

Who's in Control?

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The lecturer spoke substantially as follows:

Most of us like to feel we're in the driver's seat. That we make our own decisions. That we're on top of circumstances rather than circumstances being on top of us.

I learned something about this from an answer a high school girl gave in Sunday School. It was a class of high school students and my wife was the teacher. In the course of their discussion she asked them this question: "Would you rather be a leader or a follower?"

Most of them answered: "A leader." They felt a leader gives orders instead of being told what to do. But this girl had a different view. She said: "I'd like to be a leader and a follower and both at the same time." She explained: "If you're a leader, you've a responsibility to the people you lead. You want to feel that you're leading them right. And you can't do this unless you have some rule or guide to follow. So to be a good leader, you have to be a good follower."

There's a story in the Bible that makes a somewhat similar point. It's about a Roman centurion, and many of you will know it. This soldier had a servant who was sick, apparently near death. And he came to Jesus for help. Jesus at once offered to come and heal the man. However, the soldier replied: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed" (Matt. 8:8).

Why did the centurion feel that Jesus had the power to do this? Well, he must have known of the wonderful healing works of Jesus. But his next remark indicated a deeper insight into these works. He drew a parallel between himself as a soldier and Jesus. He said, "For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it" (Luke 7:8). The Bible

says, "When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt. 8:10). The centurion returned home and found his servant healed.

Now here's the point. The Roman officer recognized that Jesus gave orders to disease just as he gave orders to his men. And that just as he drew his power from his superior officers and eventually from the Emperor himself, so Jesus drew his power from a superior and ultimate authority. Both the high school girl and the soldier saw in their own different ways that we can exercise authority only as we obey authority.

What was the authority which Jesus obeyed and which enabled him to exercise such control over adverse circumstances of every kind? Mary Baker Eddy, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science, answers this question in "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures." She writes: "Divine Truth, Life, and Love gave Jesus authority over sin, sickness, and death" (p. 26). Jesus exercised control at all times because at all times he submitted to the divine Truth, Life, and Love which he recognized as the supreme governing authority in the universe and as the heavenly Father of men, God.

Jesus' experience was unique. But it serves as a model for each one of us. Like our high school girl and the centurion, we all must learn that we gain mastery over circumstances only when we submit to a higher authority. Jesus' supreme expression of such obedience comes in his words: "Father, . . . not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

This brings us to the main point of our discussion: that we can take control of our experience only as we submit to the control of God. In the degree that we obey the will of God, to that degree we can make our own independent contribution to life—in our relations with others,

in our career, and in facing such difficulties as accident or ill health.

This evening I would like to explore an actual situation from each of these three areas in which I have been directly or indirectly involved. These will be used as the basis for discussing just what it means to obey God's will. Next, what it is that would make us disobey God's will and so separate us from this source of power. And finally some of the ways in which obedience to God's will enables us to be on top of circumstances instead of letting circumstances be on top of us.

Mankind Desires Control

So let's turn to these three areas I've already referred to—our human relations, our activity, and our health. First, when our human relations are disturbed, when others act in an uncooperative or unfriendly way, we can feel upset and frustrated.

This was dramatically illustrated for me early one evening. My wife and I had been shopping and we thought we'd treat ourselves to a dinner at a fine restaurant downtown.

Well, everything was perfect except the waiter. He was clearly in a bad mood and plunked down our menus belligerently without a word. I figured this mood would pass. We ordered and when he brought the first course I tried to strike up a conversation. But he just wouldn't answer. He came to clear the first course and again I tried to be as friendly as I could. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't draw a friendly response. It appeared that our anticipated treat would be marred by this man's unfriendly attitude and apparently we couldn't do a thing about it.

This may seem like a small incident. But when it's multiplied by all the times people are unfriendly and uncooperative, it constitutes a very important area where we'd like to feel equal to the situation.

Before we consider how I solved this human relationship problem, let's look to another area where we seek to determine our experience—our work. Aren't we sometimes inclined to feel helpless if something happens to affect our job? I'm sure most of us are familiar with this feeling, but a friend of mine experienced it in a particularly severe way.

He'd taken a job with a well-established eastern manufacturing company. It was an excellent opportunity, and he'd made the most of it. After only six years he'd become vice-president of the company, was well-known and respected in the community. He and his family had just moved into a new home; and though their first house wasn't yet sold, he was able to finance the new home temporarily.

Then one morning the president of the company called him in and told him without any warning that his services would no longer be required.

