

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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The Law of a Sound Mind

Peter Masters

In these pages¹ we have referred to a fundamental law of the Christian faith, that our rational minds must always be in control of our thoughts and actions, and that our minds must be wholly subservient to the Word of God as the exclusive source of authoritative teaching from God. The Charismatic revolution has utterly flouted this law, which we call *the law of a sound mind*, a term taken from Paul's words in 2 *Timothy* 1:7 — "For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a SOUND MIND."

Charismatics claim that by maintaining rational control over our minds and actions we are opposing and quenching the work of the Holy Spirit. They say that believers *must* be prepared to surrender rational control in order that they may be open to direct divine activity in both worship and Christian service. John Wimber observes with concern that "Fear of losing control is threatening to most Western Christians." He insists that we must overcome our fears, because rational control must be forfeited for tongues-speaking to occur; for soaring ecstatic sensations to be felt in worship; for messages from God to be received directly into the mind, and for miraculous events to happen, such as healings.

If divine healing is to take place, then gifted healers must launch away from sober, rational control so as to be open to "words" from God, or "TV" pictures in the mind, guiding them to diagnose disorders, and telling them what God intends to do for each sufferer. Increasing numbers of healers are practicing the technique of putting sick people into trance states, which knock out their power of rational control. The sufferer as well as the healer must surrender the rational faculty in order to obtain a blessing, supposedly from God.

Most Charismatic healing meetings now begin with strenuous efforts to help people to surrender their rational control and behave in a completely uninhibited way. The goal is that worshipers should be "open" to accept anything that happens, no matter how strange, inexplicable or bizarre it may be. Loud, rhythmic music forms the basis of worship, and all present are urged to join in with arm-waving, body-swaying, foot-tapping, and even dancing and leaping in the air. Rational control must at all costs be swept away because nothing which occurs must be impeded, tested, or evaluated by the intelligent mind, versed in the Word of God.

By discarding the *law of a sound mind* (the protection provided by the reasoning faculty) Charismatics have rendered themselves highly gullible in the face of false teaching, exaggeration, and lies. They have become notably vulnerable to religious charlatans and rogues, as the 1987 crisis in American religious television (which is predominantly Charismatic) has demonstrated. Emotionalism is rampant among them, and because all are free to do whatever seems right in their own eyes, serious spiritual lawlessness is widespread. These things are the inevitable result of laying aside the objective standard of God's Word, the faculty of judgment, and the power of self-control, all of which are brought into play by the *sound mind*.

It is obvious that if traditional evangelical teaching is Biblical in its insistence that the rational faculty must be kept "switched on" throughout our waking day, then the entire Charismatic scene is gravely out of order and opposed to the declared will of God. Can the traditional standard be proved from the Scripture? The incontrovertible fact is that the Bible teems with passages that state categorically that our duty is to maintain firm control of the mind in all our worship and other spiritual activities. So numerous and so emphatic are the commands to this effect that it is almost unbelievable that mature Christians still fall for the Charismatic line that rational control is an

¹ This is chapter 10 of *The Healing Epidemic*, a book by Peter Masters published in England in 1988. It is reprinted by permission. Peter Masters is pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, the historic church of which Charles Spurgeon was pastor.

impediment to the Spirit-filled life. We shall review a large number of “unassailable” texts asserting the *law of a sound mind*, and then consider some of the reasons why the maintaining of a safe, rational mind is so strongly and constantly commanded in the Bible.

Safe-minded Words

The first group of texts to be considered contains the Greek word *sophron*, which in the AV [*King James Version*] is usually translated *sober*, sometimes *temperate*, and once *discreet*. The Greek word comes from *sozo* (to save) and *phren* (the mind) and literally means *safe in mind*. Therefore, to be *sober* (as used in the AV) generally means to be safe-minded, self-controlled, rational, and sensible. It will be seen that Paul’s use of this word condemns the main plank of Charismatic thinking — that rational control must often be abandoned to get spiritual blessing.

