

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (7)
THE IMPLICIT WILL OF GOD-Part Three
“GIVING THE DEVIL AN OPPORTUNITY”
Sermon 7/01/18

A few weeks ago we looked at God's Implicit Will, that which Scripture reveals as the will of God without explicitly stating so. We saw that:

God's Implicit Will is That:

- #1-We Set Our Mind On The Things Above, Not On The Things Of This Earth
- #2-We Are To Be Anxious For Nothing by Letting Our Requests Be Made Known To God Through Prayer and Supplication

We also looked at the difference between intellectual belief and heart belief. For instance, we can intellectually assent to the truth of God's word and even confess with our mouth that God will take care of us, but if we are anxious over what we shall eat or wear and whether or not we will have a place to live, or any other number of things over which we worry, then the true nature of our belief is revealed to be not trust but doubt.

Becoming anxious exposes the doubt that resides deep within us and brings into the light of day the weakness of our intellectual faith. Sometimes, in our weakness, we choose to cling to the fear in our hearts rather than take the hand of the Lord and walk together through the valley of trust. When we do this we give the devil an opportunity to widen the door of doubt which drives us further into unbelief and mistrust.

When Jesus was in the wilderness after being baptized by John the Scripture says he fasted forty days and forty nights and was hungry. So the devil took the opportunity to come and say to Him, *“If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”* Though hungry, Jesus recognized that this was the voice of the devil and not the voice of the Father, so He refused to be tempted and responded appropriately by saying, *“Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”* These words did not come from the mouth of God. They came from the mouth of Satan, so as hungry as He was, Jesus refused to heed the devil's advice.

By prefacing his temptations with the words, *“If you are the Son of God”* the devil was attempting to pressure Jesus into revealing Himself to the world. The devil wanted Jesus to do this by performing miracles that would benefit Jesus personally; things such as making bread out of stones and having angels catch Him when He threw Himself off the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus would eventually do miracles to prove who He was but He never did a miracle to please Himself. He only did it to lead people into the Kingdom of God. Jesus knew the miracles He was asked to do were from the tempter and not from God so He responded, *“Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test,’”*

What happens next is the subject of today's sermon. After Jesus commanded Satan to go the Scripture says, *“When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time”* (Luke 4:13). If the devil was looking for an opportune time to once again tempt Jesus, you

can be sure that he continues to look for opportune times to tempt us. Temptation is not a one-time thing. It is not just a wilderness experience. It is a constant battle between the world, the flesh and the devil and the devil will watch until he sees an opportune time to tempt us once again. There is one such time explicitly stated in Scripture. It is an opportunity which God says we must not give to Satan. It is also another example of the implicit will of God. We read about it in the book of Ephesians.

EPHESIANS 4:26-27

“Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

Notice Paul does not say we should not get angry. What he says is that we should not hold on to our anger but deal with it that same day. He also says that we should not sin while we are angry. All of us get angry from time to time. Even Jesus got angry. It’s what we do with our anger – the words we say, the actions we perform, and our unwillingness to forgive – that is the issue. So the third item on our list of the Implicit Will of God is that:

#3-We Do Not Sin When We Get Angry, Nor Let The Sun Go Down On Our Anger So That We Do Not Give The Devil An Opportunity

In John 2:13-16 we read of Jesu getting angry with the moneychangers in the temple.

JOHN 2:13-16

“The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, ‘Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business.’”

Jesus was angry enough with the money changers that he made a scourge of cords and drove them out. The selling of animals for sacrifice was something which was allowed and the exchange of foreign for local currency was needed to purchase the appropriate animal for the temple sacrifice. So it was not what they did but where they did it that was the issue for Jesus. They were doing this in the temple courtyard instead of outside the temple area near the Mount of Olives where it was usually done. That is why Jesus said *“Stop making My Father’s house a place of business.”* It was the desecration of the temple area that made Jesus angry and He took the appropriate action to show His displeasure.

Psalms 69:9 says, *“Zeal for Your house has consumed Me.”* The disciples remembered this verse as Jesus, in His zeal to cleanse the house of God, overturned the tables of the moneychangers and drove them out. Notice that Jesus did not destroy the oxen, sheep or doves. Instead He told those who were selling the doves to *“Take these things away.”* Again the issue was not the selling of the animals but rather the location where the selling was taking place. He had no intention of destroying the livelihood of the merchants. His only goal was to stop making the house of God a place for conducting business. God’s temple was to be a place for prayer not for making a profit.

This is born out in Mark 11:17 where it says that after Jesus had driven out the moneychangers from the temple, *“He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And...He said to them, ‘Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a robber’s den (den of thieves)”’”*. It seems the merchants may also have been making an obscene profit from their sales as indicated by Jesus’ usage of the word “robber” or “thief”.

