

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (12)
THE IMPLICIT WILL OF GOD- PART EIGHT
“FREE AND FRUITFUL LIVING”

Sermon 8/26/18

One of the most popular hymns of the past and present church age is “Amazing Grace.” It was originally written in 1779 by John Newton, a former slave trader who became an English poet and an Anglican clergyman after his conversion to Christianity. But when Joni Mitchell recorded Amazing Grace in 1970 it quickly became a popular song sung by millions. No longer just a church hymn Amazing Grace can now be heard at secular concerts around the world. Many have memorized the words to this song thanks to Judy Collins but they remain oblivious to the depth of its meaning. It may have become a popular song but it still retains the deep and powerful message of the gospel within it.

*AMAZING GRACE how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears released
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed*

*The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures*

A few years ago in 2006 a movie was being made about the life of William Wilberforce and his attempts to abolish slavery in England. Part of that movie dealt with Wilberforce meeting John Newton and his discovery of the hymn Amazing Grace. The producers of this film wanted to highlight the hymn in this film but needed a more modern approach for the film. They sent out requests to several songwriters to update the song. Chris Tomlin's version of the song was chosen and incorporated in the movie. He kept the melody and words the same as originally written, added a few more modern chords so it didn't sound like an old hymn but then he also added a chorus which the original song did not have. These words describe the journey that the original author John Newman experienced as God transformed him from a rough and rowdy sinner of a sailor to a gentle humble clergyman of the church. Here are the new words that Chris Tomlin wrote for the movie.

*My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love, AMAZING GRACE*

John Newton was a slave ship captain. He enslaved people and kept them in chains during the long and arduous journey across the Atlantic from Africa and the West Indies to the Caribbean, North America and Great Britain. He later said that though he carried no physical chains on his body he was a slave to his baser instincts. His sin nature had chained him with the cord of disobedient thinking resulting in disobedient actions. Like Paul he wondered who could set him free from his body of death.

His conversion to Christianity had multiple stages. He came to an initial knowledge of the truth on one of his journeys while in the midst of a storm which threatened to sink his ship. He awoke in the middle of the night and discovered the ship had developed a hole and was in danger of sinking. As the ship was filling up with water he called out to God. The cargo then miraculously shifted and stopped up the hole, and the ship drifted to safety. He marked this experience as the beginning of his conversion to Christianity.

He began to read the Bible and other religious literature and by the time he reached Great Britain he had accepted the doctrines of evangelical Christianity. The date was March 10, 1748. From that point on he avoided profanity, gambling, and drinking. Although he continued to work in the slave trade, he had gained sympathy for the slaves during his time in Africa. He later said that his true conversion did not happen until some time later: *"I cannot consider myself to have been a believer in the full sense of the word, until a considerable time afterwards."*

That time came while he was in West Africa (1748-1749). It was there that Newton acknowledged the inadequacy of his spiritual life. He had become ill with a fever and professed his full belief in Christ, asking God to take control of his destiny. He later said that this was the first time he felt totally at peace with God. After he gave up complete control of His life to His savior John Newton found the full peace of God. That is when his chains were released and the full freedom for which Christ had died became fully his to enjoy.

Like John Newton, all of us have been slaves to sin; all of us have sought to be set free from this body of death. And like John Newton we have had our initial start down the path of salvation then later coming to a fuller knowledge of the true freedom that awaits us in Christ. As we journey through life and discover more about who God is and what He has accomplished for us, we find ourselves more willing to release the direction of our lives into His loving care.

In John Newton's day Parliament was struggling with the issue of slavery. There were those who felt slavery was necessary to maintain Britain's wealth and prestige in the world. These either found no fault in slavery or found their desire for position and wealth more valuable than their conscience. Others were determined to abolish slavery for the evil that it was purely on moral grounds. But they also argued that Britain's wealth could be maintained through means other than slavery.

Just as America would soon declare in its Declaration of Independence from Great Britain, some in Parliament argued that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; and that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Just because some seek to abuse and control others for their sordid gain did not mean that is what God intended. God desired all men to be free. That included the men and women who lived in Africa and elsewhere. They were not born to be slaves. They were born to be free

just as everyone in Great Britain believed they were born to be free men and women.