In *1 Timothy* 3:2 Paul states that elders must be men who at all times keep the rational faculty alert and in control. He says, “A bishop then must be . . . sober [safe in mind; self-controlled], of good behavior [orderly].” The safe-mindedness required of the elder is underlined by the Greek word for *orderly*, or well-ordered. William Hendriksen shows that the impact of these words is that elders must always be “moderate, well-balanced, calm, careful, steady, and sane.” Does this leave scope for them to voluntarily renounce rational control? Of course not! The NIV [*New International Version*] translates the elder’s required qualifications as “temperate, self-controlled, respectable,” and the NASB [*New American Standard Bible*] adds “prudent.” The elder is to be a sagacious person, astute in mind, good at thinking, and endowed with discernment and mental penetration.

In *Titus* 1:8 Paul repeats the qualifications of elders, again using the Greek word *safe-minded*. (The AV translates it “sober”; the NIV, “self-controlled”; the NASB, “sensible.”) In *Titus* 2:2 Paul extends this standard to all older men, commanding that they should be *sober* or *safe-minded*. Lest we should think that this safe-mindedness is only for office bearers and elderly men, Paul proceeds to command that the same applies to older women, and “that they may teach the young women to be sober” (*Titus* 2:4). Young women also must be taught to be safe in mind (“discreet” in the AV), maintaining self-control both mentally and emotionally.

In *Titus* 2:6 Paul extends the standard still further, saying to Titus, “Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.” Other translators say *self-controlled*, *sensible*, *prudent*. (The precise Greek word here is *sophroneo*, to be in one’s right mind; to be rational and safe in mind.) How can one possibly square this command with voluntary surrender of the control of speech, or the abandonment of oneself to trance states or self-induced “trips” of emotional ecstasy?

Precisely the same word is used by Peter in his command and instruction about true prayer: “Be, therefore, sober [safe-minded, rational], and watch unto prayer” (*1 Peter* 4:7). The NIV translates it, “Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.” Does this sound like a license to pray in tongues, or to pray in response to wild visions and strange messages, which are supposedly flashed into the mind? Prayer, according to Scripture, is an activity of a controlled, rational mind crying out to God in faith for blessing.

Another form of the *safe-minded* term appears in *Titus* 2:12: “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” Here, *soberly* or *safe-mindedly* (Greek: *sophronos*) indicates self-restraint. The rational faculty is to maintain control over all our passions, thoughts, and desires. God calls to worship him a ransomed people who come into his presence with full control of their faculties and feelings. The Spirit will certainly lift us up to heights of spiritual love and worship, but we must never renounce our self-control. It is as image-bearers that we must worship God!

Other translations render *soberly* in this text by the following alternative terms: *sensibly*; *in a self-controlled way*; *with self-mastery*. The *sophron* family of words all contain the same elements *safe* (or controlled, or restrained) *in mind*. Thus every one of the quoted verses testifies powerfully to the central place of the ever-conscious, active, rational faculty in the life of the believer.

Self-control Words

Another highly important Greek word-group confirms the crucial importance of the believer maintaining conscious rational control of all his thoughts, words, and deeds. This group consists of a verb, noun, and adjective drawn from the word *kratos*, which means *strength*, *power*, or *dominion*. All these words indicate self-control.

The verb *enkrateuo* is used by Paul in *1 Corinthians* 9:25 when he speaks of the rigid self-control which is essential in the Christian life: “And every man that strives for the mastery is temperate [self-controlled] in all things.” The NASB says “exercises self-control in all things.” The athlete provides a perfect picture of the Christian. He never surrenders his rational self-control to impulses of diet or leisure, nor does he abandon his thought-out program. The noun form of this word occurs in two key passages about sanctification. In *Galatians* 5:23 this quality of rational strength or self-control is listed as part of the fruit of the Spirit: *temperance*. (Modern versions mostly say “self-control.”)

In *2 Peter* 1:5-6 self-control appears in the well-known chain for godly living. Peter says, “Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance [self-control]; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness.” Once again it is

affirmed that believers must always be in control of their faculties. Firm rational control must never be “switched off” or bypassed, for it is essential in the walk of holiness.

The self-control adjective occurs in *Titus* 1:8-9. We have already noted that the overseer must be *sober* or *safe-minded*, but Paul also says that he must be “temperate [self-controlled]; holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” He does not go into trances, nor does he expect direct communication from God by way of “words of wisdom” or “knowledge.” He keeps control of his reasoning, rational mind and he holds firmly to the Word of God, which the apostolic generation has passed down to him. He does not add to it; he simply teaches it. Thus by sound doctrine he exhorts those who contradict it. What an indictment these words are of those who have introduced extreme and wild doctrines, which they claim have been given to them by visions, dreams, and trances while their rational functions were suspended.

