

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (3)
THE EXPLICIT WILL OF GOD-Part Two
“BECOMING AND OVERCOMING”
Sermon 5/13/18

When I was younger I had a variety of cars. Some of them had very powerful engines and could top 100 MPH while others could barely make it up a hill. I had a bright red Ford with a 427 Cobra engine and a little green Chevy Corvair with an engine in the back. I had to be patient while my little Corvair got up to speed on the highway. But I had to pull back on the throttle whenever I put my foot on the gas with my bright red Ford. I tolerated my little green Corvair but I loved the speed of my shiny red Ford with the Cobra engine.

But the ability to speed can be a curse because when I did so I was always looking in my rear view mirror to see if there were any police cars behind me. I didn't always intentionally speed but sometimes I purposely did; mostly due to poor planning. If I was late I tried to make up it by speeding. Being late made me nervous enough but having to constantly look in my rear view mirror to avoid a speeding ticket added additional stress. Because of this driving was not always a relaxing experience.

The last time I remember consistently speeding was when my son was a teenager. I remember that time because I was pulled over for speeding on a family trip to southern California. As the Highway Patrol officer was writing up my ticket I remember thinking to myself, I will soon be teaching my son how to drive. This is not the example I want to set for him. I need to stop speeding and obey the law. I cannot be the excuse my son uses to disobey the law. From that point on I vowed never to go over the speed limit regardless of whether or not I was running late.

After a while we acquired a car that had cruise control in it. That little accessory became a great blessing to me. When I engaged it I found I could drive stress free and keep my eyes on the road ahead instead of the rear-view mirror. I just set that little blessing for whatever the speed limit was at any given time or place and I never had to worry about getting a speeding ticket. To this day I use cruise control anytime I drive, on city streets as well as freeways. This has made travel a lot less stressful for me because I don't have to worry about disobeying the law. Not that I am perfect. I still experience the temptation to speed which I occasionally give in to. But as long as cruise control is on I feel free from et fear of getting a speeding ticket.

Driving with cruise control is a lot like living within the will of God. When you turn the cruise control on your vehicle you place your trust in the setting which controls your speed. No longer worrying about disobeying the law of the land you can relax and enjoy the ride. When you practice doing God's will you are setting the control of your life in God's hands. You do not have to be uncertain about what you are doing. Your course has been set by God's will so there is no need to worry about disobeying His law.

When you know what the will of God is and put it into practice you can relax and enjoy the close fellowship that comes with being obedient to His will. You don't have to second guess or wonder if you are doing the right thing. You can be assured that you are driving down the road of life doing what God requires of you. You are on God's cruise control.

Like the posted speed limits on our roads and highways, we first have to know what the will of God is if we are to have any hope of establishing a cruise control for our lives. This is the journey we began last week as we looked at God's will concerning salvation. Today we're going to examine God's will for our personal lives. This will tell us what parameters to set for God's cruise control.

As I mentioned last week, God's will is revealed Explicitly and Implicitly in Scripture. With the Explicit will of God there is no ambiguity. Scripture tells us directly what God expects of us. The implicit will of God is more general. Though it only implies what the will of God is, it is no less binding on our behavior. Today we will continue our look at what God has explicitly said is His will.

GOD'S EXPLICIT WILL IS THAT

We Become A Product of His Will

(That we become what He has willed us to become)

In Ephesians 1:1 Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Christ, by the will of God. Paul had no intention of being an apostle of Christ, but he says he became one as a result of God's will. His apostleship was a product of God intervening in his life.

Sometimes what we become is a direct result of the will of God. This was certainly true of Samuel, whom God called when he was a young child serving in the temple of God, and also of Jeremiah whom God said, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."* (Jeremiah 1:5). Saul's life was also directed by God when Samuel revealed to him that he was to be the first king of Israel. All of these men were called by God to be something which God ordained they become.

But you do not have to be a believer to have your life directed by God. The pagan king Cyrus II, king of Persia, conquered the nation of Babylon and was responsible for setting the Israelites free and allowing them to return to the land of Israel. He did so because God had determined before his conception that Cyrus would be used for this very purpose. One hundred and fifty years before Cyrus was born Isaiah (45:1-6) wrote these words:

"Thus says the Lord to Cyrus His anointed, whom I have taken by the right hand, to subdue nations before him, and to loose the loins of kings; to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut; I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor though you have not known me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is none besides Me."

This pagan king was used by God and ordained by Him to set Israel free from captivity in Babylon. The person Cyrus would become and the role he would play in the release of the Jewish captives from Babylon was ordained by God a century and a half before Cyrus was even born.

