

Acquiescence to God's Will

*“That I may know
him, and the power
of his resurrection,
and the fellowship
of his sufferings,
being made
conformable unto
his death.”
—Philippians 3:10*

THE CONCEPT OF ACQUI-
escence to divine authority
has the thought of being
submissive to an accepted
standard or pattern. It is the
Heavenly Father's will to
have a divine family with
Christ Jesus as its head and
a “little flock” of individuals

redeemed from amongst mankind, who ultimately
will receive glory, honor, and immortality. (Luke
12:32; Rom. 2:7) The specifications of this class are
as follows. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did
predestinate to be conformed to the image of his
Son, that he might be the firstborn among many
brethren.”—Rom. 8:29

Dedicated followers of Christ have appreciated
the scriptural testimony that the path to such a
lofty reward involves a process of self-denial, cross
bearing, and following in the Master's footsteps.
The Apostle Paul in this connection states, “I beseech
you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that

ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

LOYALTY

Loyalty is much akin to acquiescence. It describes one’s faithful allegiance to another, as opposed to partial sympathy towards such an individual. Believers cannot fraternize with those of a worldly spirit and remain pleasing to the Heavenly Father. They must be completely submissive to the Lord and the principles of righteousness. Christ Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) This means that true Christians cannot be allied with this “present evil world.” (Gal. 1:4) Furthermore, the forces that oppose us frequently appear as angels of light to deceive. —II Cor. 11:14

“Our citizenship is in heaven,” and it is to assure an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom that we are striving. (Phil. 3:20, *Revised Version*) Nothing can be gained by a compromising attitude toward any of the allurements of the great Adversary. Loyalty to the King of kings must be voluntary and complete. We have learned to know our Lord and Savior, and upon the basis of this knowledge we have full confidence in the integrity of his cause. Our loyalty should be complete because we love our King and our Captain, and we are pained at the thought of displeasing him and our Father in heaven.

COURAGE

Courage is also a very essential quality of those who are submissive to God and to his will, but it should not be born of self-confidence. Those who realize their own weaknesses can be courageous if they put their trust in the Heavenly Father and look to him for grace and strength to help in their every time of need. (Heb. 4:16; Prov. 3:5,6) When the Christian looks to God, and to Christ his Captain, and realizes that he is made strong by their strength, then he can indeed be courageous.—Isa. 26:3,4

As good soldiers we must have confidence in the cause for which we are fighting. (II Tim. 2:1,3) Our faith and confidence in the righteousness of the cause which we are serving should be so complete as to call forth all of our powers and abilities in a free will self-sacrificing effort to cooperate with the Captain of our salvation. (Heb. 2:10) As Christian soldiers we should have no mental reservations as to the propriety of that which our leader asks us to do. Our faith in God and in Christ should be so complete that even though we may not always understand just why we are called upon to do certain things, nevertheless we will have full confidence in the fact that we are being guided by heavenly wisdom.—Rom. 8:28

A key to the successful completion of this course is the submission of ourselves to the doing of the Heavenly Father's will. The Holy Spirit's influence, as revealed through the study of God's word, will guide us into all Truth, and when applied faithfully in our lives, will yield a righteous character.—John 16:13

To the extent that, as Christians, we are becoming "transformed" more and more to the will of God,

the sanctifying influence of the “word of truth” will enable us to progress spiritually. (Rom. 12:2; James 1:18; John 17:17) However, sometimes there can be pressures both from within and without to have our behavior or beliefs conform to standards that do not necessarily represent what we understand to be God’s will for us, or what we believe are scriptural teachings on a given matter. We as Christians must individually render an account of our stewardship to God. (Rom. 14:12; I Cor. 4:2) Therefore, we should not be guided necessarily by what others may think, but must make the Truth our own and “prove all things; hold fast that which is good,” as did the noble Bereans of old.—I Thess. 5:21; Acts 17:11

PREJUDICE AT ANTIOCH

In considering influences toward conformity of thought or action within Christian fellowship, or by giving undue regard to how fellow believers might perceive us, a forceful lesson is brought to our minds. In Galatians 2:11-21, Paul recounts an occasion when it was necessary for him to rebuke the Apostle Peter, who was probably considered by many Jewish Christians as the foremost apostle. When Peter first came to Antioch, he freely ate with Christian converts who were Gentiles by birth. Subsequently a group of Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem for a visit. Apparently, they still held to various observances under the Mosaic Law, and when they arrived, Peter ceased to fellowship with the Gentile brethren for fear that news of his conduct would get back to Jerusalem and the Jewish brethren there.