The Greek verb *phroneo* (to *think*) is another word that indicates the controlling role of our affairs. It “implies moral interest or reflection, not mere unreasoning opinion” (Vine). It speaks of the *directed* mind, rather than the mind as passive receptacle for information and impressions. The *phroneo* verb is used frequently by Paul, as he commands us to apply our active, careful, controlling minds to spiritual objectives. Restricting ourselves to just one example, we choose *Colossians* 3:2: “Set your affection [*phroneo*: mind] on things above, not on Earth.” The NIV and NASB both have *mind* (instead of *affection*), and the MLB [*Modern Language Bible*] captures the sense with “apply your minds” — apply being the operative word.²

The minds of believers must be ever active in evaluating and discerning the influences which constantly bombard them, and also in determining and directing all their words and actions. The rule of the New Testament is not a discarded or a dormant mind, but a sanctified, active, safe mind.

The Alert-minded Word

Another word which teaches the primacy of the rational mind is *nepho*, usually translated *sober* in the AV. It literally means free from the influence of alcohol, but in the New Testament it is plainly meant metaphorically, indicating that the mind must be clear and alert so that we can detect temptation or false teaching. Paul says in *1 Thessalonians* 5:6: “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober [alert].” Everyone

² *Set your affection* is one word in Greek. Arndt & Gingrich translate it “set one’s mind on; be intent on.” Godet notes that it is difficult to render the word *phroneo* (mind) into French or English “because it includes at once *thinking* and *willing*.” Vincent comments: “The verb primarily means *to have understanding*, then to *feel* or *think* . . . to direct the mind to something” (from Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament*).

agrees that this is a metaphorical use of *sober*, and that Paul here exhorts us to be vigilant, and fully in control of our rational faculty.

In *1 Peter* 1:13 the word is used in the same way, and also in *1 Peter* 5:8-9: “Be sober [alert], be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith.” The frequently repeated standard of the Bible is: Never, ever, switch off the rational, thinking, discerning mind.

Thinking, Discerning, and Directing Words

Yet another Greek word for the mind or understanding is *dianoia*, which quite specifically refers to the mind. The word strictly means *a reflection* or *a thinking through*. This term — *the thinking mind* — appears twice in Peter’s epistles. In *1 Peter* 1:13-14 we read: “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind [thinking mind]...as obedient children.” In *2 Peter* 3:1-2 we read: “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds [thinking minds] by way of remembrance: that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior.”

Peter does not tell us that we shall have visions or “words of knowledge” coming into our minds, but our spiritual progress will depend on our thoughtful study of the inspired words of the prophets and apostles of the Lord. The principle is clear — God speaks as the Bible is channeled through our rational minds. The mind remains on duty in our communion with the Lord also, for John declares “And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding [thinking mind], that we may know him that is true” (*1 John* 5:20).

Luke records how the Lord instructed the disciples before he ascended into Heaven: “Then opened he their understanding [*nous* — mind], that they might understand the Scriptures” (*Luke* 24:45). This was to be the pattern for all communications of divine Truth once the New Testament was complete. This word for mind (*nous*) is described by Vine as denoting “the seat of reflective consciousness, comprising the faculties of perception and understanding, and those of feeling, judging, and determining.” Paul says, “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding [*nous*] also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (*1 Corinthians* 14:15).

We learn from this that the conscious, rational faculty is vital because the spirit (that is, the spiritual life) in a believer functions and expresses itself through this faculty. If the rational mind is switched off, it is not the spirit of a person, which expresses itself, but merely the emotions.³

³ Amdt & Gingrich say that *nous* “denotes the faculty of physical and intellectual perception, then also the power to arrive at moral judgments.”

The Greek word *logizomai* means to *reckon*, to *estimate*, *count up*, or *assess*. In *1 Corinthians* 13:11 Paul says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought [reckoned] as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." To the adult Christian, the rational faculty assesses and evaluates all things all the time, in the light of the Bible alone. We are disobedient to the Lord if we allow ourselves to become mesmerized by the atmosphere worked up in Charismatic meetings (usually by emotional and musical means), with the result that we cease to *reckon* or *assess*, and simply float along with the tide of un-Biblical ideas and assertions.

