before it is ready to think of self.

After all this is done, it humbly brings its own requests, but it presents them only after it has bowed in submission and said, "Thy will be done." After it has loved and worshiped and submitted, it can pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." However, after it has made its requisitions upon God's storehouse, it speedily forgets self and bursts out again into glorious praise, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever." As soon as its desires are expressed, they are forgotten, and God again fills the vision. This is the natural order of the prayer that is according to the will of God.

One great component of acceptable prayer is aspiration. It is expressed in the Lord's Prayer by "hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." The praying soul does not merely come as a beggar, asking for the things it needs, but true prayer draws out the heart to God and makes it aspire to great things for itself—not great things in a selfish way, but it aspires to be truly noble, to be Godlike: Such prayer is the flight of the soul up to God. It enkindles lofty purposes and noble ambitions, and every time we pray thus, we draw nearer to heaven, there to abide. Intercession is

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a very needful thing in our prayer, because we constantly need divine help. We need to draw upon the divine storehouse of grace, and love, and strength. There must be a constant impartation; so necessarily we must ask in order to receive. But this is only one of the components of prayer, and should be only a fractional part of our prayer; while contemplation of God, love toward him, worship, reverence, and a pouring out of our aspirations—the reaching out of the soul to encompass more of God—should be the large part of all prayer.

We are taught importunity in prayer, but there is a vast difference between asking earnestly with importunity in submission to God's will, and the prayer of selfish desire. We may pray earnestly and continually for a thing; we may desire it until desire fills all the soul with agonized yearning, without there being one element of selfishness in it. But, wherever selfishness enters, and we press our own desires upon God without regard to his desire, we rob prayer of all acceptability. We cannot help having desires, but we must beware lest these desires lead us to put our wills ahead of God's will. This is why many prayers are not answered, and often we may be pleading for something that God has refused because we ask amiss. "To make a prayer out of my rebellion against his will is surely the greatest abuse of prayer that can be conceived." Praying in the will of God does not mean dictating to God, or trying to get him to put our plans into effect, but it leaves all means and methods to his choosing, all to be done according to his will and judgment. We often resist God in our very prayers by planning for him and dictating to him.

Not all desires that arise in us are our own desires. We are told that God works in us, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. One way that he does this is to create desires in us that run

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parallel to his will. The submitted soul desires what God desires for him because his own desires are begotten by the Spirit of God and are the manifestations of God's will. It is natural for the holy soul to desire the same things that God desires. He has no selfish interests to serve; therefore, his desires are not selfish. The benevolence of his own heart corresponds to God's benevolence, and there is a unison of desire. Many times our prayers are inspired of God because God desires to give something. Because of the desire he has to give us something, or to do something for us, he draws out our desire for that thing and leads us to pray for it that our faith may reach out after it to him and thus provide a channel through which God's gift may come to us. He always grants such desires, though not always in the way we expect them to be granted. Often when we pray we have an idea in our mind how prayer will be answered, and God surprises us by answering it in an unexpected way. These surprises often leave the soul in amazed wonder at the exceeding goodness of God and at the greatness of his wisdom.

There may be a selfish element in prayer, manifested either in the thing asked for or in the manner of asking. We may desire a thing for selfish reasons, or the thing desired may be perfectly legitimate and the reason we desire it be unselfish, but we may ask it in a selfish manner. This we may do by planning the way for God to answer, or by attempting to dictate to him the manner for the answer or the time of the answer or the form of the answer. But when we pray unselfishly, both as to the thing asked and in the manner of asking, we may be sure that God hears and that according to his good pleasure he will answer in his own way and time. So we can come to him with confidence, knowing that his ears are open to our cry and that his love will not withhold from us any good thing.

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How good it is to pray for something that we earnestly desire when someone else enters into prayer with us, and we can feel that union of desire which inspires our desire with courage and faith! The heart that prays according to God's will never prays alone. There are always at least three voices that pray. This is what gives prayer its strength and makes it move the heart of God. This fact is overlooked in all too many cases, and in the overlooking of it the heart is taken out of many a prayer and this makes the soul weak and wavering where it might be strong, courageous, and full of confiding trust. Whenever we pray according to the will of God, the Holy Spirit prays with us. "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26, 27). Ah, yes, you have known that groaning which could not be uttered, that intense desire which words could not express, that longing which reached out and grasped hold of God. That was not a mere human thing. It was the intercession of the divine Spirit—God's own yearning for us. It was the earthward side of God's will for us. When the Spirit makes intercession for us in this way we may be sure that the prayer is according to the will of God, for the Spirit "maketh intercession according to the will of God."

Not only does the Holy Spirit pray for us when we pray according to the will of God, but Jesus, our beloved Savior, also joins in the intercession. "It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34). This thought should inspire our faith, cause it to mount up on joyful wings, and with glad hands to lay hold upon the promises of God and make them ours, rejoicing in them and counting them as rich treasures—treasures that are all our own.

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Prayer and works go together. Therefore, when we pray according to the will of God, there should be a willingness and a determination actively to use our powers to help God answer and fully to cooperate with him in the carrying out of his purpose. We should throw our will into the carrying out of God's purpose. We should will his purposes in ourselves, and in whatever we know to be God's designs. It is not enough to pray and then leave all else to God. True, there are many things quite out of our reach, things wherein we cannot cooperate with God so as to bring about an answer, but there are also many things in which our cooperation does help him, for God often acts through human instrumentality. So by praying, believing, and laboring submissively according to God's will, his purpose will be wrought in us and our prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done," will be answered in us and through us.

It is our great privilege to know the will of God, to abide in it, and to do it. It is our privilege to walk with him in the sweet fellowship of love, confidence, and communion which will enrich the soul, beautify the life, and bring to full fruition all the blessed fruitfulness of divine grace in the human heart, will, and affections.