Our spiritual lives mirror our secular lives. We were all once slaves to sin, captured by the devil at an early age and forced to do all that he required of us. We were subject to his manipulations and he used the secular world's system to keep us enslaved. But he also used spiritual leaders to control us by making us slaves to man-made rules and religious laws which God Himself has abolished.

In chapter five Paul writes this to the church at Galatia:

GALATIANS 5:1

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

Paul is declaring that Christ has set us free so we should keep standing firm in that truth and not allow ourselves to become anyone's slave, no matter how strongly they may advocate their position. What yoke of slavery was Paul referring to? He was referring to the Law, the same Law which God in Christ had abolished because He had fulfilled all the Law's requirements. Paul says to the Galatians (4:9-11),

“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”(Galatians 3:1-3)

“Now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.”(Galatians 4:9-11)

The gift of grace is invaluable. You cannot put a price tag on grace. It is a free gift from God, undeserved by any who receive it. So it's understandable that some would struggle with so great a price being paid for their many sins. The Galatians had started their journey of faith by relying on the Holy Spirit. But some had been led astray by those who believed salvation was a matter of grace plus works. For those who struggled with accepting grace this seemed a plausible solution to their struggle.

Pastor Andrew Wommack once told the story of someone in his church giving him a brand new truck. The sticker price was still on the window and when he saw it he was ready to refuse the gift. The price of the truck was over \$70,000 and Andrew did not feel he deserved such a costly gift. But he realized that the gift he was being given was not based on Andrew's personal estimation of himself. It was based on the giver's estimation of Andrew. The giver valued Andrew so much that he wanted to give him a gift that cost him greatly. In the eyes of the giver Andrew was worth every penny spent. Not wanting to offend the giver, Andrew humbled himself, swallowed his pride and his lack of self-worth, and accepted the gift.

All of God's gifts to us through Christ are valued far beyond our ability to pay. They are certainly more costly than a \$70,000 truck. And yet God has given them to us freely at no cost to us. Why? Because He values us that highly. Yet some believers find it difficult to accept the value God places on them. They do not feel worthy of God's gift so they act like the Galatians to whom Paul was writing. They don't feel worthy of the gift of grace so they attempt to add something to themselves in order to become worthy.

There is an old saying that goes something like this, "I don't smoke or chew or go with girls that do." This saying grew out of a legalistic view of what those who attend church should and should not do. Church members should not smoke or chew tobacco and they should not associate with girls (or guys) who do. If they did they were not considered a true believer. In order to ensure the faithful stayed faithful church leaders attempted to control their outward behavior.

Many churches today still have rules in place for their members to adhere to if they are to remain in good standing with their church. Some restrict what their members can or cannot eat or drink. Some require their members to get Elder approval before attending anything outside their own churches events. In prior days some churches prohibited their members from dancing, attending a movie, or playing cards. Places where these things occurred were considered the devil's playground and no respectable member of their church would ever be seen in one of these places or participate in them even in the privacy of their own homes.

All of these rules were made by men to ensure those who confessed Christ as Lord conformed to that particular church's vision of what a Christian should or should not do. But these rules did nothing to prevent sin from occurring because no one can keep any law, whether man-made or God ordained without the Holy Spirit. And God's Spirit does not bring about holiness through external means but through an internal change of heart. He is one who changes our stony heart into a heart of flesh so that we become willing to do whatever He directs us to do.

Now I am not making a judgment on whether it is a good or a bad thing to go to a movie theater or to attend a dance or to play cards. What I am saying is that these are external things which do not have any effect on whether or not you are saved. Avoiding these things does not prevent you from sinning any more than doing these things will cause you to sin. Jesus said it is not what goes into a man that defiles it. It is what comes out of his heart that defiles him (Mark 7:14-15). The Law was never meant to bring about salvation. It was only meant to convict us of our sin (Romans 7:7) and lead us to grace.

Paul addressed this issue of external rules when he wrote the following to the Colossians.

