

CHAPTER 8

THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

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A) THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION IS THE MOST ACCEPTABLE OFFERING

In Christianity giving is important and is acclaimed and it is a command from the Lord Jesus Himself. The Apostle Paul said to the Priests of Ephesus: "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. **And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"** (Acts 20:35). We notice that the words of the Lord Jesus which the Apostle Paul points to here were not mentioned in the Four Gospels. Yet these words were known to the believers and the Apostle Paul was reminding the believers of them: "And remember the words of the Lord Jesus". **Being known to the believers confirm that "giving" was an important agreed upon Christian principle.**

It is nice to present to God alms and material donations, and it is nicer to present to Him spiritual gifts and offerings. It is even nicer still for man to present himself to God. I do not mean by the latter, a life of consecration. Rather I mean an offering which exceeds all other offerings. That is surrendering your will to God and submitting your whole life to Him. It is the best offering because in the other offerings we give to God part of what we have. In submitting our will to the will of God we mortify our will and our personal desires **and in total we present ourselves as live oblations on the altar of submission.**

I might give alms to a person or money to the Church. In this case I give part of my riches, not all of my riches. I might serve God honestly, and in this case also I give God part of my time, not all of my time. I might strive for a certain holy matter, and in spite of that my offering is a part of my effort, not all of my effort.

Hence the life of submission is surrender of the whole life to God, such that all the deeds of man, his behaviour and his sayings are according to the will of God. The Apostle Paul expressed that by saying: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

This matter is distinct in the life of the Lord Jesus Who presented to us an example of a perfect man. He said: "**For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me**" (John 6:38). In His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night of His suffering, He addressed the Father and said: "**O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will**" (Matthew 26:39). He said that in spite of the fact that He had no will except the one will which He had with the Father. But He wanted to teach us a lesson at that time.

When His Disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, He gave them a "model prayer" in which He cared to exalt this virtue. He said to them: "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven ... **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**" (Matthew 6:9, 10; Luke 11:2).

We notice here that He taught us to ask the Heavenly Father that His will be done in our lives as it is in heaven. There are no obstacles to hinder the will of God in Heaven. But on earth, because of the free will of man by which God distinguished him, man can disobey God, and this is regrettable indeed!

The Apostle Peter exalts this virtue in the life of the Lord Jesus by saying: "Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

B) VIRTUES WHICH PRECEDE

THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

We have to mention that to live the life of submission is not an easy matter. **There are obstacles to it, among which are personal desires, feeling of the ego, the mind, ... etc.** Three virtues are to precede the life of submission:

1 - Disposition of one's desires: He who does not dispose of his desires cannot submit his life to God, because he has already surrendered himself to his desires. And if he submits his life to God, it will be conditional, and his submission is not complete. **It is necessary for him first to dispose of each wish and each desire, even in spiritual matters.** Spiritual desires should have one aim, to be one with God. The detail of this union with God and the means to achieve it have to be left to God, and man should have no special aim in it.

2 - Humility: It is not possible to live the life of submission without humility. He who is sure of himself, leans on his own thinking and depends on his own mind, cannot submit his life to God in the simplicity of faith. In most cases he submits his dealings to God under the watch of his mind in which he trusts. He accepts from these dealings that which his mind accepts and rejects the rest. He does that by arguments and discussions.

Such a person may err as he thinks evil of what God intended for his good. He might relate some of what happens to him as evil from wicked people or the devil. **He may resist God's will, and his mind pictures for him matters which appear correct, because he is wise in his own eyes. The pride of his thinking cannot sway him to submit his life totally and completely to God.**

3 - Faith: o one can submit his life to God unless he is sure that God cares for Him and takes care of all his matters. He trusts that whatever God does, He does with wisdom and that God does not need his interference. But if he doubts in the pastorship, love and care of God, how can such a person live the life of submission? If faith in God is trusting in Him, it is obvious that a person cannot submit to him whom he does not trust. We mentioned this point in the chapter about faith.

C) CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

Submission is an inner life, yet it has characteristics which we sense.

a - Submission of one's will is such that a person has no other will which differs from that of God: In other words, such a person is like soft wax which accepts the imprint of a picture on it. He does not live divided on himself, sometimes submitting his life to God, and sometimes wanting to execute his own will.

