

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (4)
THE EXPLICIT WILL OF GOD-Part Three
“SUBMISSION AND SUFFERING”
Sermon 5/27/18

I once knew a man who did not pay his income tax for over 20 years. He was self-employed and did most of his business in cash. He was a believer in Christ but had walked away from the Lord and from those who would have held him accountable. After many years of wandering he returned to the Lord and was immediately convicted of his disregard for the governing authorities. He also decided that if he expected God to bless his finances going forward it was time to make it right with the IRS.

So he began the long journey of gathering 20 years' worth of deposits and receipts in order to back file 2 decades of taxes. He then called the IRS to acknowledge what he had done and started to make plans to pay all the back taxes he owed. It took many months and much back and forth but he and the IRS came to an agreement on the amount owed and a payment plan that worked for both of them.

Unfortunately, unlike sin, his debt was not washed away. Even though he confessed and is paying back what he owes, the consequences are ongoing. Five years after confession he is still paying the taxes and penalties accumulated on the tax returns which he did not originally file. The punishment for doing wrong is very real in his life. The IRS has him under their radar and is intent on making sure he continues to pay his fair share of taxes every year. He is no longer invisible to the IRS.

Someone else I know did something very foolish. In a moment of drunkenness and anger he got into trouble with the police. As a result he was found guilty of a crime and went to prison. He now has a record and, as a result, has a difficult time finding work. For him, a moment of rebellion against authority has resulted in a lifetime of consequences from which there is no escape.

For the past several weeks we have been on a journey to discover what the explicit will of God is. We have seen that it includes in a broad sense the salvation provided by God through Jesus Christ. We have also seen in a more personal manner that God's explicit will is that:

WE BECOME A PRODUCT OF HIS WILL
WE REJOICE ALWAYS
WE PRAY WITHOUT CEASING
WE GIVE THANKS IN EVERYTHING
WE ABSTAIN FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY

This Week we will continue our look at what God explicitly requires of us by beginning with our obedience to the laws and authorities which govern us. 1 Peter 2:13-15 says, *“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish*

men.”

GOD’S EXPLICIT WILL IS THAT:
WE SUBMIT TO EVERY HUMAN INSTITUTION

If we do what is right we should have no fear of those who rule over us. In fact we should take comfort in the fact that there are those in authority who will protect and defend us against those who are disobedient to the law. There are exceptions – people in authority sometimes abuse the power bestowed upon them and some governments are corrupt from within. But God’s purpose in establishing authority over us is the punishment of evil doers and the rewarding of those who do what is right.

As Christians, we are not to be among those who disobey the law or do evil. We are to pay our taxes and avoid altercations with those in authority. We are to submit ourselves to every human institution. That does not mean we blindly accept all that is done by those in authority. Though rare, there are exceptions – times when our obedience to God requires us to disobey rather than obey those in authority. For example, Peter and John were instructed by the Jewish Council not to speak about Jesus. But they answered by saying, “*Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:19-20).

Another example can be found in during World War II when there were many who hid Jews against the wishes of the government. Some, like Corrie ten Boom and her family, were punished for hiding Jews in their house and sent to concentration camps where all but Corrie perished. The deeds of others like Oskar Schindler, who employed Jews in his factories in order to save them from extermination by the Nazi’s, were not discovered until after the war. All of these braved the wrath of those in authority in order to save people from extinction. They disobeyed human authority in order to obey God. So there are times when we called to place God’s authority over and above human authority if that authority conflicts with the will of God.

Fortunately, as Americans we live in a democratic republic. As citizens of the United States we have been legally granted the opportunity to challenge authority in a civil manner in hopes of changing the rules to which we are subject. We also have the opportunity to remove those from office and replace them with men and women who are more in line with God’s word. We can do this without fear of imprisonment or punishment because we follow the rules set up by our forefathers for civil change.

But not all live in such a free society. Remember, Peter is the one who instructs us to obey every human institution. He wrote those words while living under the rule of the Roman Empire ruled whose objective was to punish anyone who would not bow to Caesar.

But whether we live under a repressive or congenial authority, whether we have done wrong or only accused of doing wrong, we are to submit ourselves to those who rule over us. *For such is the will of God that by doing right we may silence the ignorance of foolish men.* We are to be obedient to the governing authorities in all areas of our lives so that if we are ever accused of wrong doing upon an investigation they would not be able to find fault in our behavior.

But let's not pretend that always doing what is right in the eyes of the law will keep us out of the clutches of evil men. Though Jesus obeyed all earthly authority it did not keep him out of trouble. He actually suffered as a result of being obedient to God. This brings me to a subject which none of us want to encounter but which the Scripture says is God's will. And that is to suffer – not for doing what is wrong, but for doing what is right. According to Peter:

GOD'S EXPLICIT WILL IS THAT
WE SUFFER FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST

God has put cause and effect into place for the earth and for those who inhabit it. When we don't pay our taxes we pay fines and interest in the money we owe. When we run a red light we can either be pulled over and given a ticket or hauled off to jail because we have just killed someone. If we jump out of a three story window gravity will cause us to either hurt ourselves very badly or kill us. There are both minor and major consequences for our actions.