God used another man in history to set the Israelites free from captivity but this was not from human rulers but from the devil that held them captive to do his will. The man's name was Saul of Tarsus but he later became known as the Apostle Paul. As I said earlier Paul became as apostle of Christ by the will of God. Certainly his conversion experience on the road to Damascus bears this out. You may remember that Paul was full of hatred for the followers of Jesus, even holding the coats of those who stoned Steven to death because of his faith in Christ.

Emboldened by the death of Stephen, Paul soon obtained orders from the high priest to locate any followers of Christ in Damascus and bring them bound to Jerusalem for trial. But God had other plans. As Paul was approaching Damascus a light suddenly appeared from heaven and flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" and he said, "*Who are You, Lord?*" And He said, "*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do*" (Acts 9:3-6). The trajectory of Paul's life was suddenly and abruptly thrown off course by a single voice from heaven.

Paul He had no intent of becoming anything other than that which he had studied so hard to attain. He had studied under the greatest teacher of His day and became what he called a Hebrew of Hebrews and a Pharisee of Pharisees. He was zealous for the Law and was found blameless under it. But God had other plans and dramatically changed the direction of his life.

Paul changed professions and became an apostle of Christ through an encounter with the living God. This happened solely because it was the will of God for it to occur. Paul was originally fighting against God, not believing that Christ was the Holy One sent to redeem the house of Israel. But God overrode Paul's logic, his zeal, his determination, his education, his training, and his deeply held religious belief by showing Him the real truth, which included the reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Ephesians 2:10 and 13 says that "*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them*" and that God is working in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure. We do not have to be an apostle or a prophet or even a king to become something which God wants us to become. We simply have to walk in the good works which God has already prepared for us. When we do this we will find ourselves becoming something which we did not originally plan to become.

How many of us here today have had our lives dramatically changed through an encounter with the living God? And how many lives have changed directly as a result of that encounter? I dare say anyone who has come to know Christ has had their life dramatically changed for the better. For sometimes what we think we are becoming, what we have planned and desired to become our whole life is dramatically changed as we are redirected to become something else because God has intervened in our life. Sometimes what we become is a direct result of God's will.

Having said that I have one caution; it is not enough to be set on a new course. You must also maintain that course through obedience. This comes from observing the life of King Saul. After being chosen by God to be king, Saul became disobedient to God's commands, and as a

result, though he remained king, God was not pleased with him. Because of his disobedience God went looking for someone else to rule Israel; someone who would follow God whole heartedly. So let's be aware that though God may have redeemed and redirected our lives it is up to us to maintain the course He has set for us. If we wander we must return. If we sin we must repent. What we become can be a direct result of God's will. But sometimes where we end up can be more of a direct result of our own will than His.

GOD'S EXPLICIT WILL IS THAT
WE REJOICE ALWAYS
WE PRAY WITHOUT CEASING
WE GIVE THANKS IN EVERYTHING

There are some people who live as though their glass is half full. While there are others who live as though their glass is half empty. These people are rarely thankful for what they have because what they have is never enough. Even if they have an abundance of money or goods they worry they will lose what they have. They are too busy worrying to pray and too unhappy to rejoice. To them there is nothing to be thankful for. These people look to the world for life but find none. And when they experience a respite from their difficulties it is only temporary. They are lovers of money and lovers of self, unwilling to sacrifice for others lest they be deprived of what they have.

In 1 Thessalonians (5:18) Paul tells us to, *“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* It is God's will for us to rejoice at all times, regardless of our circumstances. He wants us to pray continually without long vows of silence. He wants to be in constant communication so that He can be actively engaged in our lives. He also wants us to be thankful for what we do have rather than be unhappy with what we do not have; to be thankful in every situation regardless of whether it affects us positively or negatively. In short, He wants us to be people who see their glass as half full.

When we express our displeasure at everything around us, when we cease to pray for guidance, when we find fault with the littlest of things, we are not pleasing God. We are operating against His will. And when we operate against His will it is impossible to be happy or content. If we want to walk in the will of God we must practice His will. We must rejoice always, regardless of circumstance; we must pray without ceasing, never giving up on the love of God for us and His ability to do what is right; and we must give thanks for everything, even that which we do not understand. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.

If I sound too harsh let me say this: All of us at one time or another have seen our glass as half full. We are all tempted to hold too tightly to the things of this world. But those who walk by faith soon realize their error, repent, and begin to trust and rejoice once again.