The Greek word *suniami* means to *bring together*. It is used metaphorically in the New Testament to describe the process of spiritual comprehension. If people grasp and perceive the meaning of a parable then this verb is used. For example, in *Matthew* 13:51 Jesus asks the disciples, "Have you understood [*suniami*, comprehended] all these things?"

Paul reminds Timothy that it is by studying inspired words (like Paul's own) that he will get this quality of comprehension in all the things he needs to know. *2 Timothy* 2:7 reads, "Consider what I say and the Lord give you understanding [comprehension] in all things."⁴ Timothy is not promised any way of getting divine knowledge other than by applying his mind to the inspired writings, which are good for *all things*. In *Colossians* 2:2 Paul indicates that assurance flows out of deep comprehension of the Word. Charismatics seek assurance from signs and wonders, and from strange experiences, but Paul says, "That their hearts might be comforted...unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding [comprehension]." In *Colossians* 1:9-10 he prays that God's people "might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding [comprehension]...increasing in the knowledge of God."

Always in Control

The New Testament is so full of exhortations to sound-mindedness that it is simply impossible to do justice to them in a limited space. We may think of *Romans* 12:2 — *And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*. The intelligent, safe, sound mind both evaluates and appreciates all the spiritual things, which God has for the believer.

In *Philippians* 4:7-9 the believers' *minds* are garrisoned by God so long as they keep them alert and ready to test all things. So Paul commands, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of

good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you."

The role of the ever-awake rational faculty is yet again asserted by Paul in *2 Corinthians* 10:5, a verse which utterly condemns the uninhibited abandonment of the controlled mind which is so typical of Charismatic experimentation: "Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

The standard has always been the same for true believers, as we see from David's words in *Psalms* 32:9: "Be not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near you." Here the word *understanding* means "to distinguish or discern mentally; to think skillfully; to be prudent and wise."

Truly God has not given us the spirit (that is, disposition or attitude) of timidity, "but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (*2 Timothy* 1:7). In this text the Greek for *sound mind* (*sophronismos*) means a self-controlled or disciplined mind. All three dispositions are vital and precious to us as believers — the *power* to draw near to God and accomplish great things in his name; the capacity for *love*, and the *safe-mindedness*, which controls and regulates all our thoughts and actions. The disposition and attitude which has produced today's Charismatic healing methods is a disposition of spiritual abandon and adventure, which is utterly contrary to the spirit of a sound mind commanded in the Bible. By abandoning the Scriptures, weighed and tested by the enlightened and rational mind, as their *sole* authority, Charismatic healers have placed themselves at the mercy of a host of other influences, ranging from pure human imagination to demonic suggestion.

Made in the Image of God

The first Biblical reason for insisting on the sanctity of rational control is that the reasoning mind is the faculty above all others that marks out human beings as those who are made in the image of God. Our status as image-bearers is revealed in *Genesis* 1:26: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over...all the Earth." The gift of reason is our highest and noblest faculty — the ability to think, discern, and weigh things in a sensible, logical, organized, and rational manner. Clearly, when man was first created he was a more glorious image-bearer than now. We have certainly lost the original innocence and unique spiritual compatibility with the Lord. In the Garden of Eden our first parents could hear God's voice audibly, and talk with him as we now speak to one another. But though the image has become gravely tarnished by the Fall, yet the human

⁴ In this and the following text the noun *sunesis* (comprehension) is employed.

race continues to reflect the Creator in possessing moral awareness, an eternal soul, and a rational, reasoning faculty.

The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, and we are to glorify him as *image-bearers*, not as brute beasts. God does not summon the animal kingdom to call upon his name, to appreciate his attributes, and to serve him with all their hearts and minds. He calls only image-bearers to this privileged and glorious work. He calls those who possess a thinking, rational faculty to use it to frame sincere expressions of gratitude, love, and praise.

