

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (9)
THE IMPLICIT WILL OF GOD- PART FIVE
“DWELLING PLACES”

Sermon 7/29/18

For the past several months we have been looking at the Explicit and Implicit will of God as seen in Scripture. As a reminder, those verses that state “this is the will of God” are known as His Explicit will. Those that contain a directive without using the words “will of God” are considered His Implicit will. To date we have looked at 12 verses which state the Explicit Will of God and have also listed a total of 10 things which God Implicitly states are His will. When we conclude this series we will review all of them but for now and over the next several weeks we will continue to press on to discover the remaining verses that state the Implicit will of God.

Before we do I want to remind us of one directive which reveals God’s Implicit Will for our lives. We have already looked at this one but since it precedes the verse we will look at today I want to put it in context. The verse is Philippians 4:4-7.

PHILLIPIANS 4:4-7

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

This is a great verse, providing instruction for how to live out the Christian life when the trials and troubles of life overwhelm us. It was written by the Apostle Paul who understood that life was ever changing; that people who accepted you one day would reject you the next. A man who experienced the difficulties of life from the inside of many a prison cell yet was willing to place his hope and trust fully in the Lord Jesus Christ. He had plenty to be anxious about but chose instead to pray and trust. He was willing to lose everything he had in order to gain a closer relationship with Christ.

After saying these words Paul goes on to say this:

PHILLIPIANS 4:8-9

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Paul was not only writing these words to the church at Philippi, he was living them as well. That’s why he could say, “Look at me, and practice the things that I practice. Because of my personal experience in these situations, I can guarantee you that the God of peace will be with you no matter what your circumstances are, no matter what you find yourself facing. If you put these principles into practice just as I have done, you WILL experience the peace of God.”

So we start by refusing to be anxious over anything, choosing instead to pray and let God

know what we need. We do this because we know He hears our prayers and wants only the best for us. We do this too because we know there is no such thing as a trouble free life; life will always be full of trials and temptations. The only things any of us have control over in life is our attitude - toward God and toward our circumstances.

That is why Paul is saying not to be anxious for anything. Anything is a small but all-encompassing word. It means there is absolutely nothing which we are to be anxious about. Everything and anything that makes us anxious is to be placed under the banner of trust in God. How do we do that? We do it by prayer and supplication, letting God know what we need. But we also stop dwelling on that which makes us anxious. The “what about’s” and “what if’s” of life have no room in the mind of someone who gives their anxiety to the Lord through prayer and trust.

In order to accomplish this Paul provides an alternative list of things to occupy our mind. He says that whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. These are not negative thoughts full of worry and fear which drain you of hope and challenge your ability to trust. These are the thoughts that look toward the faithfulness of God and the promises which He has made that create a foundation of hope on which God’s peace can be built.

These are fine words and words which we should all heed. But how easy is it to do? I’m sure many of us have received such words in the midst of our difficulties but to be honest they have sometimes seemed like platitudes - clichés from a Hallmark commercial instead of sounding like real encouragement. When life gets overwhelming it can sometimes be difficult to let the word of God penetrate our soul but this is just what Paul is asking us to do. He is telling us to do the opposite of what our human nature wants to do.

Our daughter Corrie and her family live in Redding. Over the course of the past several days they have had to face the fear of losing their home to the fire that rages all around them. On Thursday they were able to gather their important papers, the few keepsake things which they did not want to lose to the fire, pack a suitcase full of clothes for each of them, throw everything including their 2 cats, 4 chickens and a bunny into their vehicles, and leave their home behind to stay in a friend’s house overnight. On Friday their house was still standing but the fire had gotten within a mile of their home and the evacuation notice finally came for them to leave. Though their house had made it through one night they were unsure if it would make it through another.

But Friday night the fire had changed direction so their home remained intact on Saturday morning. As reassuring as that news was, fire officials still warned that winds were likely to shift again on Saturday, driving the runaway flames back toward their house. On Sunday morning they got the good news that the fire which had threatened their home earlier had dissipated and was no longer an immediate threat. But no one can rest easy until the fire is fully contained. As they have said this fire has a mind of its own. So they have been and are still in the midst of a rollercoaster ride of emotions – one moment they have hope, then another day passes and worry begins to creep back in.

They have two children, ages 14 and 12. One of them suffers from anxiety in normal circumstances so even though they were unsure of what the future held for them, as parents they

had to “hold it together” so that their girls did not panic. How did they do it? They did it by faith in a God who loved them no matter what they were about to experience. Why did they do it? They did it because they loved their girls far more than they loved their possessions. They placed the security of the children above the security of their home.

God tells us not to be anxious for anything because He too loves us; and He places a higher value on us than He does our possessions. He desires that our trust and our hope lie in Him and not in the things which we possess. So what are my daughter and her family doing today? They went to church to worship the One who is worthy of praise no matter what circumstances they find themselves in.

