

Lesson 9 – Holiness and our wills (chapter 13)

Philippians 2:13 tells us “for it is God who works in you *to will* and to act according to His good purposes.” It is the will that ultimately makes each individual choice of whether we will sin or obey. It is the will that chooses to yield to temptation or to say no. To progress toward holiness, we must understand how our wills function and how to bring our wills into submission and obedience to the will of God...on a practical, daily, hour-by-hour basis.

We have looked at the elements of the heart/soul as used in the Bible as they work together in doing good or evil:

- The mind – as it reasons, discerns and judges
- The emotions – as they like or dislike
- The conscience – as it determines and warns
- The will – as it chooses or refuses to act

These faculties were implanted in man’s soul by God, but were corrupted through man’s fall and sin. Our reason (or understanding) was darkened (Ephesians 4:17-18); our desires were corrupted (Ephesians 2:1-3); and our wills diverted (John 5:39-40). Therefore, it is incumbent upon the believer to ***renew our minds*** (Romans 12:1-2), ***set our affections (desires) on things above*** (Colossians 3:1-2) and to ***submit our wills to God*** (James 4:7).

When God originally created man, the reason, the emotions, and the will all worked together in perfect harmony. Reason led the way in understanding the will of God, the will consented to God’s will, and the emotions delighted in doing it. But with the entrance of sin into the soul, these three faculties began to work at cross-purposes to each other and to God. The will has become stubborn and rebellious and will not consent to that which the reason knows to be the will of God. Or, more commonly, the emotions and desires get the upper hand and draw away both reason and will from obedience to God.

The Word and our wills

While the will is the ultimate determiner of all choices, it is influenced in its choices by the strongest forces brought to bear upon it. But from whatever source these forces come, they reach our wills through either our reason or emotions. Therefore, we must guard what enters our mind and what influences our desires and emotions. In Psalm 119:9 David concludes “*how can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your word.*” There is absolutely no shortcut to holiness that bypasses or gives little priority to a consistent intake of the Bible. Proverbs 2:1-12 shows us that the protective influence of the Word of God comes as a result of diligent, prayerful, and purposeful intake of Scripture.

Satan’s attacks

It may be helpful to realize that while God most often appeals to our wills through our reason and understanding, Satan and sin usually appeals to us through our desires and emotions. It is true Satan will attack our reason to confuse us (DaVinci Code, evolution, intellectual rationalization) and cloud the issues, but that is only to enable him to conquer us through our desires.

Knowing that Satan attacks primarily through our desires, we should watch over them diligently and bring the Word of God to bear upon them continually. Each of us should seek to be aware of how sin attacks us through our desires and take preventative actions. But in addition to guarding and defending our desires against the world, the flesh and the devil’s attacks, we must also take the offensive. Again, using the Word as a proactive weapon we:

- Set our hearts on things above (Colossians 3:1)
- Delight ourselves in the law of God (Psalm 1:2)
- Think and meditate on pure, good, virtuous, praiseworthy things (Philippians 4:8)

Our responsibility regarding our wills is to guard our minds and emotions, being aware of influences our minds and stimulates our desires. As we do our part, we will see the Spirit of God do His part in making us more holy.

Habits of Holiness (chapter 14)

Every sin we commit reinforces the habit of sinning and makes it easier to sin. Habits are the thought and emotional patterns engraved on our minds, repeated acts or behaviors conducted with the consent of the will. As unbelievers, we gave ourselves to developing habits of unholiness. But now, we are to give ourselves to developing habits of holiness (Romans 6:19) and train ourselves in godliness (I Timothy 4:6-8).

Even though we are to deal with habits of unholiness, we must not try to do it in our own strength. It must be done in cooperation with the Holy Spirit and in dependence upon Him. Sheer human resolve has never once broken the shackles of sin. But there are practical principles which we can follow:

1. Frequent repetition – the more we sin, the more we are inclined to sin. Conversely, the more we say no to sin, the more we are inclined to say no. (Titus 2:11-12)

2. Never let an exception occur – when we allow exceptions, we are reinforcing old, sinful habits or failing to reinforce new, holy ones. We must watch for the “just this once” or “just once more” type of thinking.

3. Diligence in all areas of our lives is required to ensure success in one area – John Owen (1656) said, “without a sincere and diligent effort in every area of obedience, there will be no successful mortification of any one besetting sin.” That is the reason, for example, that it is so important for us to develop habits of self-control over our physical appetites. (next lesson, *Holiness in body*)

4. Don’t be discouraged by failure – there is a difference between failing and failure. Failure gives up. As long as we are working diligently on a holy walk, regardless of how often we fail, we not become a failure.

It is unproductive to guard our minds and emotions against that which comes from without if we do not also, at the same time, deal with the habits of sin which are within. The battle for holiness must be fought on two fronts – without and within. Then we will see progress toward holiness.