

## **GOD'S WILL CONCERNING THE CHURCH**

**"This is the will of God [concerning you], even your sanctification."**

**– 1 Thess. 4:3.**

IN OUR TEXT the expression, "This is the will of God," is in the nature of advice rather than command. Considering the class to whom this advice is given, we find them to be those who desire to draw near to God and to have Him draw near to them. God has promised a great reward for submission to His will in every particular; and the Apostle Paul is stating what the will of God is concerning those who desire to live in nearness to Him. He tells them that it is God's will that they be fully set apart to His service; that they lay down their lives in His work; that in all the affairs of life their hearts should be set to know and to do His will.

In words of loving entreaty the Apostle elsewhere addresses this class, saying, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1.) The phrase, "Present your bodies," includes not only the primary presentation, but the continuation of the living sacrifice to the completion of the work. In other words, the Gospel Age is *the* acceptable time when God is willing to receive those who come unto Him through Christ. It is the time for His drawing, calling, those who are to become members of the Elect Church.

God's will for His believing people, justified by faith in the Ransom and consecrated to His service, has always been the same as the Apostle stated, namely, "This is the will of God [concerning you], even your sanctification." To produce this sanctification in believers God has given unto us "exceeding great and precious promises," and declares that the truth of His Word will produce the sanctification of character acceptable to Him – conformity to the image of His dear Son, our Redeemer.

Sanctification does not mean human perfection. It is the consecration, or devotion of the *will*, which through Christ is accepted of the Father as perfect; it is a consecration of the *body* to sacrifice – even unto death. As we have seen, that body is not made actually perfect through justification by faith, but merely reckonedly perfect, according to our will, our heart, our intention. The new will should seek to bring every power, every talent, every endowment of its body, into full accord with the Lord, and should seek to exercise an influence in the same direction upon all with whom it comes in contact.

This does not mean, however, that in the few short years of the present life it will be able to bring its poor, imperfect body to perfection. On the contrary, the Apostle assures us in connection with the Church, that in death it is sown in corruption, sown in weakness, sown in dishonor, sown a [an imperfect] natural body (I Cor. 15:42-44); and that not until in the Resurrection we are given new bodies, strong, perfect, glorious, immortal, shall we have attained the perfection which we seek and which the Lord promises shall be ours eventually, if in the present time of weakness and imperfection we manifest to Him the loyalty of our hearts. **[R5127 : page 340]**

Our text, as well as many other portions of the Scriptures, teaches us that the great work which God asks of us is not for others, but is a work in ourselves, subduing, conquering, ruling *self*. Everything else, therefore, our doing service to the household of faith, our doing good unto all men, by home or foreign missions, etc., is subservient to this most important work within. For, as the Apostle by inspiration declares, though we should preach the Gospel eloquently to others, and though we should give all our goods to feed the poor, or become martyrs for a good cause, we should be nothing from the Divine viewpoint, without love – the Spirit of Christ and of the Father – developed in us as the ruling principle of life. (I Cor. 13:3.) But before we can "put on love – the bond of perfectness" – and have its rule established, we have many enemies to *put out*.

## OUR THREE GREAT FOES

The heart is the battleground on which the Holy Spirit helps us to wage warfare against the enemies which since the Adamic fall have taken possession of the human mind. Our battle is to be against Sin, the great taskmaster, which captured our race more than six thousand years ago. Satan, the great master or general of Sin, is our enemy, and has largely to do with the various influences against which we must contend. We are not, however, to battle directly with Satan, though we are to "resist" him; that is, we are to resist his influence, his deceptions, and his endeavors to lead us into error and into sin. We should be powerless against this great enemy were it not that our Lord Jesus has conquered Sin, and that He is on our part, so that we can confidently say, Greater is He that is on our part than all they that be against us.

Again, our battle is with the *world*. By this we do not mean with our fellow-creatures; for, blinded by the Adversary, they are little, if at all, accountable for their course. We are to do battle with "the spirit of the world" and its influences. The disposition of the world, the mind of the world, the motives which actuate the world, the ambitions of the world, the pride of life and the deceitfulness of riches – the wrong views of matters as seen from the worldly standpoint – we are to resist, to fight against. And it is a *daily* battle.

Finally, our battle is with the flesh – our own flesh. Ever since Sin captured our race, its slavery has been conducive to mental, moral and physical degradation. Its every tendency has been toward evil, and that continually; and although our Lord Jesus had compassion on us and redeemed us from slavery to Sin, with His own precious blood, yet we have in our bodies the motions, the tendencies toward sin.

So, although we are now free, and are with the mind serving the Law of Christ, and although we have covenanted to battle for righteousness, truth, goodness and purity, we find our new selves harassed by the old, perverted tastes and inclinations of our own flesh toward the service of the old taskmaster. Not the least of our battles,

therefore, is against these perverted tendencies of our flesh; and the battle with these is also a daily battle. With the great Apostle Paul we should be able to say, "*I keep my body* [my flesh and its desires] *under*" – in subjection to my new will, the New Creature.