In any event, as I have already stated, the selling of animals was not the issue that made Jesus angry. It was where they were selling and the price they were charging. The Temple was to be a place of prayer and not a place of business or an opportunity to cheat people out of their hard earned money. When business and shady business dealings were allowed inside the temple area this angered Jesus enough to take up a scourge of cords and drive them out.

Jesus got angry but He did not sin. How do I know that? Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus was *“tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”* In His anger Jesus was tempted to sin but He refrained from doing so. What would the incident at the temple look like if Jesus had allowed sin to infiltrate His anger? We can only speculate but observing how today’s anger is being played out in the streets of America I would surmise the following:

Jesus would have used something more life-threatening than a scourge of cords and would not have stopped at the overturning of the tables. He would have brought in a sword and threatened the lives of the moneychangers. He would not have simply overturned the tables He would have destroyed them. He would not have simply poured out the coins of the moneychangers; He would have gathered their coins and thrown them to the crowds, depriving the merchants of their wages. And He would have released the animals to wander the streets, allowing others to capture and claim them as their own instead of allowing the merchants to take their animals with them as they left.

In other words, if Jesus had let His flesh control His anger He would have destroyed and taken the property of those who angered him so they could no longer make a living from selling sacrificial animals – in the temple or anywhere else. He would have acted like judge and jury showing no mercy. This is what we see in America today - an anger that seeks to destroy the property and livelihood of others with whom they disagree. This is what anger does when it is fueled by sin.

And that is why Paul tells us not to sin when we are angry. It’s also why Paul tells us to deal with our anger immediately and not to keep holding on to it overnight. The longer we hold on to our anger, the more we stew over it, the greater the opportunity for sin to enter and gain control of our anger.

The selling of sacrificial animals in Jerusalem was a convenience for those who traveled from afar, preventing them from having to drive their sacrificial oxen or sheep all the way from their home to the temple. Jesus understood this and so Jesus limited His anger to the actual offense and not to the entire process. He was angry at the offense and not at the offenders. He wanted their trade to continue but outside the temple gates, not inside its walls. He also highlighted their greed so they would know He understood they were taking advantage of others by taking too much profit

from the sale of a religiously required item.

Again Jesus was angry at where the selling was taking place and not at the actual selling of the animals. By His actions He was restoring the true purpose of the temple – a house of prayer and not a place of business. This is something the priests should have done, so in His anger Jesus sought to correct the offense and restore the sanctity of the temple. But in so doing He did not destroy the dignity or the livelihood of those who were in error.

Jesus also did not allow His anger to grow overnight. He did not stew on it overnight or wait for next year's Passover before taking action. He took immediate steps to correct what He saw that made Him angry. And He did so because He knew it was the zeal for the Lord's house that had made Him angry and not His flesh that was waging war within Him. He was able to control the flesh so that He did not sin when He got angry.

Some people in this life seem to get angry quickly and often. The Bible speaks of this. Ecclesiastes 7:9, *"Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools."* Proverbs 15:1 says, *"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."* Proverbs 15:18 says, *"A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient clams a quarrel."* Proverbs 22:24 says, *"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered."* And Proverbs 14:29 says, *"Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly."*

Perhaps this is why James 1:19 says, *"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this, Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."* This is the crux of the matter. Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. The anger that Jesus experienced was not human anger. It was anger driven by His zeal for Gods' house. It was righteous anger.

Here is one more example of what made Jesus angry. It is found in Mark chapter 3.

MARK 3:1-6

"(Jesus) entered again into the synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. They were watching Him to see if He would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and come forward!' And He said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or kill?' But they kept silent.

"After looking around at them with anger, grieved at the hardness of their heart, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him."

What was Jesus angry about? He was angered at the hardness of their hearts; for they did not desire a man to be healed on the Sabbath. To them healing was defined as work and work was not permitted on the Sabbath. God had not determined that healing was work, but the Pharisees had. They would rather have a man wait a day or more for healing than allow him to be healed on the Sabbath. So they took the opportunity to convict Jesus of being a sinner simply because He

healed a man on the Sabbath.

In spite of this Jesus was not dissuaded from healing on the Sabbath. He did it at least two additional times. He healed a woman tormented by a spirit who bent her double so she could not straighten up at all (Luke 13:10-17). He also healed a man on the Sabbath who was born blind (John 9:1-34). In each instance He got the same negative reaction from the synagogue leaders. In one synagogue the leader even said to the people who witnessed the healing, *“There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and be healed, and not on the Sabbath.”* In other words, we, your spiritual leaders, care more about the Sabbath than we do about you. This – putting the Law above compassion - is what angered the Lord.