Men and women away from God have frequently sought to suppress this highest natural gift and to escape temporarily into a world of basic, animal emotions. Heavy drinking provides an opportunity to numb and dull the higher senses, so that the lower urges can prevail. Drunkenness is a short-term renouncing of reason; an abdication of the status of image-bearer; a desire to be rid — at least for a time — of the rational faculty. In the light of the phenomenon of drunkenness we must appeal to those who advocate Charismatic ideas to consider what they are doing. The very aim and purpose of drunkenness is unwittingly shared by Charismatics when they renounce their rational self-control and launch themselves like surfers onto waves of emotions, ecstasies, involuntary speech, random impressions, visions, hallucinations, messages in the head, fictional fantasizing, and so on.

Genuine spiritual activity is the very opposite of drunkenness, as Paul indicates in the words of *Ephesians* 5:18: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (*NASB*). The filling of the Spirit does not produce an alternative, alcohol-free form of emotional drunkenness! Not for a moment are the higher senses (the mind and reason) dulled or dimmed, so that the divine image in us is suppressed or bypassed. The very opposite is the case, because by the blessing of the Spirit our minds are given a far greater intelligence to grasp the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. Our praise is *all the more worthy* because it comes from people who are in full possession of their senses; who voluntarily and intelligently direct sincere and profound worship to their God and King.

Because the rational mind is the divine image upon us, it is intended to have an active and central role in all our affairs all the time. The Lord Jesus Christ declared: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (*Matthew* 22:37). We must no more switch off the thinking and controlling activity of our minds than the love of our hearts. To do so is an act of disobedience, which renders us distasteful to the Lord. Therefore, because we are image-bearers, not animals, we must never lay aside the rational faculty, or allow ourselves to lose touch with reality. We must never do

anything to impede the activity of this precious faculty. We must never render it insensible by drink, trance-like states, voluntary surrender to glossolalia, or by any other means.

We must never switch off the rational faculty in order to experience emotional trips (even when these are wrongly labeled as worship) or allow ourselves to be "carried away" by gospel rock music, or to swallow uncritically the tall stories of today's Charismatic wonder-workers. In times gone by millions of people were persuaded to suspend their reasoning faculty and swallow the fables of medieval Rome, and this same kind of tendency has now re-appeared in the midst of the Charismatic movement.

The Mind Is the Organ of Obedience

The vital importance of the rational mind is also obvious from the fact that it is the organ with which we hear, understand, and obey God's will as revealed in the Bible. When the mind is renewed and illuminated by the Holy Spirit at conversion, we are enabled to receive by faith God's Word and to understand it. Then, says Berkhof, "By the application of sanctified human reason to the study of God's Word man can, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gain an ever increasing knowledge of God."

The Bible alone is God's Word; it is a completed revelation, and it is completely sufficient for all our spiritual needs. God gave all the Truth to the generation of the apostles (*John* 14:26; 16:13-15). The completed Bible provides totally for the Lord's people, so that there is no doctrine or command that we need to receive which is not already in the Scriptures (*2 Timothy* 3:16-17).

This Bible must be diligently studied by our reasoning minds, because this is the *only* way that Christ will speak to us *authoritatively* until he shall come again. It is true that there are a number of incidental subordinate ways by which God touches the hearts of his people, but *authoritative* guidance and teaching come only from his Word. As we have pointed out elsewhere, the Holy Spirit often prods our consciences and jogs our memories, moving us to acknowledge our sin, or to carry out a neglected duty. In his graciousness he will help us think clearly and Biblically through difficult situations, but he will never give us revelations that bypass the process of studying his Word.

As we serve the Lord he may be the unseen author of many ideas that we have for doing things more effectively. Therefore, if our minds become fertile and productive we shall certainly give him all the glory. But because we cannot tell the difference between the Lord's prompting activity on our minds and our own imaginations, none of our ideas are *authoritative*, and we must never say, "God told me; therefore, I *will* do it." All our thoughts must be brought humbly before the principles of conduct given in the Word, as God has commanded.

It is a grave violation of the *law of a sound mind* for people to allow their free-wheeling day-dreams to become

the voice of God. How do they know that their “messages” are not purely the product of their own imaginations? Some have detailed visions, but how do they know that they are not hallucinating? Almighty God has decreed that he will *never* put men and women in the position of not knowing whether their thoughts and dreams are messages from Heaven, or whether they are merely the fruit of their own random mental activity. He has categorically stated that he will speak doctrines and authoritative commands *only* by his Word, and he has commanded that we keep personal control over our minds as we study.