From the moment we make a full consecration of ourselves unto death in the service of the Lord, He reckons our flesh as dead, and begets us as New Creatures. Our new minds are alive toward God with a newness of life. Hence those motions of sin which we are seeking to bring into absolute subjection to the will of God in Christ are not recognized by the Lord as the will or the motions of the New Creature enlisted in His service, but merely as a part of the general enemy, Sin, pursuing after and battling with us. These we are pledged to resist, and to war against; and to overcome these He promises sufficient grace and help.

### **OUR DAILY BATTLE WITH SELF**

These enemies in our own flesh cause us the greatest difficulties. To these Satan appeals; these he seeks to encourage in the warfare against the new spirit of our **[R5127 : page 341]** minds; through these the spirit of the world gains closest approach to us, and seeks to capture us and lead us back as captives to Sin. So to speak, the "New Creature in Christ" is beset, surrounded on every hand with enemies seeking its disaster and re-enslavement. We must battle for ourselves, for our own liberty, for victory over our own weaknesses; we must battle against the spirit of the world, against delusions and snares of the Adversary by which he would make evil things appear good, and right to appear undesirable. No wonder that the child of God is urged to be continually watchful; that he is urged to "put on the whole armor of God"; that he is cautioned in respect to his various wily foes and especially against those of his own flesh; that he is urged to faithfulness and loyalty of heart!

Heart-loyalty to the Lord means continual effort to bring all the conduct of our lives, yea, the very thoughts and intents of our hearts,

into subjection to the Divine will. (2 Cor. 10:4,5.) This is our first duty, our continual duty, and will be the end of our duty; for "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." "Be ye holy; for I [the Lord] am holy." – I Peter 1:16.

*Absolute holiness* is to be the *standard* which our *minds* can gladly and fully indorse and *live up to*, but to which we can never attain actually and physically so long as we are subject to the frailties of our fallen natures and the besetments of the world and the Adversary. But day by day we are taught of God; and as we come to a fuller knowledge of His glorious character, and as the appreciation of it more and more fills our hearts, the new mind will more and more gain influence, strength, power, over the weaknesses of the flesh, whatever they may be – and these weaknesses vary with the different members of the Body.

If we be sanctified to God by the Truth, if our wills be dead and the Lord's will be fully accepted as ours, in thought, word and deed, then we have attained the will of God, and shall win the prize as "overcomers" even if we have never had opportunity to preach, to give to the poor, or to suffer as martyrs for the Truth's sake. Let us all note well this point: "This is the Lord's will [concerning you], even *your* sanctification." Let *nothing* becloud or obscure this truth; but let it *dominate our course in life*. Then if *God's* will is really *our* will, we have a clearly marked pathway before us.

But without doubt, before all such God will open opportunities to serve the Truth to others, to let their light shine to the glory of the Father and the blessing of fellow-creatures; for this is His command to us, and we may be sure He gives us no commands impossible to be obeyed. If you have been seeking opportunities of service and have found none, there must be something wrong; you may have been seeking some *special* service of your own preference (your old will meddling with your newly adopted will – the Lord's).

Possibly the great Teacher sees in you pride, which you would have been prompt to crush had you recognized it, but which hid itself from

you under the cloak of "self-respect." Possibly the great Teacher by His providence and His Word is saying to you, "Whatsoever thy hand *findeth to do*, do it with thy might." (Eccl. 9:10.) Possibly He sees that *you* would be spoiled were He to give you a more important service for others, before you have learned the lesson of humility – all important in God's sight. Act quickly, therefore; the *time* is *short*. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God [to do whatever service His providence has made possible to you], that He may exalt you in due time." – I Peter 5:6.

## **SANCTIFICATION THE RESULT OF LOVE OF GOD**

True sanctification of the heart to the Lord means diligence in His service; a declaration of the good tidings to others; the building up of one another in the most holy faith. It also means that we do good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially unto the household of faith; that in these various ways our lives, consecrated to the Lord, shall be laid down for the brethren day by day, opportunity by opportunity, as they shall come to us; that our love for the Lord, for the brethren, for our families and sympathetically for the world of mankind, will increasingly fill our hearts as we grow in grace, knowledge and obedience to the Divine Word and example. – Gal. 6:10; I John 3:16.

Nevertheless, all this exercising of our energies for others is merely one of the many ways in which by the Lord's providence *our own sanctification* may be accomplished. As iron sharpeneth iron, so our energies in behalf of others bring blessings to ourselves. Additionally, while we should more and more come to the condition of loving our neighbors as ourselves – especially the household of faith – yet the mainspring back of all this should be our supreme love for our Creator and Redeemer, and our desire to be and to do what would please Him. Our sanctification, therefore, must be primarily toward God and first affect our own hearts and wills and, as a result of such devotion to God, find its exercise in the interest of the brethren and of all men.

=====