

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Freedom from Compulsion and Information St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr
Wednesday, August 10, 2016 8:15 AM **2 Cor 9:6-10;** Jn 12:24-26 (There is a way
of rightly taking in information and it can't be just anything.)

“Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Indeed, **cheerfulness and giving are part of the very stance of God.** And Jesus is inviting everyone to come into work with him, **God's work in redeeming and re-creating the world.** And this requires **a great donation of self**, but the donation of self has to really be a donation and the result, the grace, in that is cheerfulness, joy, humility, peace; the various qualities reflect the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The point is that God cannot be outdone in giving, so as we give of ourselves, we give of our time, we give of our substance, we give of our money, **God is filling us all the more with the gifts of the Spirit.** So God loves a cheerful giver because **joyfulness is the Spirit's way of enveloping the worker**, the coworker with God.

And the kingdom of God is all about this, but of course **it all requires choice; it requires the decision.** Jesus' own preaching began with this message of repentance, which means **change of mind.** It does not mean regret. Sometimes the English word “repentance” has a connotation of regret. In the Bible, in the New Testament, it doesn't have that meaning. **Metanoia** never has that meaning. It has the meaning of deciding anew, **deciding afresh what kind of person one is going to be or become.** This is of course what it means to be human. It is to decide. Cats don't decide to be feline. Dogs don't decide to be canine. That's just the way they are. Snakes are serpentine. **But human being are everything, but nothing by necessity. Everything is choice.**

But choice can be interfered with with compulsion. Compulsion isn't actually a choice; **It's something inwardly forced by something**, some factor, some tape in the mind or some emotional need. Something drives compulsions. And no matter what results from compulsive behavior, it isn't good. Outwardly it may seem good. It may seem like service, for example. It may seem like help, helping other people. But **if it's compulsive, it isn't good because it isn't free; it isn't freely given. It isn't therefore joyful**, and therefore it's ultimately negative. It restricts the human soul. So God's will is for us to be free of compulsions. But even then it's a choice because sometimes we need some kind of healing.

And certainly **we all need space in our lives, quiet, freedom from information.** Today people talk so much about the Internet. Well, the Internet is okay as an objective reality. But the Internet can become the source of endless trouble for people, not only in matters of pornography. That's one big issue for some people. But it's just the overabundance of information **that cannot be digested.** If your only source of food is McDonald's, you would not be a healthy person, not that McDonald's can't be okay once in a great while, but ordinarily that kind of food sold in fast food places is not very substantial or nutritious. Ditto for all the other fast food places. There is a way of eating rightly. Well, **there is a way of rightly taking in information and it can't be just anything,** and it can't be all the time because that will ruin the soul, just as junk food ruins the body. It's all one thing on different levels.

What God is wanting us to do is to change our ways, to focus on God and God's work and God's presence. This is all an affirmation of God's constant presence in our life, God seeking to give us an abundance, his blessings, not what we might want or the world might tell us we should want, but what God wants for us. But that requires that we put an end to all kinds of influences that are against that, contrary to that, that we discipline our minds and our bodies, and all sources of data, and all sources of so-called information, so that **we take in only what is good, only what is nourishing, only what has value,** discerning everything carefully, living not in isolation, but living in the presence of God, alone with God, which is not to be alone of course, and **allowing everything to harmonize within us toward our own well-being and the well-being of the earth, of the world, through us God building up his kingdom.**