Immediately my friend contacted an employment service to find another position. But he was told that because of the high level of his position, its specialized work and salary demands, it would probably take months to place him. Yet if he didn't find something almost immediately, he could be in financial difficulty. He had used his bank reserve in buying the second house, and if he couldn't keep up the payments he stood a chance of losing both houses.

To all appearances he was in a situation which was out of control—leaving him with a temporarily helpless and frustrated feeling. Now again before we look to how he resolved this situation, let's consider a third area where we need to be on top of things—our health. Doesn't it disturb us when our health fails? Or when we see someone dear to us threatened by ill health or accident?

A young mother, who's a close friend of my wife and myself, faced

such a situation. Her little boy was struck by a car as he darted across the busy street in front of their house. A crowd gathered quickly. The boy had all the evidence of a severe concussion, and because of deep cuts, his head was bleeding profusely. The father was out of town, so the mother had this challenge to face alone. Here was a situation which she seemed helpless to do much about.

Now, I've given you three examples where *circumstances seemed to take* the experience of several people out of their hands. What could they do? What can any of us do when we're frustrated or afraid? Actually there's only one thing we can do—learn to understand what really governs our experience.

God's Will Defined

Our high school girl pointed to the answer when she said, "If you want to be a good leader, you have to be a good follower." In other words, "If you want to exercise authority, you have to submit to authority."

The centurion showed us this too. He drew a parallel between the authority he expressed because he submitted to his military superiors and the authority Jesus expressed because he submitted to God.

Jesus did submit wholeheartedly to God. He said so himself. "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). And the same divine authority that Jesus expressed in unparalleled measure is available to us when we submit to God's will as he did.

But to submit to God's will we need first to understand what it is. There are three things we can say about the will of God. First, it's always good. Second, it's universal. That is, it applies to everyone. And third, it's always expressed. By that I mean it's concrete, never abstract theory. We experience it directly.

We can say these things about God's will because of what God is. It stands to reason that God's will, or God's purpose, is going to reflect His nature. Here's how this works: if we take one of the names for God — say, the descriptive term, Mind, which is used for God in Christian Science and also is implied in the Bible—we see that God's will must be always good. And here's why. God as Mind is the intelligent source of all right ideas, the creator, the Father, the origin. We could even say the author, from which we get our word authority. If we accept God as intelligent Mind, we have to conclude that His ideas are always construc-

tive and progressive, never destructive or unwise. So God's will as characterized by intelligent ideas must be always constructive, always good.

This same reasoning applies to all the other descriptive terms for God and gives further proof that God's will must be always good. Take these names for God found in the Bible: Love, Life, Spirit, and I AM. Love indicates affection and care. Life excludes death. Spirit excludes limitation. I AM brings to our thought full and satisfying individuality. All of these point to the intent of God's will as wholly good for man.

The goodness of God's will was shown in the centurion's contact with Jesus. Did Jesus tell the centurion, "I'm sorry your servant is sick, but it must be God's will"? No. He said, "I will come and heal him" (Matt. 8:7). Jesus understood that God never ordains sickness or suffering.

In addition to understanding that God as good preserves our health, we can also know that His will includes supply for every need. The infinite Mind and unceasing Love which are God could do no less than impart to us every necessary idea and quality. The epistle of James affirms this: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (1:17). There's no limit to God's giving and there's no interruption in God's giving. Every good gift. No variableness. So first we identify God's will as being entirely good.

Secondly, God's will is universal. It's everywhere present and applies to each individual. It has to apply to each individual, because nothing exists except that which is the fulfillment of God's purpose. This universality of God's will was stated by Jesus in his parable about a man with a hundred sheep. He said that, if he loses one, will he not leave the ninety and nine and go out and seek that one which is lost? "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14).

Every individual is precious to God. No one is excluded from God's purpose for man. No one here in this audience is excluded from God's will. No one on this planet. No one in the entire universe is excluded from the goodness which is God.

Then there's a third point about God's will that's essential to understand. His purpose is always expressed. It's never abstract, never withheld.

Mrs. Eddy brought out this vital point when she emphasized that God is not only totally good as creator or basic cause, but He is always *expressing* Himself in a good creation. This creation or expression is man, you and me, in our true spiritual nature. Even as a child Mrs. Eddy couldn't accept the traditional religious doctrine of foreordination—that God willed some men to be saved and willed others to be condemned. To her, God being wholly good, He must have a good creation. This conviction was a forerunner to her discovery of Christian Science in 1866. At this time she realized that, as each of us understands what God's nature really is and identifies himself in thought and conduct as the expression of God, the sorrows and suffering of human experience must be seen as unreal and disappear—because they're not the expression of a good God.

