

Accepting the Universe: Our Only Choice

When Carlyle heard that Margaret Fuller had decided to "accept the universe" he roared with laughter.

"Well, she'd better!" he shouted good-naturedly. And she had. And so had we. This idea was once expressed better by a man who was asked how he managed to live in such a state of peace even though surrounded by circumstances that were far from pleasant.

His answer was as profound as it was simple. "I have learned," he said, "to cooperate with the inevitable." This idea is so wise and simple that it is hard to see why we Christians have overlooked it in our every day living.

To accept the inevitable is not the natural thing for us. We believe that we must "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" but we certainly kick against the pricks when life's situations do not go the way we planned.

Circumstances often control us. The outside world determines the inner man. Yet it should be the other way around. It is the inner world that matters and it is for this world that we are responsible.

The inner world controls our thoughts and emotions and is presided over by our will. While we cannot determine the circumstances in which we live, we can determine our attitude to them. And this is precisely where we either lose or win the battle.

To accept the inevitable is not resigning to fate, or to deny the freedom of the human will. On the contrary, it is being realistic. We can be angry with the world as it destroys so much what is beautiful and meaningful. But anger turns so easily to bitterness and robs a man of the joy of living.

Though we cannot control the universe, we can determine our attitude toward it. We can accept the will of God for our lives and the world itself. This is of course also the intent of the Christ taught prayer. We are to pray "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

If my will is to do God's will then there will be a peace of mind and rest in God regardless the circumstances. Though times, unemployment, physical handicaps, all these will be accepted as within the will of God. Let us "accept the universe" for this will give us peace.

Most of us have seen the picture of a tiny bird asleep on the limb of a storm-tossed tree. The Christian also should exhibit a serenity of spirit, for he knows the God who permitted the storm and the Christ who is the solid foundation.

To accept the universe does not mean that we are to accept evil conditions as inevitable. You can never use this idea to justify the charge that is brought against the Christian gospel that it is nothing but "the opium of the people."

It is characteristic of our age to find a tendency on the part of a large number of people to feel that the Christian gospel has been a hindrance to the forward march of mankind, that it has been a drag to progress and a road block to social justice. The charge is then that the Christian faith has taught people to put up with all kind of evil condition. Some have put their sentiments this way:

"The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate, God made them, high or lowly, And ordered their estate."

Of course this is rubbish and an outright denial of the teachings of the gospel. Where there are situations that are clearly contrary to the teaching of Scripture, it is our privilege and obligation to work towards change.

The Christian cannot rest at ease when two-thirds of the world have a below subsistence level standard of living. The injustices and evils of our times, the decline of morality, the social evils are to be tackled with vigor and courage. With prayer and work, changes should be sought.

Even with illness we should not surrender and do nothing about it. Rather, we should accept it provisionally as the will of God for the time, ask what lessons can be learned from the experience, and seek His will about recovering our health. The big thing, however, is that we do not rebel.

A man who can accept the universe is also the man who is ready to change it. He rests in the sure promises of God and is at peace. As master of the circumstances he is able to be deeply involved in the search for justice and in the fight against evil wherever it may be found.

As Dr. W.A. Tozer so beautifully said: "But to fret and complain against our afflictions like an animal caught in a trap is to miss the whole disciplinary purpose of God in our lives. God will heal and alter conditions but He will not do so for fretful souls who chew at the trap of circumstances and pity themselves for their sufferings."

Johan D. Tangelder
January, 1974