What angered the leaders of the synagogues was the fact that Jesus showed compassion instead of following the man-made rules which they had created to honor the Sabbath. Their anger led them to sin for God had already said to them in the Scriptures, *“I desire mercy and not sacrifice.”* (Hosea 6:6) and *“To obey is better than sacrifice”* (1 Samuel 15:22). Jesus was being obedient to the Father when He healed these people on the Sabbath. We know this because Jesus said He did nothing except what He saw the Father do and what He heard the Father say. The synagogue leaders were being obedient to the Law of man-made rules and not to the heart of the God of compassion

To put this in perspective, it was the anger of Jesus toward the synagogue leaders which led Him to do good and heal on the Sabbath. But it was the anger of the synagogue leaders which led them to sin against God by attempting to deny the healings and to bring charges against Jesus so that He might be killed. If we are to avoid sinning when we are angry we need to follow the example of Jesus and not that of the leaders of the synagogues.

There are some explicit ways that Scripture provides that can help us avoid sinning when we get angry, but we will look at those for next week. I want to wrap up today with the issue of giving the devil an opportunity. According to Ephesians 4:26 if we hold on to our anger we give the devil an opportunity to tempt us to sin. This is not the only thing the devil will use to tempt us. Our own lusts can lead us into sin (James 1:14-15). But the Bible says that holding on to anger, dwelling on it for any length of time, can be used by the devil as an opportunity to lead us into sin.

Small things people do can easily irritate us; and, if we let it, that irritation can grow into anger and that anger can grow into sin. Anger can stem from something seemingly inconsequential or spring out of righteous indignation. People can intentionally or unintentionally do something that offends us but we cannot allow any of this to be used by Satan as a vehicle for sin. This is especially true of those who live with a spouse or a roommate because when we live with someone we can't have everything done our way. We must compromise and these compromises can sometimes make us angry. Most of our preferences come from our upbringing and are so ingrained in us we find them very hard to give up. We would rather the other person change their ways than for them to ask us to change.

What end of the toothpaste tube you squeeze from use can irritate your spouse; how you place the toilet paper on the roll so that it rolls out from the top or the bottom can, if you let it, be an irritant every time you use the bathroom. Sometimes things that seem common sense to us can

be a real irritant to our spouse or roommate. When we were first married I had to decide whether or not something Wendy liked was going to irritate me the rest of our married life or whether I was willing to let it go. She liked to hang pictures one way and I liked to hang them the other way. This presented me with a dilemma. I was used to having pictures hung a certain way and really did not want to compromise because I was afraid that every time I looked at the way those pictures were hung it would irritate me. And I did not want to be constantly irritated every time I opened the door to my home.

Luckily the Holy Spirit opened my eyes enough to look years into the future and realize that I could either keep my anger and let it divide us for the next 50 plus years, or I could let go of my anger now, placing my desires below hers. I made the right choice to make my wife the priority instead of myself. So I don't look at pictures in our house or anyone else's and get angry at how they are hung. It does not matter. I chose years ago to let that anger go. I did not give the devil an opportunity to tempt me to sin; at least not in this area. There have been plenty of other areas where it took me longer to realize I had to either deal with my anger or let it go in favor of unity and love. But each time I choose love over demanding my way I have never regretted it.

1 Peter 5:8 says, *"Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* He is looking for an opportunity to tempt you to sin. Since we now know that anger is one of those opportunities for which the devil is looking, let us not give him the satisfaction of using our anger for his evil purposes. James (4:7) tells us to *"Submit ... to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* So let us not allow the sun to go down on our anger and let us not allow our anger to cause us to sin. Let us instead choose to forgive and strive to bring unity where there is discord. Let us be more willing to give up our own ways so that we might be at peace with those whom God has called us to love.

If there is righteous anger let us do what is right in the sight of God to correct the wrong, just as Jesus did with the moneychangers in the temple. But if it is human anger let us remember that according to James human anger does not accomplish the righteousness of God. We must be willing to resolve our differences in a spirit of love and unity so we do not provide the devil with an opportunity to sow discord. So remember the words of Paul in Ephesians:

EPHESIANS 4:26-27

"Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity."

We all have strong feelings about something and as much as we may desire it, we will never agree on everything; but that does not mean we cannot accept one another's differences and love each other in spite of them. When we do this we prevent an opportunity from occurring which for the devil could use to tempt us to sin. If we die to self and live to God we can deny the devil an entrance into our anger. Without an entrance he cannot provoke us to sin. Resist the devil, do not sin when you are angry and do not hold on to your anger, and he will be unable to take advantage of such an opportunity.

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