COLOSSIANS 2:8-23

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him, all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; ...

"When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the

certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross...

“When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day – things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ...

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, talking his stand on visions he has seen., inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God...

“If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) – in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?...

“These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”

The commandments and teaching of men have no effect on one’s ability to control fleshly impulses. Having once experienced God’s grace, we cannot go back to using works as a means of gaining God’s favor. All the rules men put in place to ensure an outward appearance of righteousness do nothing to gain God’s favor. All they do is enslave us again to rules and regulations which never have nor ever will add anything to the free gift of grace. God has already granted the cleansing blood of salvation to those who have placed their faith in the work of Christ on the cross. Once we have had the chains of slavery taken off we should never allow anything or anyone to put those chains back on and enslave us again.

Now let me make one thing perfectly clear. We do DO things that Christ requires of us because that is our spiritual service of worship (Romans 12:1). We obey His word, we die to self and live for him, because we love Him and we want to serve Him. God expects us to act like people who have been freed from slavery to sin. But we do these things because we have already been granted everything that pertains to live and godliness (1 Peter 1:3). We don’t obey to gain salvation or to become more acceptable to God. We have already obtained acceptance and forgiveness through faith in Christ. We did nothing to deserve it and we can do nothing to maintain it. It is a free gift, not a matter of works. And we should not fall into the trap of believing we can do anything that would enhance our standing in the eyes of God outside the parameters of grace.

So what we have learned about God’s implicit will today is this:

#14

GOD’S IMPLICIT WILL IS:

- * We Are To Stand Firm and Walk in Freedom
- * We Not To Be Subject Again To A Yoke Of Slavery

We are instructed to put on Christ, not put on works (Romans 13:14). The moment we add anything to the work of Jesus as a condition of winning God's approval is the moment we have walked away from faith and walked back into slavery. That is the moment we act foolishly, as Paul says; for we did not receive the Spirit of Christ by doing works. We received the Spirit of Christ by faith. We have no ability to perfect our flesh for there is no good thing that resides within it. Even God Himself will do away with our body of flesh when we die and will grant us a new spiritual body which does not decay or die. If God will not perfect our current flesh we would be foolish to attempt to perfect it ourselves.

One final thought on freedom and this comes from the book of Ephesians.

EPHESIANS 2:4-10

“God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

“so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

The good works we are instructed to do are not those created by man. They don't arise out of a false sense of what man thinks holiness looks like. The works we are to do were created by God before we even made a profession of faith in Him. The good works which we are to do are the things which God directs us to do through His Holy Spirit. They are tailor made for each of us individually according to the abilities, talents and gifting's which God has given to each of us. The things which God has prepared for me may not be the same as God has prepared for you. But we all walk the same path of obedience – not to gain salvation, not to please men, but to please God.

Christ did not set us free from the law of sin and death so that we would trade our freedom for another form of slavery no matter how spiritual it seems. The work required for our salvation was completed by Christ on the cross. We did not, could not and could never add to what Christ has done for us. Salvation is a gift. It cannot be earned; and those who attempt to control our spiritual lives by applying a set of legalistic rules must not know anything about the free gift of God's grace or they would never attempt to do so.

To quote a line from the Wizard of Oz, *“Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.”* Anyone who hides behind a set of legalistic rules and seeks your adherence to these rules only seeks to enslave you again. It is God who promises to conform you to His image. You do not need a list of man-made rules to become Christ-like. The Holy Spirit alone is sufficient for that task. So be careful not to subject yourselves again to any kind of spiritual slavery. Instead stand firm in your faith and walk in the freedom Christ purchased for you by His blood. What can wash away our sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Amen.

“Amazing Grace:My Chains Are Gone” Words and Music by Chris Tomlin, Edwin Othello Excell, John Newton, John P. Rees, Louie Giglio, 2006 worshiptogether.com songs (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), sixsteps Music, (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Vamos Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing)

Unless otherwise noted all scriptures have been taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked “NLT” are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation (NLT), copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked “NIV” are from the NIV® Bible (The Holy Bible, New International Version®), copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked “ESV” are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.