It is God who has given us the gift of reason, ennobled it, renewed it, anointed it; and he has commanded us to keep this faculty alert, in control, and subject *only* to the teaching of the Bible. Therefore, if a novel healing method is born in the mind of someone who says that God commanded it in a vision or in a “word of knowledge,” our suspicions *must* be aroused. Did God, after all, fail to finish the Bible? Is the proposed method in the Bible? The healer in question may seem to get impressive results, and susceptible fans may say that they “feel the presence of the Spirit” of God in his meetings, but the sole task of our reasoning mind is to ask — *What saith Scripture?* If it is not consistent with the clear teaching of the Bible, then it is not the will of God. At best it may be a grave mistake on the part of a well-meaning person who needs correcting; at worst, it may be the wilful invention of someone who is carnal, self-seeking, and godless.

Because the mind is the essential organ of hearing and understanding God’s will as revealed in the Bible, it must be at its most alert in times of worship and Christian service. To abandon rational control is to cut our line of communication to God.

The Mind Is the Palace of Faith

The mind or rational faculty is also of central importance to our Christian life because it is the residence or palace of *faith*. *Faith* is what we have when, by God’s grace, the mind becomes fully convinced about God’s words. We believe the teaching, the record of Christ’s redemptive work, and the glorious promises of God. Because with our *minds* we have received the promises, we can rest our faith upon them. Our faith depends upon this reasoning faculty being enlightened by God and convinced of his Word. The New Testament word *faith* means *persuaded*; *convinced*. Clearly we can only be *persuaded* or *convinced* if our minds are consciously functioning and open to God’s Word. Therefore, to switch off the mind is to undermine faith.

If we extinguish discernment and open our minds to un-Biblical stories and dubious tales of daily miracles, what will be the furniture in the palace of faith? What will occupy the rooms of the mind? What will we be *persuaded* and *convinced* about? The mind must always guard its entrance doors and carefully label the stores that enter. Only God’s Truth must be taken to the best room and *faith*

will feed upon *these* stores. Other information may go into sundry side rooms and passages of the mind, labeled as material to be inspected, evaluated, and perhaps remembered, but never trusted or accepted as authoritative words sent from God.

In modern Charismatic healing methods, the faith of those who seek healing is not placed in the Word of God, but in the claims and assertions of the healer. In the healing meeting, the celebrity healer says that you will be healed. He says he accomplishes this all the time. *He* (not the Bible) guarantees you a healing. Furthermore, he claims to have received a word directly from God about you, saying what is wrong with you, and that it is about to be healed. He claims to have special power by way of a personal gift, so that people will fall backward when he touches them. As the healing meeting proceeds, people all round the hall cry out and claim that they are being healed. Perhaps you have come to the meeting convinced that your reservations and misgivings must be laid aside as unworthy. You make yourself as open, susceptible, and vulnerable to “blessing” as possible by laying aside your rational faculty, dismissing the guard at the door of your mind.

The result of all this is that your mind is filled with non-Biblical information clamoring for your trust — information invented by the healer, *his* claims, *his* promises, *his* power, all reinforced by the plausible “words of knowledge” which he speaks. What will your faith rest on now? As you seek a healing, your faith will be resting on a wild jumble of purely human assertions and claims, not on God’s Word. Because the mind is the dwelling place of faith, we must never relax the duty of examining by the Word of God every teaching or idea which claims admission. The rational faculty must never go off duty, as the Charismatics propose, because if it does, we shall be instantly vulnerable to human error and satanic subtleties.

Maturity Must Be Our Goal

The ultimate goal of our Christian life is conformity to Christ. In *Ephesians* 4:13 Paul expresses this goal thus: “Till we all come to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” We seek to deepen our character, grow in grace, increase in love and knowledge, and also in discernment and judgment. We are absolutely obligated to progress from spiritual childhood to spiritual maturity. Yet it must be said that the Charismatic ideal is an abandonment of maturity and a reverting to childishness. The rhythmic pattern of music and dancing; the hand clapping, the jolly informality, the uninhibited antics of some, together with the very low demands made on the *mind*, are all features of conduct which delight the very young and tend to embarrass the mature person.