For nearly 10 years Mrs. Eddy successfully applied this truth to the healing of all kinds of human ills. Then in 1875 she published *Science and Health* to explain her discovery. In the teaching of this book Mrs. Eddy set aside the false concept of God and man as separate from one another and as having separate wills. She showed that man is distinct from God, as effect is distinct from cause, but man is not separate from God. Man actively expresses God's will of universal good.

To illustrate this: when you are kind, in a degree you're expressing Love, God. When you behave intelligently, in a degree you're expressing Mind, God. This doesn't mean that you are Love or Mind or God; you're the expression of Love, Mind, God. But equally you are not separated from these; you're always at one with the divine source of your being.

God's Will Meets a Need

To see this makes us want to accept God's will because we see that it could never impose on us or restrict us. God's purpose is to empower us, benefit us, liberate us, supply us with all that makes up our full and satisfying selfhood.

I came to feel this power and presence of God's will one time in an unforgettable way. I'd moved to a large city where I knew no one. One evening I found myself sitting alone in my room feeling quite depressed and lonely. It wasn't that I hadn't formed some close friendships, but this didn't seem the same as having someone with whom I could share my life and work. Also my finances were extremely low.

I'd been a student of Christian Science all my life, and as I sat seeking an answer, all of a sudden the significance of what I'd studied swept over me. I saw that I could never have more than I had right at that moment.

This may sound like a peculiar thing to say—that I could never have more than I had right at that moment. And it may not sound very encouraging considering I was alone and almost broke. But I had suddenly realized what the verse from the Bible means which says: "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it" (Eccl. 3:14). In other words, I said to myself, "If tomorrow I should have an unlimited income according to material evidence, and if I should find myself with perfect, ideal, satisfying companionship, I would not have more than I have right now." I had caught a glimpse of God's nature as abundant, unlimited good universally expressed. The material evidence didn't tell me this, but my spiritual understanding told me. Immediately I was on top of the feelings of lack and loneliness. They disappeared completely.

The next day I didn't have any more money in the bank, nor had anyone fallen in love with me. But a change had occurred within me. I won't say I was never tempted again to feel lonely or financially frustrated. But whenever the temptation would come, I returned to that glimpse I'd caught of God's will as insuring an unlimited abundance of all good without change, and I would be at peace.

The financial picture and the companionship picture didn't change immediately, but I still felt this peace. This was one of the most beautiful parts of the entire experience. Because it meant that, after both situations had changed for the better, I was able to base my freedom from lack and loneliness on spiritual understanding instead of basing it on material evidence. I had glimpsed that God's will is unchanging good universally expressed.

When I thought about my experience later, I realized that I had been praying in the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). I had been seeing God's will of unlimited good in place of the material evidence which seemed to contradict God's will. This opened the way to my experiencing more and more good in my life.

To sum up, we can describe God's will in three words. It is *good universally expressed*. And as we yield

to this divine will, we gain control over our experience. Why? Because we're aligning ourselves with the unlimited power and substance that is God.

Nature of Human Will

Now when we come to realize that God has only good in store for us, it would seem we would be only too eager to align ourselves with His will. One of the main difficulties in doing this however is that we sometimes confuse His will with **human will**. And human will is something we all have to come to terms with. Even Mrs. Eddy had to.

Born in New Hampshire, known as the Granite State, she came of a strong-willed family and grew up among strong-willed neighbors. From early in her life she had a strong sense of divinely appointed mission. After her discovery of Christian Science she knew clearly what this mission was—to make available to all mankind this practical healing and saving Truth.

Mrs. Eddy met obstacles and opposition that would have daunted someone less determined. But she continued to demonstrate her discovery, to teach it to students, to write her book *Science and Health*, and to found the Christian Science Church with all its auxiliary activities. What gave her the strength and determination for all this? A constant readiness to be guided by God, to do His will, and to set aside her own human will. On many occasions she set out upon some course, only to find it was not in accord with God's purpose. Then unhesitatingly she withdrew and waited upon God to show her His way of doing what was needed. But when she was sure she was acting in obedience to God's will, then she held to her course regardless of difficulties and won through to her objectives.

When we're inclined to feel that we're at the mercy of circumstances, it's because we're accepting a power apart from God. We're permitting human will to operate. So in order to be really on top of our experience we also need to realize when human will is operating. To do this we have to understand what human will is.

