

**RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part nine - Teaching #2164**

**Sunday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 6:30 p.m.**

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**THOUGHTS, DESIRES, THE WILL, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE RENEWING OF THE MIND**

When we study these component parts of the human person - mind, feelings and will - it's important to remember that, while they can be **studied** separately, they don't **function** separately. There is an ongoing interplay between these three human components and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as Christians. **Images** appeal to feelings and desires. Catering to these forms **ideas** - a **world view** - in the mind. And the mind then effects the **decisions** of the will. The cumulative effect of these together is the forming of **character**.

What I'm saying here is that the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives isn't just one big mystic mystery. I know the wind of the Spirit blows wherever it wills. I know the Spirit of God can't be put into a box. But, at the same time, Paul tells us we can "**sow to the Spirit**." By that means we can **cooperate** and **participate** with His work in our lives. A farmer can't make seed grow. Only God can work that miracle. But the farmer can and must sow seed in the soil if he wants a harvest.

And that's what this series has been all about. The reason we've taken eight weeks studying this whole matter of **spiritual mindedness** is to form an understanding of how these components work **together** to bring about genuine discipleship and inward transformation. We need to think about how we are **created**, how our lives are **shaped**, and how they can be **reshaped** for God's glory.

Your **will** is the part of you God cares about the most. It's what marks the **image of God** in you. Animals react by **instinct**. People align themselves mostly with the animal world when they blindly follow their desires. They are most like God when they **choose** to initiate and create and become according to God's will and plan.

God doesn't care how tall you are. He doesn't care whether you are black or white, or rich or poor. He loves the astronaut and the dentist and the cattle rancher equally. He will respond to the cry of the genius and the simple with equal mercy. He doesn't care one bit whether you are a blonde or a redhead. The part of you He seeks and responds to is one part only - the **decisions** you make with your **will**.

It is as if God has a **heart monitor** installed for every person. He looks for people who **choose** Him. In fact, that's **all** He is ultimately concerned about:

**Psalm 145:18** - “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

**Romans 10:12-13** - “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. [13] For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

All the visible, manifold distinctions that separate and distinguish people on this earth disappear before God. He just looks for people to **choose** Him - to decide with their wills to **call** upon Him and enthrone Him and honor Him.

This is **still** the most important thing about your life today. God doesn't care about your wealth or your fashion sense or your social standing. He doesn't measure you by your natural abilities or your education or your looks. He cares about your **will** above all else.

1) **HOW HUMAN WILLS BECOME DIVIDED AND THEN ENSLAVED**

**James 1:14-15** - “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

We saw last week how our *feelings* - our *desires* - are the *trigger* for sin in our lives. They are not sin in themselves, but they form the heart of the *temptation* for sin. The trigger isn't the bullet that kills, but it *fires* the bullet and sets the process in motion.

Satan gains entrance through the appeal of an image to our desires. He actually *doesn't* want you thinking these things through with your mind. He wants to engage your *desires* - for wealth, for pleasure, for power, for social popularity and esteem - he wants to awaken these desires while keeping your mind asleep. He tip-toes into your affections with the promise of all these things while wanting your mind to remain unengaged.

James traces the sinful act back to the inward desire. The effect of the desire is one of *hypnotizing the mind*. We saw last week that as the mind is repeatedly hijacked by sinful desires it becomes, in Paul's words, "*futile*" and "*darkened*" - Ephesians 4:17-18 - "**Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.**"

What Paul means here is the mind no longer functions *morally* as it should. This is why when we see such a person we stand back in amazement and say, “**How could he do something like that!?**” There is nothing spiritually rational in his actions anymore.

But there is something else that happens in the process of giving in to our feelings and desires. The habitual *following* of a desire increases the *hold* of that desire over the will. Treating our *feelings* as our *will* - that is, making our feelings the *reason* for acting - creates a kind of *inertia* in our true ability to choose properly.

This is a vitally important principle in the spiritual realm and it relates so powerfully to the use of the will. It is always easier to do what you have already done than to do something *other* than what you have done. In other words, you and I will tend to keep doing what we have done, and more so, the more we have done it. This is how sin always puts you on its *payroll* - the “*wages*” of sin is the way the Bible puts the same truth.

If you want that same principle in additional Biblical terminology it is certainly easy to find:

**John 8:34 - “Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.’”**

**Romans 6:16 - “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?”**

So James says sin has its birth in the realm of the feelings and desires. As the mind is hypnotized and the will caves in, the desires are treated as though **they** are the will. And as those desires grow in their demand (which they always do), and as the mind is hijacked to **excuse and justify** the sin (which the futile, darkened mind always does), the will becomes increasingly useless to turn the life around.