Paul tells us in Galatian 6:7 that *"God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap."* This refers, of course to those who disobey both man and God's law. But even those who obey God can find themselves oppressed and punished by those who oppose God. Here are the verses where Peter states it is God's will that we suffer.

1 PETER 4:12-16, 19,

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

"If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."

God is not talking about those who suffer as a result of sin. He is talking about those who are sharing in the sufferings of Christ. And what did Christ suffer? He suffered rejection, abuse - both physical and emotional; he suffered abandonment when many left Him because of His teaching; He was mocked, beaten, put in prison, and sentenced to die a grisly death. He did nothing wrong but He suffered in spite of it. That's the type of suffering which God asks of us.

According to these verses it is God's will that we suffer for Christ. And when we suffer for Christ it is proof that the spirit of glory and of God is resting upon us. Now we in America have been very blessed and have not had to go through this type of suffering. But we have many brothers and sisters across the world who do suffer for their faith. Why are there some people, some religions, even some governments, who so despise Christians that they torture and kill them? We may question the reason and the motive behind those who persecute believers around the world but I don't think it can be understood from a purely human perspective.

Yes, man is evil and will continue to cause suffering for those with whom they disagree. But this is not simply a human response to different beliefs or ideas. This is a spiritual response. The spiritual forces of darkness in the heavenly places hate the forces of light and they would do anything to destroy it. Satan urged Judas to betray Jesus and he used the religious authorities of the day to arrest and mock Him. This in turn caused the Roman authorities to become involved which ultimately resulted in the death of Jesus by crucifixion.

Jesus did nothing wrong. He was without sin. Yet those in positions of leadership hated Him and wanted Him dead. He was a direct threat to their authority and their power over the people. Christians living under the Roman Empire lived exemplary lives. Acts 5:13 says non-believers held them in high esteem. But the rulers felt threatened. They held their positions of authority because they believed that Caesar was God. Christians did not. Because these Christians would not bow to Caesar they were punished and killed as sport in the Arena.

Suffering for their faith was very real to the believers living under Caesar. It is to those living at that time that Peter says were suffering according to the will of God. Whenever we are persecuted for our faith, no matter how big or how small, how little or how often, we are suffering according to the will of God. This should cause us to be encouraged. We naturally want to avoid persecution and suffering because of our faith, but perhaps if we had the perspective that this suffering was according to the will of God we may not be so quick to avoid it.

We should remember the words of Jesus who told us in advance that the world would not care for us and that we would suffer because of it. He said *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you... If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for my name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me”* (John 15:18-21). *“In this world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

Suffering is part of living a believer’s life while on this earth. Our forefathers came to this nation because they were fleeing religious persecution. They established this nation on the premise that they would be free to worship as they pleased without any government oversight or interference. As a result, those living in America since its inception have suffered very little for their faith. However, over the last decade there have been increases in people of faith being challenged by the government to abandon their beliefs and conform to this world’s ideas. They have been taken to court by people who hate what they stand for. Some have lost their livelihood simply for not baking a cake or taking a picture for an event in which they did not wish to participate.

A firm belief in the truth of the Bible was the driving force behind these businesses. Their faith would not allow them to be associated with specific types of events. This angered those who opposed them so much they took them to court and sued them for emotional damages. They sued them to the point where they were financially drained and could no longer sustain their business. Those who persecuted them were well aware they could find someone else to bake their cake and take their pictures. But having other options was not the point. Driving these people out of business

because they disagreed with their faith was their goal. Unfortunately, while seeking relief from the courts the government ruled against them as well.

Should we be surprised? As Americans I think we should be, but as Christians, no; we should not be surprised when the world hates us and persecutes us for our faith. They hated Jesus and they will hate all who love Jesus and live according to His standard of righteousness. What should surprise us is how unprepared we are to suffer for our faith. Is it because we have lost our first love like the church at Ephesus or become lukewarm like the church at Laodicea that we are not being persecuted? Is there not enough Jesus in us to get the world's attention? Or is it because we are blessed to have embedded in the First Amendment of our Constitution the guarantee of freedom of religion and because there remains in America a strong foundation of faith in God? Whatever the reason we should give thanks to God that we can still live out our faith in America without persecution.

One last thing, the phrase "according to the will of God" refers not only to the suffering that comes about because of belief in Christ, but also to how we conduct ourselves while under persecution. Even as we are being reviled for the sake of Christ we are not to revile those who persecute us. We are to live a godly life in speech and action while we suffer for the gospel of Christ. Persecution is not an excuse to abandon righteous living. God expects the people who persecute us to see our faith in action with the hope that they will see the glory of Christ revealed in us and turn from their evil ways and be saved.

