**His Will; His Way – Transforming the Mind**

**11-7-21**

Over the past several weeks, we have been talking about the importance of living into God’s will and God’s way.

* It is a stated desire that much of the Church prays for each week with the words: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.”
  + But it is much easier prayed than done.
  + The truth is, most churches have no strategy at all for seeking God’s will or pursuing His ways beyond vague prayers and grandiose assumptions.
    - Many just assuming that if we’ve given our lives to Christ, then our will and our ways are pretty much identical to His.
* But God has never suggested that. In fact, he declared in Isaiah 55:7-9:

*7 let the wicked forsake his way,*

*and the unrighteous man his thoughts;*

*let him return to the Lord,*

*that he may have compassion on him,*

*and to our God,*

*for he will abundantly pardon.*

*8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,*

*neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.*

*9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,*

*so are my ways higher than your ways*

*and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

* But this presents us with a problem.
  + If God’s thoughts are as far above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth…
  + And if His ways are “to infinity and beyond” any of our evil ways…
  + Then how can we even conceive of them, much less know them and step into them?

The Apostle Paul expresses this very dilemma to the church in ancient Rome in chapter 11 of the letter he wrote to them.

* In Romans 11:33-34 Paul writes:

*33 Oh, the depth of the riches [of] wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

*34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord,*

*or who has been his counselor?”*

* + Here Paul uses two Greek words to depict our inability to understand God’s will and God’s ways:
    - The first is used only in this verse in all of the New Testament, the second is used only here and in Ephesians 3:8.
    - Here are some of the English words translators have used to try to communicate the meanings of these two Greek words:
      * Inscrutable (don’t you love it when they use a word we need to define in order to understand a word we need translate!)
        + Inscrutable means “impossible to understand or interpret”
    - So English words used to translate include:
      * Inscrutable
      * Incomprehensible
      * Unsearchable
      * Unfathomable
      * Unexplainable
      * Untraceable
      * Undiscoverable
    - So where does that leave us when it comes to grasping God’s will and God’s way?
      * It seems the are, Unattainable!
* And yet in the second verse of chapter 12, Paul tells us that knowing the will of God and embracing His ways are within the grasp of every believer.
  + All it takes is a bit of transformation, not of our behaviors (though they will come along for the ride), but of our minds.
  + We read in Romans 12:2

*2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

* + - The first part of this verse references what we’ve already talked about in previous messages.
      * That we need to first be willing to, as the writer of 2 Chronicles put it, “turn from our wicked ways” if we ever hope to see God’s will and ways done on earth as they are in heaven.
      * That means forsaking the will and ways of this world rather than conforming to them.
      * If you have not been here the last few weeks, I strongly encourage you to listen to the messages you’ve missed either on the Rock App or website.
    - But today, it’s the positive, second part of this verse I want to focus on for the next few minutes.
      * For they are a prescription of how to know the unknowable and follow the untraceable.
      * So that we might walk in the will and way of God.

First, we need to examine the grammar of the next phrase where Paul writes:

*…but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*

* Believe it or not, it’s the grammar that takes what looks like a rather mundane command and makes it an absolutely amazing statement of how we work in cooperation with the Holy Spirit for our own transformation.
  + But to notice it, I’m going to have to ask you to return to your Junior or Senior High School English class.
    - Because to learn how to step into God’s will and God’s way we will need to take note of the tense, voice and mood of this short phrase.
* First, the tense.
  + Paul writes this phrase in the present tense, which in Greek means that the action begins now and is continuous from here on out.
    - It could be translated, “Continue to let yourselves be transformed.”
    - Meaning that this transformation is not a one time occurrence, but is a continual process.
      * The Apostle Paul also speaks of it in this way in 2 Corinthians 3:18, where he writes :

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,* ***are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another****.*

* + - * That is, this transformation within us is ongoing and progressive – “continuing to progress from one degree of glory to another”.
    - This transformation never ends – stick a pin in that.
* Second we look at the voice of the phrase:
  + This phrase is written in the passive voice, which you may remember means that the subject is not acting, but rather, is being acted upon.
    - Paul does not say, “Transform yourselves!” but, “Let yourselves be transformed.”
    - The actor in our transformation is the Holy Spirit.
      * Going back to 2 Corinthians 3:18, look at how finishes his thought:

*We…are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.* ***For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.***

* + So this is a continuous transformation that is being achieved in us by the active work of the Holy Spirit of God.
    - For as Paul says in Philippians 2:13:

*13 …it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

* But before we relax in this passive voice, believing that we haven’t really much to do in all of this, we need to finally look at the “mood” of the phrase.
  + And the mood here is that of the “imperative”.
    - Now you may remember that an imperative is a command – often followed by an exclamation point.
      * Paul is commanding the Romans to take action.
    - But what action, if their transformation is something that is continually worked IN them by the Holy Spirit?
  + Here we find once again that amazing melding together of our lives with Christ as we cooperate with His Holy Spirit in our own transformation.
    - Both of the other passages that we have quoted in the last few moments speak of this cooperation between the Spirit’s action and our entering into that action.
      * The passage in 1 Corinthians 3 declared that our part was *beholding the glory of the Lord.*
        + This once again echoes 2 Chronicles 7:14, where God calls His people to “seek my face” as well as “turn from their wicked ways”.
        + “Beholding the glory of the Lord” is more than just longingly gazing at Him, it’s humbly submitting to Him.

Submitting to His will and His way.

Choosing Him, long for His will and His ways.

* + - * + As we are doing this, Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit is transforming us into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another.
      * Or again in Philippians 2:13, we read:

*13 …it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

* + - * + God is actively transforming us, but it is not without our participation – for many of you know what comes immediately prior to this.

*12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence,* ***work out your own salvation with fear and trembling****…*

* + - * + God is actively transforming us, but here in yet another imperative, Paul instructs the Philippians to cooperate with God in that work.

Stepping with Him into what He is doing.

So how then, in Romans 12, are we called to “step into” the transformation that the Holy Spirit is doing in us?

* Look again and see:

*…but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*

* We need a change of mind.
  + Not in the sense of exchanging one idea for another one.
  + But rather our entire mind, wholesale, has to be exchanged.
    - For the mind you have will either limit or enable your ability to grasp and enter into God’s will and God’s way.
* How many of you remember the Mel Brooks film, *Young Frankenstein?*
  + In it, as Victor Frankenstein was creating his monster he needed a human brain to put into it, so he sent Igor off to a morgue to get one of a great scientist who had recently died.
    - But when Igor gets there he accidently drops the jar with the scientist’s brain in it, so he quickly grabs another one and brings it to the doctor.
    - Dr. Frankenstein then unknowingly implants the brain into his creation only to discover that the monster was erratic, frightened and violent.
      * Turning to Igor, he asked him about the brain he had gotten at the morgue only to discover that it was not the great scientist’s brain after all.
      * So, he asked Igor whose brain it was.
      * Igor replied, “I don’t know…Abby something?”
        + Abby something? Abby what?
      * Igor thought and replied, “mmm…Abby Normal”.
        + Which explained the difficulty Frankenstein was having with his creation.
    - All this is a silly way to make the point that our ability to grasp the will and way of God depends on what mind we possess – one abnormally shaped by this world, or one renewed by the Holy Spirit.
  + You see, this is the reason we can’t comprehend the will and way of God…
    - The reason they are inscrutable, untraceable and incomprehensible…
    - It’s because we approach God’s will and way with the mind of this world rather than the mind of Christ.
* Paul’s solution? *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*.
  + If we ever want to grasp the will of God and walk in all His ways, then we need to cooperate with the Spirit of God as we exchange the world’s way of thinking for Christ’s way of thinking.
  + Now as we noted before, this is a continual process in our lives that never really ends.
    - But there are some core convictions that are necessary if we are ever to discover and take hold of God’s will and God’s way in our lives.
      * Convictions that are nearly always at odds with the world’s way of thinking and often invite ridicule.
    - But it is these four convictions of a transformed mind that will enable us, as Paul promises, to *test and discern what God’s will is.*

The first conviction is that the will of God can only truly be discerned through the Spirit of God and we are helpless without Him.

* Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:11-12

*11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.*

* Friends, we cannot discern the will and way of God apart from the Spirit of God.
  + Paul says as much in 1 Corinthians 2:14:

*14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

* + God’s will and God’s way are spiritually discerned, and thus require the participation of the Spirit to know them.

The second conviction is an absolute belief in the goodness of God.