This is the process of the **entanglement of the will**. This is how entanglement **happens**. Now, what does this kind of entangled will **look like?** How does this condition **manifest** itself?

Usually, as people are experiencing this loss of their true will, they still have some desire to live better than they do. Their will doesn't die all at once. It becomes divided and fractured. Their wills are marked by **duplicity** rather than **simplicity**. They are, in other words, the opposite of those Jesus called **“pure in heart,”** who would see God (**Matthew 5:8**).

We need to think carefully about Jesus' words about purity of heart.

**Soren Kierkegaard** said, "**Purity of heart is to will one thing.**"

That's it exactly. The entangled will - the will that has been compromised by being hypnotized by desires - is a will that no longer **wills in one direction**. This is the experience, to varying degrees, of willing in two contrary directions at the same time - a part of your person being pulled to each.

If this seems like merely an intellectual concept, think again. It's right at the core of how our lives are shaped. I could come up with scores of real-life examples of this condition:

Consider the young man who is dating an unsaved woman. He's a Christian. He's been **told** that this is wrong. In fact, he knows the verses that **tell** him it's wrong. And, on a certain level, he still wants to live for God. But his mind is somehow blind to the truth he can find and quote from the Bible. And his will isn't strong enough to pull him away from his companion.

What's gone wrong here? Why isn't his will taking over with power and authority? Because he has already given another part of his being - his feelings and passions and desires - over to his girlfriend. So there he is, feeling **guilty** and **satisfied** at the same time - part of his will going one way and part of it another. Or, as James would say it, he is now a "**double minded man, unstable in all his ways.**"

There are a thousand situations every day where this kind of ***splintered will-power*** cripples professing Christians. In its early stages it leads to ***moral confusion, condemnation*** and ***frustration***. In its final stages, if left unrepented of, it will reveal its true nature of ***emotional emptiness and spiritual deadness***. This is because, while you and I are free to turn our wills in any direction we want, we are not free to choose the ***consequences*** of what we have chosen:

**Galatians 6:7-8** - “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

These words are more profound than we often discern. Each act - each turning of the will - is never an ***end*** in itself. Each act, however freely chosen, and in whatever direction, is only the ***beginning of a process***. You don't just ***use*** your will, you ***sow*** it. And the reaping is totally out of your hands.

- 2) **THERE IS A WAY OF EXERCISING THE WILL IN THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION THAT WILL RARELY, IF EVER, BE FRUITFUL FOR GODLINESS**



Before we examine this path specifically, let me lay some ground work in understanding the way God has created us as people in His image. We all have these three things in common. We **think**. We **feel**. We **act**. We are more than the animals. We don't (or shouldn't) be steered by blind instinct. We are to pursue spiritual mindedness by **building the forms of Godliness into which the Holy Spirit can move with His precious life and presence**.

All three of those parts of our nature (**thoughts, feelings and will**) are God-given and beautiful **when ordered together and prayerfully submitted to His direction**. But these three parts of our being can also fight and war **against each other** when we are undisciplined and careless and carnal.

Now, here's how some Christian people **think** they are going to use their will-power to serve God and cooperate with the Holy Spirit, when, in fact, they are doing no such thing. Here is one way people use their wills, but to no lasting spiritual value:

Some people, perhaps very sincere and well-meaning, rely on their will-power - **perhaps even calling out to God in prayer** - when tempted to sin. But (and this is the crucial point) they don't change the **diet and content of their mind**, and hence, they don't change the **objects of their affections**. They just try to **will their way out of sin at the last minute**.

In other words, they try to summon their will, right at the moment they feel the force of some temptation and are about to fall. They try to use their will-power to **cancel out** the **deception in their minds** and the **enticements of their feelings**. And there is no way anyone is going to be very successful at that game for very long. You simply can't be successful using **one third** of your being to **override** the other **two thirds**.

3) **THERE IS AN EFFECTIVE AND SPIRITUALLY FRUITFUL WAY TO EXERCISE YOUR WILL IN THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL MINDEDNESS**

Let me give you the principle in a nutshell before we expand it. ***The primary purpose of your will in the Christian life is to focus the direction of your mind.***

We already referred to this verse, but now I want to look at it in a slightly different light: **Proverbs 4:23** - **“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”**

Most commonly, the heart is the mind in the Scriptures. But the first words of the verse aren't directed at the mind. The very first verb is that word "**keep.**" And it's a **will** verb. A **choice** is being called for. It is the glory of the image of God in man that we have the capacity to **choose** where we will place our minds. We aren't just driven by instinct. We can **think**. And, more importantly, we can **choose** about what we will think.