When Christ stood before His accusers He did not say a word. Though He was questioned at some length as He stood before King Herod, Jesus said nothing. When they led Him like a lamb to the slaughter He did not complain. He willingly suffered and died according to the will of God. He submitted to the authorities even though it meant His death. Jesus knew where He had come from and where He was going. He committed His spirit into the hands of the Father and let the will of the Father be done. We are to do no less.

If there is a suffering that is according to the will of God then we should not be surprised when it comes. Rather we should be prepared. In Revelation Jesus says this to the church at Smyrna. *"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."*

This is what Jesus asks of us when we suffer – to be faithful until death; to not abandon our faith because we have had everything – our homes, our businesses, our wealth, our freedom, our families - taken away from us by those who hate us; but to remain true to our calling; to love in spite of hate, and to remain hopeful in spite of circumstances; to know that what awaits us by faith is far glorious than what we see now by sight; and to ultimately entrust ourselves to a faithful Creator to do what is right by us. And what does the Lord require of us if we should ever be called before the authorities and accused of some crime simply because we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Luke records the Lord's instructions.

LUKE 12:11-12

“When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense. Or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

If any of us are called to give an account of ourselves because we believe in Christ in the midst of a world that does not, we are to trust the Holy Spirit for the words we are to speak to those in authority over us. Paul took many opportunities to proclaim the truth of the gospel of Christ to those in authority over him. This did not always result in his release or in the salvation of those who heard him. But many of Caesar’s household did become believers because of Paul’s faithful witness to the power of Christ to sustain him in the midst of persecution and imprisonment.

And while we may not be experiencing persecution in our own lives here in America there are many across the world that are suffering because they do not hold the same ideals or the same faith as those around them. Some, like Pastor Andrew Brunson who is being held in a prison in Turkey, have suffered because of their faith in Christ, while others have suffered simply because they were not the right ethnicity or religion. There are Christian ministries which reach out to those who have suffered at the hands of evil men, whether that be because they were Christians or simply because they were in the path of ISIS as they spread their evil across the middle east. These ministries house, feed and clothe refugees who have had to flee their cities and countries in order to escape persecution and death. Some have lost not only their livelihood but their homes and possessions. Some have even lost their loved ones to death. RUN Ministries is one example of Christians coming together to provide a safe haven from ISIS in the Middle East. They not only provide food, clothing and temporary shelter, they also provide encouragement and counsel, speaking freely of the love of Christ and His ability to heal great loss. Here is one example of what RUN Ministries was able to accomplish with a family fleeing ISIS.

When Karim, her little sister, and their mother arrived in their open-sky camp, they had nothing: no food, no clothes, and no home. Most of all, they had no father and no husband. They provided them with the love and care they needed, and then they sent out RUN’s rescue teams to look everywhere for Karim’s father, Abdullah.

Within a few days, their teams found Abdullah. He had been tortured, imprisoned and mentally broken. When he first saw his wife and daughters, he had a moment of clarity, but the trauma of his captivity made their reunion short-lived.

Every day, Karim and Fatima would put their hands on their Daddy and pray for Jesus to heal him. Finally, he asked his wife, “What are my children talking about, and who is Jesus?” The wife explained that they had met Jesus in the Community of Hope open-sky camp and said that they were praying for his healing and salvation.

Then it happened: Abdullah’s heart was opened to the love and peace of Jesus. His family’s prayers were answered, and his mind was healed.

We may not personally be experiencing persecution for our faith but many others across the world are. That is why we pray for them every Sunday. But those of us who are able can do more than just pray. We can donate money to those organizations who are aiding those who are being persecuted. Organizations like RUN Ministries who provide shelter for those fleeing ISIS in the Middle East and the American Center for Law and Justice who aided in the release of Pastor Sayeed Abidini two years ago and are currently defending Pastor Andrew Brunson in Turkey.

We can help others who are suffering according to the will of God in those nations which do not honor the Lord. Just as believers in ancient Rome provided for Paul and others while they were in prison, suffering for their faith, so we too can give time and money to organizations seeking to help those who are suffering for their faith. And if our resources are limited, we can encourage those in prison by writing to them. Voice of The Martyrs is just one of the organizations that will deliver your letters to those suffering in prisons around the world simply because they are believers in Christ. We may not be able to do much but if we are so inclined, in addition to our prayers, we can do something tangible to encourage those who are suffering.

PRAYER

Father, none of us knows what tomorrow holds. We make plans, and I believe You honor those who prepare as best they can for the unknown; but the only thing certain about our future as believers is our final destination. What happens to us along the way before we make the transition from this life to the next is in the hands of our loving Father. We may not know what lies ahead, but You do. You hold tomorrow in Your hand so all we need do is cling tightly to You as we travel day by day down the road that leads to eternity; always trusting, never doubting, never wavering, even in the midst of persecution. You are able to accomplish what concerns us today, provide for the concerns of tomorrow, and to deliver us safely into eternity. Because You can be trusted to care for us, even in the midst of persecution, today by faith we place our lives and all our tomorrows in Your hands. Amen.

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