Mature people are uncomfortable not because they are unwilling to let the Holy Spirit have sway in their lives (as the Charismatics claim), but because they sense that this

manner of proceeding is in the reverse direction from that of spiritual maturity.

As we seek to draw closer to Christ, and to be like him, we must ask, Was Christ abandoned in his behavior? Did he encourage people to dance and jump and roll over on the ground (as some healers do today) before he healed them? Did he engage in uninhibited physical activities in his prayers to the Father? Did he put believers into trances or encourage them to shout out suddenly, shriek, or cackle alarmingly? We are to imitate our Lord. We are on a journey to Christian maturity. We are commanded to exercise our adult minds and not to behave like children, who use their minds sometimes, and sometimes not. Our actions are always to be controlled, sincere, sensible, and worthy of our Master.

Children love to pretend and play-act. They love stories and surprises. They are gullible, open, believing, and easily led astray. Our duty on the pathway of Christian maturity is clear from Paul's words: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 *Corinthians* 13:11). How many believers allow them-selves to be drawn into Charismatic thinking through hearing stories of how people have supposedly been restored by a "gifted" healer, but they do not ask — *What saith Scripture?* Sadly, this reflects the difference between a child and an adult. The little child is amazed at what the conjurer can do, whereas the adult perceives that things are not always what they seem, and applies certain laws to the situation.

We hear even of ministers who have been drawn into Charismatic pastors' fraternal and conferences where they have thrown off the mantle of maturity to experiment with the claim that uninhibited behavior releases the blessing of the Spirit. It is the ultimate tragedy when worked-up emotional sensations have to take the place of genuine power and blessing from God. The road to Heaven has always led upwards, not downwards, and this goes for maturity of behavior, rational control, and discernment as well as for all the other objectives of the Christian life. Paul underlines the issue with the words: "Brethren, be not children in understanding...but in understanding be men" (1 *Corinthians* 14:20).

By abandoning the duty of spiritual maturity and the law of a sound mind, Charismatic teachers have plunged thousands of believers into the very quagmire of childish, superstitious religion which true Christianity rescues us from. With supposed healings as its principal "selling point," Charismania reverses the process of maturity, turning people into mere children — "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (*Ephesians* 4:14).

God's Will and Healing

John W. Robbins

Since I was diagnosed with Stage IV metastatic colon cancer in September 2005, some strangers, friends, and acquaintances have given me different opinions on the topic of God's will and healing. All of the opinions are offered by sincere people, but most sincere people are sincerely wrong. Only one opinion is Biblical. This should not be surprising, for there is an indefinite number of ways to go wrong, but only one way to go right. There is only one right answer to the question, "How much is 2 plus 2?" and an infinite number of wrong answers. That is why the Bible in general and Jesus in particular stress the importance of finding the narrow way and repeatedly warn against the broad way.

The many opinions on healing I have received distill to three. The first is that it is not God's will that anyone — or at least any Christian — be sick. Being sick is being "outside God's will." By not getting well, a Christian is showing his rebellion against God's will that everyone be well. In this opinion, every Christian who is sick for any length of time (I suppose they make exceptions for colds), is not "submitting to God's will that he be well."

The second opinion seems to be the opposite. It is that a Christian must "submit himself to God's will," and if he is not getting better, God's will is that he remain sick, and perhaps die from the affliction. He also is told to "submit himself to the will of God," but to an opposite end, not to get well, but perhaps to die.

The third opinion does not speak of "submitting to the will of God," but tells us to seek and pray for the desires of our hearts. It certainly sounds like the least pious of the three opinions, doesn't it? But it is the Biblical position. The Bible is not a very religious book, as men count religion.

Let us examine each of these three opinions.

Take the first opinion first: Is it God's will that no Christian be sick or afflicted? Of course not. If it were not God's will that some people are sometimes sick, no one would ever be sick, since nothing, not even the death of a sparrow or the fall of a hair from our heads, happens apart from God's will. God causes both sickness and health in his and in all people. This is taught so clearly in the Bible that one must deliberately ignore and disbelieve scores of passages that teach it. Here are a few:

"And I [God] will afflict the descendants of David because of this, but not forever" (1 *Kings* 11:39).