I see this wonderful little verse speaking about forming **character** and then living life **out of** that character. This great verse says the rest of the life - the "**issues of life**" - "**spring**" from the character formed in the heart. And the will begins this process - "**Keep your heart....**"

You can't use your will, in some desperate attempt to **override** your thoughts and feelings at the last minute. However sincere the effort, it will never be effective on a long-term basis. You simply can't survive for long using your will-power as a **fire extinguisher** for your thoughts and desires. But you **can** use your will to **shape** your thoughts and **shape** your desires long into the future. This is the plan the Holy Spirit will honor and bless.

The Holy Spirit wants us all to be taking a **long term view** of the pursuit of fruit and holiness. That's the whole point behind the analogy of **sowing** to the Spirit and **sowing** to the flesh. Sowing is what you do **first** in the process of growing anything - including your life. But it's how you **effect** what will ultimately be harvested.

Think about this. Obviously it's too late to change our desires **right at the moment of choice and decision**. But it **is** within our power to choose, with the Holy Spirit's transforming power, to **change what our thoughts and desires will be at future points of choice and decision**.

You change **future** desires by changing **present** thoughts. And you change the direction of your thought life by exercising your will to control and focus what you put into your mind.

#### 4) **HOW THIS PROCESS BEGINS**

I am convinced that the pursuit of spiritual mindedness begins when you're **not** normally thinking about it. The kind of spiritual disciplines you develop **now** determine how your **mind** will guide you in the future. And the things you **choose** to set your mind upon **now** will shape the **affections and desires** that will be on the **trigger of your will** in the future.

The Holy Spirit wants to form the character of Jesus in you. He wants to start right now. And he wants your involvement. The primary means of your involvement will be the use of your will to set the direction for the thoughts of your mind and, through that process, the future affections of your soul, and ultimately, the future choices of your will.

You can't get there ***instantly***. But you can ***begin*** right away. Here are some basics to remember:

First, spiritual character is measured by ***what kind of worldliness you can tolerate and compromise with*** and ***what you know you really should forsake and repent of right away***. There is no doubt about it, the ***beginning*** of spiritual character is always a growth in ***carefulness***, especially with your mind. And knowledge of this will always lead to fresh seasons of humble, thoughtful repentance.

The next step is ***surrender***. And when you think of surrender to God don't start with your ***money***. Start with your ***time***. You begin to surrender more and more time and effort to get God's truth - His thoughts - into your mind. To do this ***more*** you will always have to do something else ***less***. Hence, surrender.

The third step is a growing **contentment** and **joy** with the shape and momentum the will of God brings to your life. Remember, you can't **start** with this step. This third stage is **grown** as you persist in the first two steps. And unlike the first two steps, this isn't a stage you sense yourself initiating at all. It comes more as a gradual, **happy discovery** and the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Remember, this wonderful discovery doesn't come in the very first stages of spiritual mindedness (though I think Christians feel compelled to pretend it does!). But as the mind is increasingly given over to more of the way and will of God, the **pain** of denying self is felt less and less. We begin to discover that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. We find increasing joy in the journey. But you and I will usually have to **grow** into this.

The fourth step is **engagement** in the will of God. By this I don't just mean His will of avoiding sin and growing in holiness. I mean engagement in accomplishing God's will **in this world**. At this point I will have grown past the point of **"being good"** to **"being good for something."** As spiritual mindedness grows so does my desire to be **abundantly useful** in God's service. I will no longer delude myself into thinking I'm somehow **"serving"** the Lord just because I don't get drunk or curse or watch dirty movies. It's not enough now just to be **clean**. I will find my joy in actual **service to God's kingdom**.

O how God wants to move us along from the point of ***accepting Christ*** to ***“putting on Christ”*** - **Romans 13:14** - **“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”**

***Putting on Christ*** is the only way to rise above the lusts of the flesh. Live life out of the character of Christ. Cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Never forget this sequence. Use your ***will*** to ***diet your mind*** to ***shape holy affections***. Learn the difference between ***“Christ in you”*** (which takes place at conversion), and ***“Christ formed in you”*** - **“My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is *formed in you!*” (Galatians 4:19)**. This ***“forming of Christ,”*** with your cooperative effort, grows in power and fruitfulness and discovery by the inward work of the Holy Spirit until Jesus comes again!