In each of our lives God provides many opportunities to choose between anxiety and trust, between faithlessness and obedience. He will use the trials of life to test us to see what truly lies within our hearts. In Deuteronomy chapter 8 God speaks to Moses and tells him to carefully obey all the commandments which He has given to him. Then He says this,

DEUTERONOMY 8:2-3

“You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not...

“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”

Every situation in life is a test which God uses to see what lies deep within our hearts. Now God already knows what lies within our hearts. He is infinite and all-knowing. There is nothing that is hidden from His sight. So when He says He tests us to know what is in our hearts He is really saying He wants what is in our hearts to be revealed, not for His sake, but for our sake. We need to know what lies deep within our own heart. We need to know what keeps us from obeying God’s commands. We need to have the evil and stubborn pride residing within us all exposed to the light.

And so God uses the trials and difficulties that come our way to reveal what lies deep within us. Our response to the loss of our homes and our possessions, the loss of health or wealth, the loss of friendships or family members will reveal either the peace or the anxiety that dwells within us. That’s why it is so important that we do not fill our minds with things that are not true; things that cause us to cling to this world rather than to the next; that cause us to doubt rather than trust; that lead us away from the love of the Lord rather than have us running into His loving arms.

Our minds do not normally think this way. Our human nature tends to fear the unknown when we encounter things over which we have no control. Our fear stems from thinking we can control anything in life; that we are the master of our own fate and that with careful planning we can control the events of our lives. To a certain extent this is true. If we save we have some control over our financial future. If we make a will or trust we have some control over who gets our assets when we die. When we purchase insurance we have some control over the recovery of our

possessions if robbery or disaster strikes.

But even with all these things in place we have no control over our investments or over inflation; no control over the time or method of our death; no control over a fire headed our way or a drunk driver swerving in front of our car. What we think we have control over can be deceptively comforting but in the end we have no real control over anything in life that matters. As Solomon wrote, *“We may throw the dice, but the Lord determines how they fall”* (Proverbs 16:33). James also says *“You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”* We may seem important in our own eyes but our importance is but a vapor which appears but for a little while and then vanishes from sight.

We are not to keep our eyes focused on the things we see – the dangers of the unknown tomorrow - but rather on the things which we cannot see – the things we know by faith. Likewise we are not to focus our minds on things we possess on this earth but rather on those things which are reserved for us in heaven; the things we possess by faith. We are to practice the presence of God here on earth so that we will be ready to experience the presence of God in heaven. And how do we do that? We do that by offering ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God as our spiritual service of worship. We do this by not being conformed to this world and its way of thinking but rather to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. In this way we can prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We start by making a choice to trust in the God of our salvation. To trust that He will take care of us no matter what the storms of life may bring our way. When we start with trust then it becomes easier not to be anxious for we have already settled the issue of who is in charge of our lives. Having that issue settled allows us to lay our anxiety at the feet of the Father where we can tell Him our needs and our wants and share with Him why we are fearful about the future and how it may uproot our fragile hold on life. In exchange God will give us His peace in the midst of the storm so that when fire threatens to take our homes and all our possessions with it we can be at peace, knowing that even in the unknown God is already there. He has gone before us and will be waiting for us to guide and direct our every faltering step.

But we need to do our part as well. We need to stop dwelling on the “what about’s” and the “what if’s” of life and think instead of the good that God has in store for those who love Him; to think about the purity of God’s love; His faithfulness, His kindness, His generosity, His ability to provide when our ability to do so has ended. We need to think on whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute. And if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, we are to dwell on those things as well.

You may think this is an impossible thing to do; that God is asking too much of us. No one can keep negative thoughts from entering their mind and no one can consistently keep good thoughts from leaking out of their mind. This is true. We are all subject to the ups and downs of life. But God is not asking us to never have a negative thought. Even Jesus was tempted in all things as we are, so we know that both good and bad thoughts will come and go through our minds as we journey through life. What God is asking us to do is to not give in to those negative thoughts; to not give in to temptation; and not to dwell on the lies which Satan whispers in our ears.

One way to do that is to dwell on things which are good true and honorable and pure and not on things which are unholy, impure, and defeating. This is hard enough to do when we are secure in life. It is harder to do when life throws us a curve ball. But it can be done or else God would not have required it of us. And I personally know a man who was able to keep his mind focused on the things God required of him while in the mist of as devastating loss.

When Wendy was in college she went to a Christian camp to be a counselor for high school kids. Her parents were away as well but her oldest brother stayed home to take care of the house. One evening he came home from work, fixed himself some dinner then went to bed. He was awoken by the smell of smoke in the air. He got up and ran to the kitchen where he discovered he had left the stove on and the pot had caught fire. Flames were already running up the walls and into the ceiling. He started to call the fire department but the flames got so hot he had to rush out of the house just to save himself. He ran to the neighbors and called 911 but when the fire trucks arrived there was not much left to save.