"For you, O God, have tested us; you have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; you laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads" (*Psalms* 66:1-12).

"...when they pray toward this place and confess your

name, and turn from their sin because you [God] afflict them....” (2 *Chronicles* 6:26).

“And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord” (*Jeremiah* 31:28).

In the New Testament, Paul tells us that “For this reason, many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep, for if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged, but when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world” (1 *Corinthians* 11:30-32).

These verses clearly show that it is God’s will to afflict even his own people at times, even to the point of killing them. From many more verses, too numerous to list here, it is clearly God’s will that whatever happens happen, for there is nothing outside God’s will. He is sovereign and omnipotent, and nothing can happen apart from his plan and will. It is logically and theologically impossible to be “outside God’s will.”

The second opinion is that sickness or affliction that does not go away in a relatively short period of time (I suppose these people also make exceptions for colds) indicates that it is God’s will that the afflicted person remain sick, and perhaps even die from his affliction. This is made especially convincing if a medical professional pronounces the condition “incurable.”

But there are many examples of suffering people in Scripture – commendable examples – that refute this notion as well. Take, for example, the woman who hemorrhaged for twelve years, spending all her money on physicians, none of whom could cure her. Did she submit to “God’s will” and resign herself to being sick and perhaps dying of her disease? Of course not. She did not confuse the inability of physicians to help her with the will of God. She kept seeking the desire of her heart, and this desire led her to Jesus, who cured her and who did not upbraid her for refusing for twelve years to “submit to God’s will for her life.” Nor does he scold her for being “outside the will of God” for twelve years.

There are many similar examples – even cases where parents of dying and dead children sought help rather than submitting to the “will of God.” They sought the desire of their hearts, not even accepting imminent and present death as “God’s will” for their child. Were they wrong to do so? Were they also – like the sick allegedly outside the will of God – in rebellion to the will of God? Of course not. Christ never scolds any of these people for refusing to “submit to the will of God.”

In both these erroneous opinions – (1) God’s will is that no Christian should be sick, and one is not submitting to God’s will if one is sick; and (2) in cases of extended illness, one should submit to the will of God by recognizing it is his will that you remain sick and perhaps die of this

sickness – the same serious theological mistake is being made: The mistake is an error – a presumption – of knowledge: It presumes that we can know what the will of God for the future is by reading present circumstances, and therefore know how to “submit ourselves to the will of God.”

The second opinion assumes that one’s present affliction indicates the ultimate outcome (which is false) – and that the Christian should submit to that anticipated outcome as if it were the “will of God.” The first opinion assumes, contrary to Scripture, that the will of God is that every Christian be well, and that those who are not well are “outside God’s will” and need to submit to it. In both cases – though they reach opposite conclusions, death and health – they share the presumption that one can know from present circumstances what the will of God is for the future. That simply is not true. Apart from divine propositional revelation, we cannot know what God’s will and plan for the future is.

The third opinion is that one should pray for the desires of one’s heart, not guessing or presuming what the will of God for the future is. That is the rule followed by the “incurable” woman, by the parents of dying and dead children in Scripture, and by many others, including Jesus himself, who prayed that this cup would pass from him, if possible. What makes Christ’s case different, of course, is that, unlike us, who do not and cannot know the future, he could and did know the future – and still he prayed for the desires of his heart.

The notion that we should “submit to the will of God” when we do not and cannot know the will of God is not a Christian idea at all, but a Muslim idea. Islam means “submission,” and it teaches the same error of presuming that the will of God can be known before God reveals it. In Christian theology, the proper verb is “obedience,” not submission, and it is obedience to his revealed commands, not submission to an unknown (and apart from revelation, unknowable – see *Deuteronomy* 29:29) will of God. *Psalms* 37:3-6 read: “Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and feed on his faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.”

The Bible nowhere commands Christians to “submit to the will of God,” precisely because we do not know that will. The Bible commands us hundreds of times to obey God’s commands. We must never confuse our guesses about the future with “God’s will” and piously submit to those guesses – or more likely the guesses of clerics who think they know the future. God’s commands we know, because they are revealed to us in Scripture, but apart from revelation, we cannot know his will, and therefore we cannot “submit” to it, nor need we try to do so.