Saul of Tarsus (the Apostle Paul before his conversion) asked God when He appeared to him near Damascus: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6). These words express complete submission, and were the turning point in the life of that great Apostle, who was led by the Spirit from that point on. We realise the same from Paul's sayings: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

We again listen to what St. Paul said to the Priests of Ephesus: "And see, now I go bound in

the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:22-24).

St. Paul lived in complete obedience to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. Although he knew that chains and tribulations awaited him, he did not dispose of his obedience to the Spirit, and the life of submission which he vowed to live.

b - Also the thought becomes that of God: The Apostle Paul who lived and experienced a life of submission said: **"But we have the mind of Christ"** (1 Corinthians 2:16), **and that is a normal result of the life of submission.** If a person submits his life completely to God, God will guide his thoughts. The Psalmist said: "I was so foolish and ignorant; ... you hold me by my right hand. **You will guide me with Your counsel"** (Psalm 73:22-24).

c - In total, all the behaviour of man will agree with the will of God: The Divine Revelation said about the Prophet and King David: **"I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will"** (Acts 13:22). **David deserved this great testimony because he lived a life of submission. He always used to shout: "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast"** (Psalm 40:8). That was the testimony of his willingness to obey God completely, and to surrender to Him totally.

d - Reacting gladly and with thanksgiving to different events: Flaring up concerning a certain matter shows that we were shocked because a personal desire did not materialise and resulted in becoming nervous. But he who knows how to submit his life to God, does not get anxious nor depressed. **He accepts gladly whatever happens and with thanksgiving, knowing that it was for his good, whether in its appearance it looked good or bad.**

D) BLESSINGS OF THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

What does a person gain from submitting his life to God and what are the blessings which he reaps?

1 - Perpetual joy with no grief nor agitation, complete peace without anxiety or fear: That is the result of the feeling that God's will is done. The Psalmist said: "I delight to do Your will, O my God" (Psalm 40:8) and "But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You" (Psalm 5:11). Joy is from the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and sadness is from the fruit of sin.

The source of joy for man and what accompanies it from peace is the fulfilment of the will of God and the faith which follows it: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). **The Wise expressed it by saying: "No grave trouble will overtake the righteous"** (Proverbs 12:21).

Joy and peace which accompany the submission of the will to God does not mean that the person who enjoys them will not meet difficulties in his life. Maybe the contrary: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

To a great extent, such a person resembles the three young men in the burning fiery furnace in Babylon. They were seen midst the fire walking joyously as if in a picnic. The fire had no power over their bodies; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments burned, and the smell of fire was not on them. All the fire did was loose them and they were able to walk in the fire. The secret was in the presence of a fourth Person with them Who was like the Son of God (Daniel, Chapter 3). This is our God about Whom is said: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them" (Isaiah 63:9).

b - Total serenity: The person who knows how to submit his will to the will of God is serene and nothing inflames him. He submits all his life to the Almighty "for of Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Romans 11:36). Such a person always feels that his life is in the hands of God Who loves him and Who is able to rescue him from difficulties and tribulations.

The Psalms of the Prophet David are full of these emotions which filled his heart: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4), "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident" (psalm 27:1-3) and "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalm 46:1-2).

Another source of serenity for the person who lives the life of submission is his feeling that God, to Whom he submitted his life, will bring to him only that which is good and right. The Apostle Paul says: "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). And when he is surprised by something which he does not expect, he realises at once that God has a purpose and a useful ending for him.

It was said about one of the saintly fathers who experienced the life of submission, that he went to the city of Alexandria, Egypt. There, some atheists surrounded him and kept insulting, swearing and beating him. All the time he was keeping his serenity without any anger. Then one of them asked him: "What are the wonders and miracles which that Nazarite in which you believe in did?" The saintly father broke his silence and said: "One of the miracles is that you have beaten and insulted me while I stayed happy and joyous".

It was also said about a saintly monk who used to perform miracles and wonders, that the head of his monastery - in spite of these miracles - noticed that the striving of this monk was no more that those of other monks in the monastery. He was surprised and asked the saintly monk about his life. The monk answered that he did not pray, fast, or keep vigil more than the other monks, but that he did not get annoyed from anything at all. The head of the monastery asked him: "Did you not get angry when our enemies attacked our monastery and set fire to the store of wheat?" The monk replied: "I am accustomed to accept everything with thanksgiving, submitting the matter to God".

The head of the monastery realised that the secret of the serenity of this monk and the wonders he performed were in submitting his whole life to the will of God.