The first characteristic of human will was seen in the experience of the young mother whose five-year-old son was struck by a car. What tried to make her afraid? It certainly appeared that God's goodwill for man wasn't operating. But what told her this? Wasn't it the conclusion she drew from the material evidence—the boy's physical appearance, the crowd of people,

the anxiety of the woman who had driven the car. Wasn't this the evidence that tried to persuade her that there was a moment when God's will wasn't operating? This is the first characteristic of human will—drawing conclusions from material evidence.

A second characteristic of human will was illustrated in the experience of the businessman. When he felt he was no longer master of his employment situation, wasn't it because his own plans for the future had suddenly been interfered with? Then when the situation went contrary to his plan, wasn't this why he felt he'd lost control? The discouraging prediction of the employment consultants added to this feeling. Here we see the second characteristic of human will: outlining exactly how *we* think a situation should work out or how *we* fear the situation may work out.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't plan at all. But if we decide that a situation can be solved only in the particular way we outline, this is human will operating. It isn't receptivity to the divine will.

A third characteristic of human will is self-interest, putting one's own interest and advantage above regard for others. In my experience with the waiter, wasn't I thinking of myself when I felt disappointed and frustrated because our pleasant dinner would be marred by the waiter's unfriendly attitude? A concern for one's own selfish interest is a strong facet of human will; it tends to blind us to the universality of God's will as providing good for all in unlimited measure.

Human will, then, can be identified by these three characteristics: drawing conclusions from material evidence, insistence on our own plans, and too much concern for ourselves regardless of others.

Human Will Replaced by God's Will

How do we let go of human will and submit to God's will instead? We do it mentally and spiritually. We decide we're going to accept only the evidence of God's will instead of the testimony of human will.

Isn't this what Jesus did when the centurion came seeking help for his servant? When Jesus heard that the servant was sick, did he agree with this? No. He held to God's will as good universally expressed. He mentally replaced the material evidence presented by the centurion with spiritual evidence. Here Jesus conformed to the prediction about the Messiah given by the prophet Isaiah six hundred years earlier. Isaiah wrote: "He shall not judge

after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears" (11:3). Because Jesus fulfilled this prophecy we refer to him as the Messiah or, to use the Greek version, the Christ. His complete identification with the Christ, the true idea of God and of God's expression, man, gave him his healing power. We reflect the same power when we accept the Christ, the true spiritual idea.

The change of thought that Jesus taught and that Christian Science now teaches is the rejection of a false limited view of man. It is the acceptance instead, of man as God's expression. It isn't a change from one material form of thinking to a different material form of thinking. In other words Jesus didn't decide that the centurion's servant should become well. His perfection was already included in the will of God—of the divine Mind, who has conceived and created each of us. Jesus simply understood God's will for man, and this acceptance of God's will healed the centurion's servant.

The Bible also points out that the healing occurred at exactly the time Jesus spoke. It was instantaneous. There was no period of recuperation because in reality no actual change took place. God's will is established, unchanging. We may seem to require a period of time to let go of human will, to let go of our material conceptions, rigid planning, and self-interest. But the instant we do let go of human will and submit to God's will the healing is accomplished. The healing is the acceptance of the good that has always existed.

This may sound easy. And it should be. But I'm sure everyone has discovered that at times it seems very difficult to let go of human will. What do we do at such a time? We pray. We acknowledge the truth of God's will operating as the law of life and health. We gain help in our prayer by studying the spiritual truth found in the Bible and in Christian Science. And, if necessary, we can call on another to help us as the centurion called on Jesus.

Through these efforts we can reach the point where we let go of human will and submit to God's will. We can gain authority over our circumstances by bringing our lives under divine authority—to the benefit of all.

Control Gained

How is this universal benefit expressed? Let's answer this question by returning now to the three incidents we discussed earlier and see how the solutions were found in

each instance through yielding to the will of God.

First, do you remember the matter of human relationships in the restaurant? I felt my wife and I were going to have our outing spoiled because of the waiter's unfriendly attitude. Well, I got to the point where I was just going to ignore him and not let his attitude interfere with the pleasantness of my evening. But I couldn't be content with this approach. There was something about shutting out my fellowman that wouldn't let me rest.

As I considered the problem, I saw the waiter standing by the kitchen waiting for our meal. He was a Negro and the race riots in Watts were currently drawing much attention. As I watched him, my heart went out to him. I sensed the challenge he faced. Suddenly my resentment and disappointment drained away. I had let go of that element of human will we call self-interest.