Barnabas and others followed Peter's example. Peter well knew, in connection with the conversion of Cornelius, that God "shows no partiality." (Acts 10:34, *International Standard Version*) Therefore, he erred by refusing to eat with uncircumcised believers, implying that the Mosaic Law afforded a higher level of sanctification than the "righteousness of faith." (Rom. 4:13) Paul, appropriately, faulted Peter for hypocrisy by pointing out that Jewish Christians had a new standing on the basis of faith in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, and that they were dead to the law. Accordingly, since the law could not justify anyone, Gentiles should not be placed under it.—Gal. 2:14-21

If a Spirit begotten pillar of the church, such as Peter, could wrongfully succumb to the influence of an improper belief held by some of his Jewish brethren, and thus not acquiesce to God's clearly stated will, could we not be vulnerable today to the opinions of others within our fellowship? The individual church, or ecclesia, with whom we may fellowship, is a very special arrangement which our Heavenly Father has provided so that we might be nurtured and developed as we seek to make our calling and election sure. In our mutual studies, we should consider not only the factual content of what we are studying, but also the spirit behind the message.—Rom. 2:28,29; 7:5,6

We read, for example, in I John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." In all of our interactions with one another, that is surely a scripture to be kept in the forefront of our minds. Yet, because we have this treasure of the New Creature in an earthen

vessel, and because we are eager and zealous to serve the Lord, it is quite apparent that at times we will find that there are opportunities for friction when we may express ourselves differently from another member of the brotherhood. (II Cor. 5:17; 4:7) Let us conscientiously strive to look at one another not from outward appearances according to the flesh, but let us believe and act upon the knowledge that just as God has called us so he has found other jewels who are struggling with their flesh as we are; and we should focus upon those things which bind us together in the spirit of love.—I Sam. 16:7; II Cor. 10:7

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Humbly submitting to God's will is also of importance regarding the exercise of Christian liberty with regard to those items of Truth which are not supported by a clear "thus saith the Lord." It is not a matter of mere conjecture that each of us should engage in, but if indeed we have a scripture to prove what we have to say, such should suffice. If, in certain cases, there is a thought given that is not in harmony with the way in which we believe it should be expressed, then we should be free to speak to our brethren individually and discuss it in love until such a time as the Heavenly Father designs to clarify the matter for one or the other. In any event, force should not be used to attain exact conformity of thought but, as the Bible declares, "let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."—Rom. 14:5

From earliest New Testament times, congregations of the Lord's people were established in various locations. The Scriptures give guidelines for the setting up of these groups. (I Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9;

I Pet. 5:1-3) Those who serve, be they elders or deacons, are elected to positions of service by vote of the ecclesia. As such, it places the congregation as a higher authority, and as an indicator of the divine will. Should the judgment of the class with regard to certain policies or practices differ from that of an elder, the elder should submit to the will of the class where it is only a matter of ecclesia preference, as opposed to matters of fundamental doctrine, moral issues, or violations of one's conscience. On the other hand, and in keeping with the responsibility of selecting elders in whom the ecclesia has confidence, the Lord has overruled so that by the vote of the congregation a specific individual was chosen. It, therefore, would be the obligation of the entire group to support and encourage the elder in proportion as they note his striving to know and to do the Lord's will in a faithful manner.

A PARTY SPIRIT

The spirit of rivalry, or party spirit, between fellow members of Christ's body should be avoided. We read in I Corinthians 1:10-13, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" Divi-

sions amongst the people of God should be of serious concern, especially if there are pressures exerted to hinder opportunities for fellowship with other Christians that we consider to be Spirit begotten.

There may be, of course, very legitimate reasons why a physical separation among the Lord's people is sometimes necessary. Nevertheless, to the extent that we recognize one another as brethren in the body of Christ, there should be no manifestation of a sectarian spirit. If we create man-made barriers which are not scripturally authorized and believe some brethren are unworthy of our fellowship because of minor differences, then there is a danger of exercising a spirit that is contrary to the doctrine of the unity of the body. Such a spirit would show a marked lack of acquiescence to the will of God in our fellowship.—Ps. 133:1-3; Eph. 4:1-3,15,16; Phil. 2:3

IDOLS

Closely allied with the foregoing is the possibility of creating idols of our leaders in the ministry. Revelation 19:10 reads: "I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said, unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God." It has been suggested that the Apostle John in this context is representing the faithful members of the body of Christ, especially at the time in which we are currently living. Carrying this thought further, we would be admonished not to worship those who may be instrumental in nourishing us with God's Truth. We should appreciate the faithful efforts of all who are engaged in the Lord's service, but we should not place them as idols of worship.—Rom. 1:25

This same thought seems to be found in the words of the Apostle Paul: "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels [Greek: messengers], intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind." (Col. 2:18) The giving of undue homage to those who serve is an improper spirit of which we should be aware, and is out of harmony with God's will for the Christian. We should not promote such an attitude, even though we should recognize and acknowledge all who are faithfully ministering in God's service.

SOCIETAL PRESSURES

Concerning pressures which may come from the world in conformity to its standards, there are many influences that would be pleasing to our flesh, but which may hinder us from acquiescing to God's will. It is for this reason that we read: "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:2,3) Many activities relating to culture, recreation, and hobbies that are not sinful are pleasing to the flesh. An appreciation of Christian liberty reminds us that unlike certain prohibitions which were given to the nation of Israel under the Law Covenant, we do not find many "thou shalt nots" in the New Testament as they relate to the conduct of believers. Thus, we desire to fulfill in our hearts the spirit of the law of love and the law of righteousness as they are indicated in God's will for us.