3 - We said earlier that humility precedes the life of submission. We add that the life of submission in the long run lets the virtue of humility grow. Humility is the strong foundation upon which our spiritual building stands.

4 - Among the blessings of the life of submission is being sure of the final judgement of God. The fact that I submitted my life to God means that there is no condemnation on me.

How would I be condemned on fulfilling the will of God? The whole spiritual striving for man is to reach this point - not to be condemned in the last day. If the life of submission leads me to this conclusion, this is enough for me.

5 - Among the blessings of the life of submission is that we oblige God to care for us. The more we submit ourselves to Him the more we oblige Him to care for us. The Psalmist says: "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Psalm 91:14-16). The first lesson in swimming is for a person to submit himself to the water without fear. The more he submits the more the water carries him.

6 - A life of submission cultivates in us the love of God. Love is not considered complete until our will agrees with the will of whom we love. The practical evidence on our love to God is submitting our lives to Him and His will be done in us: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

7 - A life of submission gives us a chance to acquire other spiritual virtues such as obedience, patience and endurance. My own will stands against acquiring these virtues. A person who does not submit himself to God cannot be obedient, because obedience is in submission. Submitting myself and accepting a certain matter even when it appears not for my advantage cultivates in me the virtue of patience, and patience enriches my life, and produces perseverance (Romans 5:3, 4).

8 - A life of submission gives me possibilities for holy experiences in the life with God. God created man with a free will. Man with his full freedom deprives himself from many graces when his will contradicts the will of God. The Lord Jesus said to the people of Jerusalem: "How often I wanted to gather your children together, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:37, 38). **If I submit my will to the will of God I see wonders.** Besides, man will receive many graces from God as a result of not hindering the work of the Spirit of God in him.

E) MATTERS WHICH HELP MAN IN THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

1 - One should convince himself that nothing will happen in his life or even in the life of the whole world, except by either God's will or by God's permission. The Lord Jesus said to Peter in the evening of His suffering, when Peter cut the ear of the servant of the High Priest with his sword: "Put your sword into the sheath. **Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"** (John 18:11). The Lord did not say "the cup which Judas and the Chief Priests have given Me", but He said: "the cup which My Father Who controls the whole world and Who holds everything in His hands has given Me". In another event, Pilate said to Jesus: "Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?", **the Lord Jesus answered: "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above"** (John 19:10, 11).

Herod, the Jewish King, tried to kill the Lord Jesus when He was a child by putting to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts from two years old and under, but without success, because the hour of the Lord Jesus had not come yet (Matthew 2:16). The Jews also tried several times to kill Jesus, but they could not fulfil their wicked desire. Once the people of Nazareth rose up and thrust Jesus out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. **"Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way"** (Luke 4:29, 30). **But when His time came, which He designed according to His eternal knowledge, He said to those who came to arrest Him: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness"** (Luke 22:53).

King Saul tried his best to kill David, but failed in all his efforts. The reason is that "God did not deliver him into his hand" (1 Samuel 23:14). **The brothers of Joseph tried to get rid of him, but God sent him to Egypt before them to preserve life for many people. Later when he met his brothers, Joseph said to them: "But now, do not therefore be grieved nor angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life ... And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt"** (Genesis 45:5-8). Joseph also told them: "Do not be afraid, ... you meant evil against me;

but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:19, 20).

How nice to feel that our lives are in the hands of God, the loving, kind and mighty. If we really realise that, we will submit ourselves to Him willingly and in obedience. **St. Kebrianos** commented on the verse "Do not lead us into temptation" (Matthew 6:13) by saying: "We come to God and not to the devil - in order not to be lead into temptation". That is how the saints understood the life of submission.

In one of the attacks of the devil against St. Antony the Great, the father of the monks, he appeared to St. Antony in the form of many beasts. St. Antony looked at him with confidence and said: "If you have power over me, it would be enough for only one of you to fight a man like me. But God took away your power".

2 - One should not be annoyed when he faces matters which he does not like. Instead he should come to God to correct what is lacking in him. The children of Israel, disliked eating the manna in the wilderness, and desired eating meat. So God gave them plenty of meat. But that was for their destruction: "So they ate and were well filled, for He gave them their own desire. They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, The wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel" (Psalm 78:29-31). **It would have been better for the children of Israel - after all the wonders that God did with them - to continue to eat the manna and thank God for His great gifts in the bare wilderness.**