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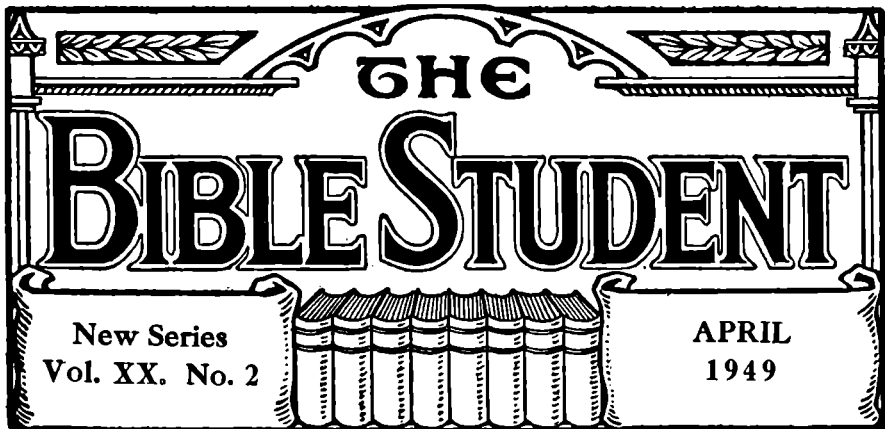
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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

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MAN'S FREE WILL

BY DAVID THROWER

The Scriptures teach that man was created with a free will, being pure and innocent, and a perfectly free agent. Had he obeyed his Maker he would have continued to enjoy the truest and fullest freedom. Alas, however, the arch-enemy of God and man deceived our first parents by promises of enlarged powers and increased pleasures, as a result of which they lost that glorious heritage. God cannot allow any will in His universe to range in defiance of His sovereignty.

One of the baneful effects of sin is that it gives the will that has deflected from holiness a permanent inclination to evil. The will of the unregenerate man, therefore, is not free. He cannot do what he would, but is "led captive by the devil at *his* will." He is not a free agent, for his will is fettered, and his whole nature stunted and deformed. The image of God in him has been defaced. Even when he conceives a strong desire to do good he is unable to carry it out for, do we not read in Romans 7:16 "What I would, that do I not . . . for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. . . . The good that I would I do not. . . . When I would do good evil is present with me"? If this could be said by an apostle, where does the unbeliever stand? Of course, every man has a measure of liberty to do as he pleases, which is analagous to that enjoyed by a tethered animal: The creature is free to move in any direction, or to remain inactive, as the whim takes it, but only as far as its rope permits. So man is restricted within the limits of his spiritually degenerate state, although he is perfectly free within that sphere.

The will of the truly converted, on the other hand, has, by the efficacy of the Saviour's sacrifice, been freed from the devil's control, and granted liberty to live to the glory of God. "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made him free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). Yet even this is not the ultimate truth, for no believer is, in the last analysis, free to please himself. Every Christian is subject to the dominion of the King of Kings.

A believer can, therefore, only enjoy the fullest emancipation by complete submission of his liberated will to his Redeemer. Let us remember that it was to the members of a Christian church that the exhortation was given: "Be ye reconciled to God." If we sincerely examine our hearts I am sure we shall find that we

are not wholly reconciled to our Father's will. Each of us should ask the question: "Can I truthfully say with the Lord Jesus: 'I delight to do Thy will, Oh God'?" Do we not often react to revelations of His will with something very different from the smile of delight? Further, are we not at times guilty of putting forward our own plans for His assent? Brethren! These things should not be. Let us bestir our sluggish minds to apprehend our Master's will, and keep our own wills entirely out of the picture.

Perhaps the above requires some amplification. The human will is, in some respects, the image of God in man, and it is this possession of a rational will that distinguishes him from all other beings in this world. At the Fall man's powers of reason became distorted by his debased will; at the Restoration (conversion) the will is, to some extent at least, brought into line with the divine will, and thereafter ennobles reason and applies it to the fulfilment of God's purposes instead of its own.

All true Christians come under one of two categories:-

1. A majority of believers, through lack of clear and challenging teaching, fail to submit their wills to their divine Conqueror. The first thing demanded by a victorious general is that the vanquished lay down their arms. This obviously should apply in the spiritual realm, and yet many who profess allegiance to the King of Kings unconsciously retain their arms, seek to hold pieces of territory on their own account, and make their word law in their particular part of the royal domain. We urge those of our readers who find themselves convicted on this point to surrender unconditionally every scheme, plan, idea, ideal, desire, ambition and the rest to the Saviour without further delay. The only way to real liberty is through complete capitulation to Jesus Christ. He hands back the sword to those who become His submissive captives.

Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free.
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.

2. A minority of believers, who make a complete surrender to Christ, find a new world of experience opening up before them. As we have hinted above, full consecration is not a distant ideal but is the only true start and basis for a life of victory and blessing.

As a little experience is worth much theory we will, for the glory of God, give our personal testimony regarding this matter. After the writer had been a believer and a Christian worker for upwards of twenty years, he was brought under the ministry of a servant of God which demanded a simple, definite act of dedication of the body to the Lord Jesus Christ in accordance with Romans 12:1. We were told that, just as Mary of Nazareth had to surrender her *entire body* to God for the Saviour to become incarnate in human flesh, so the believer must offer up his or her body to Him Who has bought it with His own life-blood. This involves surrendering to the Lord of the whole person and being, "from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot," with every faculty, desire and power, together with the will, and all our relationships and possessions. Only in this measure and manner can the Saviour live out His own life within these redeemed bodies of ours—as Paul puts it, "that the life also of Jesus may be *manifested in our body*" (2 Cor. 4:10, 11). We yielded to that challenge, and what was the result? From that day to this—now nearing ten years—that crisis has been followed by a process of testing, trying, proving to ensure that the old soldier (the will) does not after all play false to his lawful Captain.

In this battle of the Prince Emmanuel for full possession of the town of Mansoul, Lord Will-Be-Will is one of the last of the puppets to abdicate. In this death to the self-life, the will is often the last enemy in Mansoul to surrender. This full surrender of body, mind and will leads to a complete transformation of the mind and an apprehension of the perfect WILL OF GOD: (See Romans 12:2).

One more word in conclusion. While the Lord Jesus Christ was in the flesh He exercised no will of His own. Did he not say: "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me?" Having received a commission from the Father, He could not be actuated by an independent will concerning Himself or any part of His Mission. He laid aside His will together with other insignia of His dignity as the eternal Son, and gave Himself wholly to the fulfilment of His Father's will. That being so, how can we retain our wills in independence of His?

My will is not my own,
Till Thou hast made it Thine.
My glorious Victor, Prince Divine,
Clasp these surrendered hands in Thine.
At length my WILL is all Thine own,
Glad vassal of a Saviour's throne.