I tell this story not because of the loss of their house. Many people have lost their homes over the course of the last several years just here in California. It is not an unusual incident anymore to lose your home to a fire. No, I tell you this story to let you know what the response of Wendy's father was when her brother called and let their father know their house was lost. His first response was, "Are you all right?" When his son assured him that he was fine his father then said, *"Ok. That's all that matters. There's nothing we can do and you have a place to stay so we will just finish our vacation and see you in a few days."* No berating of his son, no disparaging remarks about his carelessness, no condemning words; only concern over his well-being. He had only one thought in mind – the safety of his son. Once that was established there was nothing left to talk about.

I don't know about you but I don't believe for one minute that my father would have responded in that way if I had just burned down our house. But then my father was not a believer in Christ. Wendy's father was. And He responded like the Scriptures we have looked at today expected him to respond. He was not anxious. He simply prayed for God's peace. He let God know his needs and then left their future fulfillment in the hands of the Father. He experienced the peace of God even while hearing the news of the loss of house and possessions while away on vacation.

It's true he had insurance that would cover the loss of the house and most of the family's possessions so financially he was not going to be ruined by this fire. He would be able to rebuild with the insurance money. But that is not the point. God was testing him when he received that phone call from his son and Wendy's dad passed the test. The faithfulness of that man was revealed in his response and in his actions. The things that filled his heart were revealed in that moment and they were shown to be true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent and worthy of praise. He did not become anxious or dwell on his loss. Instead he dwelt on the faithfulness of God to restore to him what had been lost and on God's ability to provide a new home for his family.

We all make choices in this life. We all choose to do one thing or another. We also choose what we keep our minds focused on. We can dwell on our fears, our failures, our disappointments, our hurt, insecurity, anger, and frustration; or we can keep our minds focused on things that bring

life and health and peace to our soul; things that are centered on God's truth and not Satan's lies; things that honor God rather than make Him ashamed of us; things that are pure and do not pollute our minds; things that cause us to praise God rather than disparage Him, that cause us to open up in trust toward Him rather than shut Him out and deny His power.

So here is Gods Implicit Will as shown in Philippians chapter 4, verse 8

#11

GOD'S IMPLICIT WILL IS:

That We Dwell On Whatever Is True, Lovely, Honorable, Right, Pure, Lovely, Of Good Repute, Excellent, And Worthy Of Praise

Making a change to our thought life may be easier for some than for others. If we have spent a lifetime dwelling on negative things then it may take some time to change a bad habit in to a good habit; to change from thinking of negative things to dwelling on positive things. But with the help of the Holy Spirit it can be done. All of our minds need to be renewed and they need to be renewed daily. There are no exceptions. We are sinful people who have been released from the power of sin but are still susceptible to it. We may succeed today but tomorrow will bring a whole other set of troubles that will challenge our thoughts.

But this is what it means to "work out" our salvation "with fear and trembling." We work out the good work that God has already done in us in such a way that it influences our thoughts and our actions. We do this by dwelling on things that feed our soul and not our flesh. We do this by releasing the cares of this world to the only One who knows the future and has the ability to shape it to His will. We do this through acts of obedience using a mind that trusts and a heart that hopes as our first line of defense against the enemy of our souls.

If you have ever experienced a devastating loss then you know it is not a simple thing to recover from; nor does it happen overnight. Insurance claims can take months to resolve and the repairs or the rebuilding that follows can take many more months. Especially in large areas of devastation, it can take up to a year or more to be "back to normal". So God's directive on what our minds should be dwelling on applies to the recovery phase as well as the disaster stage. We cannot let our guard down simply because the storm has ended. We may have passed through this storm but there will always be another on the horizon to test us.

Jesus said not to worry about what tomorrow holds, for tomorrow will take care of itself. Today has enough troubles of its own without borrowing from tomorrow's batch of troubles. Worry, fear, anxiety, these are all emotions which can easily overwhelm us if we consistently fill our minds with negative, discouraging thoughts. But if we fill our minds with things that are true, lovely, honorable, right, pure, and praiseworthy then anxiety will not be able to find any fertile ground in which to grow. What we think about is the soil that will produce either good or bad fruit. By dwelling on the things that God has asked us to dwell on we can prevent the weeds of anxiety and fear from growing and have plenty of room for the fruit of peace and trust to blossom.

The storms of life are used by God to test us, to see what is in our hearts, to see whether or not we will place our trust in Him or in our self. Will we obey His word or will we go our own

way? By making a habit of dwelling on things that are right and pure and lovely you can be prepared, as my father-in-law was, and as my daughter and her family are, to respond in faith and trust in a good God when disaster strikes; a God who does not forsake His own no matter what the future holds. Tilling the soil of your mind with things that are excellent in the sight of God, that are worthy of praise, that are honorable and right and pure, will enable you to produce a harvest of righteousness and peace wherever and whenever the storm clouds gather. Be anxious for nothing, pray about everything, dwell on whatever is good and the God of peace will be with you. Paul guarantees it.

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