Although Christian liberty does not allow any of us to make a set of rules for one another, it also

does not mean we are free to do as we please without repercussions. Thus, it is essential that we seek scriptural guidelines to help us determine the degree to which various pursuits either gratify the flesh or are in harmony with the spirit of sacrifice and consecrated living. If, upon individual scrutiny, we find that a particular activity is edifying, ennobling, and glorifies the Heavenly Father, we should participate in it to the greatest extent possible. If, on the other hand, it does not appear to have spiritual value, we may desire to put even such a good thing on the altar of sacrifice.

OUR HOMES

Another area for our consideration in submitting to God's will deals with our dwelling places. Certainly, all of the Lord's people have different circumstances, and the financial resources of which we have been made stewards may vary considerably. It is for each individual to seek God's guidance in this realm, as in every undertaking. We know for a fact, however, in the world great stress is placed upon having a fashionable home, often to the extreme.

Such examples which could be given are likely endless, but we ask the question: "Could the Lord's people also be affected by an extraordinary concern for the appearance and size of their homes?" It is possible to rationalize that we must make extensive changes in our present abode, at the cost of great time and expense, because we want to accommodate fellow Christians in a comfortable manner. No one, of course, is in a position to judge what another brother or sister may be doing along this line. However, we may need to prayerfully commune with the

Father as to whether or not such involvement or activity will detract in any way from the covenant of sacrifice we have made.

IN THE WORK PLACE

With regard to our jobs, some of us may find ourselves in very difficult and trying situations, which bring considerable discomfort to our flesh. Then, an extremely favorable job opportunity may present itself, but it might require working a different schedule or at a distant location, with the ultimate effect being a disruption of our spiritual fellowship. We might have to miss certain meetings now on a regular basis because of new working circumstances. We need to rely upon seeking the Lord's will, and acquiescing to it, when making such decisions one way or the other. Is it not possible that our current difficult condition to which the flesh has been subjected is being permitted because the Lord knows that we need to have some experiences to teach us patience and reliance upon him?

On the other hand, a move could be the Lord's will, as it was when he sent Philip to the desert to witness to the Ethiopian eunuch. (Acts 8:26-38) Each one's experience along this line is, of course, unique to his or her situation. The Scriptures do not set forth hard and fast rules along this line, the exception being that each is to "provide for his own." (I Tim. 5:8) Beyond this, the answers that may apply to each one's individual circumstance can only be found by remaining very close to the Lord.

FOUR IMPORTANT STEPS

Consider these four important steps in acquiescing to God's will in life's experiences.

1. Engage in frequent personal study of God's word. (II Tim. 2:15) Since we are committed to being footstep followers of the Master, it is essential that we find time to regularly search the Scriptures for the purpose of seeking the Father's will and leadings in our lives, and to become familiar with the divine principles that can be applied in our conduct. If God truly is first in our lives, we must arrange our schedules so that we can commune with him and receive the strength which he desires to give us.

2. Support our local ecclesia through regular attendance and participation in fellowship and studies. We are very familiar with the admonition to "forsake not the assembling of ourselves together," and we should appreciate this arrangement as an important means of receiving instruction from the Heavenly Father. (Heb. 10:25) Such association with one another in this setting will facilitate, among other things, the kind of interaction which will allow the contributions of one another to provide for the mutual spiritual strength and edification of all, if we are rightly exercised. We are informed that "every joint supplieth," and as we meet with those of our immediate fellowship and others among the brotherhood as we have opportunity, we will be guarded against the spirit of self-exaltation.—Eph. 4:16

3. Live a life of sacrifice. The greater the degree of our self-denial, the less exposed we will be towards a covetous spirit by which the Adversary seeks to entrap us, and hence the easier it will be for us to acquiesce to God's will. "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," are all

obstacles that can and must be overcome through the influence of the Holy Spirit and obedience to the Heavenly Father by striving to walk even as our Master walked.—I John 2:16

4. Engage in frequent, focused prayer. If in the personal scrutiny of our lives we find that, contrary to God's word, we have erected some idol in our hearts, we can take comfort from such texts as I John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Thus we see that it is our privilege to go to the throne of grace for cleansing and assistance with regard to those things we do that are not pleasing to the Lord, especially cases in which we have not submitted to his will. Additionally, if we are very sensitive towards righteousness and pleasing God, even when we are not aware of some indiscretions, the prayer of our hearts will be such as follows: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."—Ps. 19:13,14

When we consider that we have been called to be part of the divine family, it should cause us to revere God to such an extent that we would do anything to please him, to honor him, and to sanctify his name. Truly, "The reverent fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding and a teachable heart are possessed by all those who do the will of the LORD."—Ps. 111:10, *Amplified Bible* ■