* This may seem self-evident and rather unnecessary to talk about, but the truth is many believers carry unspoken doubts as to the goodness of God.
  + I mean no one is going to verbalize it in mixed company, but many believers have their doubts at times.
    - I know I did.
    - I can remember during a time of great turmoil and change telling close friends that I didn’t doubt God’s existence, or even His goodness.
      * I just doubted that He would extend His goodness to me.
      * And it caused me to hesitate following Him where I knew He was leading me.
  + To accept and walk in the will and way of God, we have to believe in God’s goodness toward us.
    - If we don’t, we will not trust Him with the people and things that are most important to us.
* Now some might counter that they have good reason to doubt the goodness of God, or at least that He is always good.
  + You may feel as if God has let you down or abandoned you in your time of need.
    - Maybe you have given yourself over to a ministry of God only to have it implode or just fizzle out after years of effort – and you wonder where God is.
    - Or maybe you have lost a friend or a loved one after praying fervently for healing, but God, in His sovereignty took that person home (or worse yet, let them die without Christ) and left you alone in your grief.
    - And you just aren’t sure you trust Him the way you once did.
* It’s not hard to see that if we don’t hold this conviction in our minds that God is good, not just in a general theological sense, but specifically as He relates to us, then we will have a hard time discerning and walking in the will and way of God.
  + But we can take heart that we are not alone on this journey.
    - Some of the greatest names of Biblical history had to battle through these doubts and experience God’s goodness through the eyes of a transformed mind.
      * Paul prayed earnestly about his “thorn in the flesh” that it would be removed, but it never was.
        + But he came to see it as a gift from God that taught him that in Christ, “when I am weak, then I am strong.”
      * Or the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament, who was known as the weeping prophet and experienced much rejection and sorrow in his life and ministry.
        + Mostly because He was called upon by God to communicate the coming judgement of Judah and their exile.
        + And in His very personal book of Lamentations, where he expresses his pain and frustration, he writes of his transformed mind as well in chapter 3.

*21 But this I call to mind,*

*and therefore I have hope:*

*22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;*

*his mercies never come to an end;*

*23 they are new every morning;*

*great is your faithfulness.*

*24 “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,*

*“therefore I will hope in him.”*

*25* ***The Lord is good to those who wait for him****,*

*to the soul who seeks him.*

* + Cooperating with the Spirit in transforming this part of our minds takes intention, time, and trust.
    - But it is necessary if we truly desire *His kingdom come, His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

The third conviction necessary to grasping the will and way of God is that love is our ultimate calling.

* I don’t have time to go over all of the Biblical texts that call us to love God to love each other to love our neighbor – even to love our enemies.
  + It is found in the great commandment (to love God – heart, soul, mind, strength)
  + And in the second which is like it (to love our neighbor as ourselves).
  + And it is the evidence that Jesus says will identify us as His disciples (by the way we love one another).
* Yet, rarely, when we are seeking God’s will and way do we stop to ask what would love have us do?
  + As we discern what God would have us to do, do we begin with what love compels us to do?
    - Now, to be sure, the world’s view of love is distorted and tainted, thus our conception of love also has to go through a transformation process.
      * The world, after all, often equates love with license to do anything your want, which parents know full well is not love at all.
  + But even with this caveat in mind, does the ONE command of Jesus stand at the forefront of our desire to walk in His will and His way? (John 13:34-35)

*34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

* + - Here is the will and way of God in a nutshell.
    - Will we subject all our will and our ways under its guidance.

Which leads us to the last conviction necessary to having a mind that will be able to discern the will and way of God for our lives: the conviction, once we know it, we will follow His will and His way no matter where it leads.

* After all, it does us no good to search for and find the will and ways of God if we are not committed to walking in them.
  + This is a conviction that needs to be in place at the very beginning of the process.
    - Are we committed to do God’s will even before we know what that will is?
  + Or are we just playing games.
    - Praying, “Oh God, show me your will and your ways, and if I like what I see, I will do it.”
      * But I’ve already decided to leave this job, so if you tell me not to I’m going to ignore you.
      * Or, I’ve already decided to marry this person, so if you disagree I’m not going to pay you any mind.
      * Or, I’m already against this idea or hold this position on this an issue, so if you try to dissuade me, don’t hold your breath.
      * And if you tell me to go to Africa or Albania or Antarctica, well, I’m just going to stay in America and send some money, if you don’t mind.
  + Friends, if we don’t want to know; if we are not committed to following before we pray, then don’t ask.
    - But also understand that a disciple is always committed to following his/her Master.
    - For in Matthew 12:49-50 we read of Jesus:

*49 And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”*

So where are we when it comes to these four convictions?

* Are we certain that our only way to the will and way of God is through the Holy Spirit?
* Do we fully trust in the goodness of God, not only in general but specifically in each of our lives?
* Are we convinced that love is the source and foundation of all of God’s will and ways and as such will always be reflected in them?
* And are we committed to walking in the will and way of God not matter where He leads or what He calls us to do?

This calls for a ruthless self-examination – a hard inward gaze and absolute honesty so that we might see where transformation is needed and where to begin as we seek to step into God’s will and God’s ways.

* Next week, we’ll look at how to position ourselves for such transformation as we cooperate with the Spirit in the renewal of our minds.

**Benediction**

*Now may we who, with unveiled faces, are beholding the glory of the Lord, be transformed into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another by the power of the Holy Spirit of Jesus. Amen.*