If you are a person who sees their glass as half empty it may take you a while for you to change your perspective on life and on God's ability to provide for your needs. But the transition from being one who holds tight to this life to one who holds the things of this world loosely is worth the journey. To rejoice instead of grumbling, to pray without worry, and to be thankful for all we have is the will of God for all who call on the name of the Lord. We will speak more about

this in the coming weeks as we continue to look at God's Will for our lives. But for now remember these three things – rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

The last Explicit Will of God we will look at today deals with our moral fortitude. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 Paul says, *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.”*

GOD'S EXPLICIT WILL IS THAT: WE ABSTAIN FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY

Sanctification in the life of a believer is three-fold. (1) It is something that occurs at the moment of belief. (2) It also occurs incrementally over the life of a believer. (3) It will only be fully realized when we leave this life and no longer inhabit bodies of flesh. Let me explain what I mean by this.

1 Corinthians 6:11 says we were sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. Because of our belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus we have already been sanctified. It is past tense. But here in 1 Thessalonians Paul explains that we have something to do with our sanctification while we live here on earth. We are to abstain from sexual immorality and by so doing sanctify ourselves for God's service. To sanctify ourselves is to purify ourselves by keeping away from sin, in this particular case away from sexual sin. This is present tense. And finally, Jesus sanctifies us fully and completely when he transforms our earthly bodies into heavenly ones. This is future tense.

God's will for our present sanctification could not be any clearer - we are to abstain from sexual immorality. Paul reaffirms this in 1 Corinthians 6:18-19 where he says, *“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”*

When we commit sexual immorality - when we sin against our flesh - we are sinning against the temple in which the Holy Spirit resides. It is like throwing manure on the altar of God. The temple of God deserves respect and since we are the temple of God we need to respect our bodies and not allow sexual sin to rule over us.

Having said that let me reassure those who have committed sexual sin, and who hasn't at some point in their life, that there is forgiveness to be found in Jesus. The passage telling us to flee immorality comes at the end of a long list of sins, including sexual sin, which many committed prior to receiving Christ. But they forsook that lifestyle and committed their lives to Christ that they might overcome the pull and shame of sin. What we once did willingly and enjoyably we cannot now do without regret and guilt. 1 John 3:9 says *“No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in Him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”* The key words here are “practices sin”. True believers, those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, do not make a habit of sinning. The Holy Spirit convicts them of their sin and as a result they turn from their sin,

repent, and are cleansed.

Paul tells us to abstain from sexual immorality. To abstain is to refrain from doing something, to keep oneself from something. To abstain from alcohol is to never take a drink, to refrain from doing so. This is easy for some to do because they have never developed a taste for it. But for others who were ensnared by drink it is hard to overcome. The same is true for those who were sexually active before Christ. The pull of the previous desire is strong and is not easily overcome. But Christ gives the victory over all sin, regardless of its nature. So while it may be harder for some than for others, God would not require us to abstain from sexual immorality if it were not possible through the power of the Holy Spirit to do so.

God does not require of His people what He Himself does not empower them to do. So we should not be deceived by the pull of the flesh which Satan uses to entice us. Remember, James says that each one of us is tempted when we are carried away by our own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin. We live in a body of flesh which constantly wages war against our desire to do right. Paul knew this pull well and asked the question, "Who can set us free from this body of death?" But he also provided the answer: "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 7:24; 1 Corinthians 15:57).

We can abstain from sexual immorality but only through the power of the Spirit which lives within us. We cannot do it by will power alone. We must partner with the Spirit in order to experience consistent victory over sexual sin. By doing so we are living out and abiding in the will of God. For it is His will that we abstain from sexual immorality.

There is more to discover about the will of God and we will do so in the coming weeks. But once you have some understanding about what God's will is you need to start applying it, start walking in it, and put it into practice. These are the initial limits of what God has set for your life.

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If you use these as your guide you can set your spiritual cruise control in these areas and stop worrying about disobedience. As your knowledge of God's will expands you will no longer have to look behind you to see who is waiting to condemn you because you disobeyed God's rules for life. You will be walking in the light of God's word and resting on His promises.

Life is not easy. You can't set one speed and expect to cruise through life. There will be bumps in the road and distractions that slow life down to a crawl. But as long as you stay within God's speed limit - within the parameters of what He has set for your life - then you need not worry about being caught unaware of disobedience. You will know the path you have set for yourself is the same path God has set for you.

In walking this path you will be, as Paul tells says in Colossians, *"filled with the*

knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, walking in a manner worthy of God's calling, pleasing Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthen with power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

May the Lord give us all the strength to obey and to do so consistently until the day He sets us free from all temptations, all desires, and all wants which contradict His will for our lives. May He also empower us to maintain our course, continue our journey, and run our race with endurance all the while clinging to the hope that soon we will all be changed and become like Him. Amen.

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