But I had to do more than this. I had to stop drawing conclusions from material evidence as well. According to material evidence, the prevailing social conditions limited this man's progress in many ways. But I needed to know that, in place of this material view, God's will was operating. I needed to know that in reality God imparts His qualities to each individual without measure, and nothing can prevent full expression of these qualities. To the degree that this truth is realized, limitation of whatever nature can be set aside.

By the time the waiter came back to our table, it wouldn't have mattered what attitude he had. I had let go of human will and had submitted to God's will, acknowledging good universally expressed. But the man's attitude had completely changed! As he prepared the skewered beef and liver, he talked freely, animatedly with us. You can't imagine a more friendly atmosphere.

When we finished, he helped my wife on with her coat. Then he came over to me, took my hand in both of his, and told me how very glad he was that I had come. All my human efforts had failed. But realizing the will of God established warmth and friendliness. Had I gained control over this man? No. I accepted God's will with the result that God controlled all of us.

Now, by admitting God's power, we not only solve problems of human relationships. We also bring our activities, particularly employment under divine control. This is what my friend needed when he

lost his good-paying, secure position. He saw he must let go of human will, mainly outlining, and affirm God's will as alone controlling him.

First he rejected the forecast that finding an equivalent job could possibly take several months. Instead he realized that as universal good, God's will is always expressed. The intelligent Mind, God, who gives man his abilities and ideas also provides a continuing demand for them.

But he not only gave up the outlining of possible delay; he also replaced his own personal interest with a deep desire to be of service. His anxiety and frustration dropped away, and he gained the sense of freedom that only complete submission to God's will can bring.

Within one week a much larger firm contacted him. They made a similar product and were in serious need of someone to expedite their manufacturing process, precisely his area of specialization. The new position paid better, the location offered his family more cultural and civic activities, and he sold the two houses quickly without suffering any loss. A mutual friend of ours said to him later, "Bill, being fired from that job was the best thing that could have happened to you!" By completely giving up his own fears

and limited sense of his future, the good which God wills was expressed in his experience.

A Child Is Healed

Finally, we spoke of how submitting to the will of God brings our health under control. When my little five-year-old friend was hit by the car, his mother immediately telephoned a Christian Science practitioner for help. He heard the stress and anxiety in her voice and said to her, "We need to know that no accident has occurred." This may sound strange; it was certainly a radical statement, but it accorded perfectly with the nature of God's will as good universally expressed. It was necessary under the circumstances to challenge and silence the testimony of human will with its conclusions drawn from material evidence and with its outlining or mental projection of harmful results.

Since the mother wanted to rely entirely on Christian Science, the practitioner told her to bring the boy into the house and said he would help through prayer in Christian Science. In a few moments the mother called back and asked the practitioner if he could come personally to the house, since the fear seemed so great.

When he arrived about fifteen

minutes later, the boy's condition had already improved. The profuse bleeding had completely stopped, though there were still symptoms of concussion. The little family, the mother and eight- and ten-year old brother and sister, the practitioner and his wife all went into the living room and turned to quiet prayer. Through reading the Bible and Science and Health they all worked to realize God's will and to let go of human will. They knew there was no power in conclusions drawn from material evidence or in a mental projection of anything opposite to God's will.

The mother's decision not to subject the child to a physical examination also was significant. It showed her desire to reject conclusions from material evidence and human opinion, and to submit entirely to God's will — to find out from spiritual understanding what the real condition of the boy was.

Later the mother checked in the bedroom and found the heavy breathing had lessened and the boy was sleeping. In the morning he awoke clear in his thinking. All the evidence of concussion had disappeared. He ate some breakfast and by afternoon was playing quietly around the house. The next day he attended his half-day in

nursery school. The accident occurred on Tuesday and by the end of the week he was outside playing normally. The deep cuts healed up quickly. No stitches were taken.

By letting go of every trace of human will, a sure sense of control over the situation was felt from beginning to end, the divine control that comes from submitting entirely to God's will, good universally expressed.

Mankind Finds Dominion

This evening I've referred to several specific instances of what happens when we bring our lives under divine control. As you'd expect, any of us who has had such an experience is profoundly grateful for this evidence of the real source of authority. But when we know we've gained it by submitting to God's will, a deeper feeling moves us than gratitude for mere relief from human difficulties.

This deeper feeling is the assurance that the power of God exists, and that it is supreme over all material conditions. As we accept it, we find it gives us in turn authority over every kind of daily experience. Then we really know who's in control.