

28. God willing

February 16, 2014

A phrase among many Christians use is “God willing” or “the Lord willing.” Believers include this phrase either at the beginning or the end of their statement. It is something they will do in the future.

The person who uses this phrase is saying if it is in the Lord’s will, he or she will do a certain thing – not quite sure whether that is the Lord’s will or not, but hopefully it is. In other words, that person is not willing to step out of God’s will, but putting His will over that person’s desire. It is a very godly mindset.

However, saying “God willing” should not be some sort of Christian careless cliché, rather it should be our attitude to Him. If that is what the Lord wants and permits, that is what we would like to do. The more we get to know Him through the Word, He will reveal His will for our lives to us clearly .

James 4:13-15 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit ”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away . Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.”

With Paul, “if God will” was more than a religious slogan. It was one of the strengths and encouragements of his life and ministry. Knowing and doing God’s will is one of the blessings of the Christian life. Even in some of his letters like 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Timothy, Paul identified himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God .” Paul was not afraid to overrule his own will with God’s will.

A. TAKING A VOW

Acts 18:18-19 So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow . 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

After eighteen months of ministry, Paul decided that it was God’s will for him to leave Corinth and return to his home church in Antioch. I love how it worked. Apostle Paul disciplined Aquila and Priscilla during his time with them in Corinth. They became dear friends and such excellent disciples of Jesus that Paul took them to Ephesus. They were in charge of the church of Ephesus to disciple the men and women there.

You can say that I am one of the fourth generation Calvary Chapel pastors. As you all know, the Lord used the late pastor Chuck Smith to start a revival that was known as the ‘Jesus Movement’ from his church ‘Calvary Chapel’ in 1970s. Out of that movement, many great men of God came out. One of them was Skip Heitzig and he was the second generation group. One of the third generation pastors was pastor Robert Furrow of Calvary Tucson who came out of Skip’s church in Albuquerque, NM. Here I am, I’ve been pastoring this church for last 13 years. Now , I am privileged to be discipling three godly men in our church who are called by the Lord. They will carry the torch of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the next generation. Isn ’t that cool?

In v18, it says that Paul took a vow. Can you guess what kind of vow he took? The vow was almost certainly the vow of a Nazirite as it is mentioned in Numbers 6. Usually this vow was taken for a certain period of time and when completed, the hair which had been allowed to freely grow was cut off and offered to the Lord at a special ceremony at the temple in Jerusalem.

The purpose of the vow of a Nazirite was to express a unique consecration to God, promising to abstain from all products from the grapevine, to not cut one's hair, and to never go near a dead body.

We are not told why Paul took this vow. Perhaps it was a part of his special dedication to God during the difficult days of the early ministry in Corinth. Or perhaps the vow was an expression of gratitude to God for all that He had done for him and his associates as well as his consecration unto the Lord more than ever after he lived in the intense worldliness of Corinth. I can understand how Paul felt after I visited Las Vegas over ten years ago. As I was leaving Vegas, I felt that I needed a spiritual shower from all the filthiness I saw in that city.

In a simple phrase, the vow of Nazirite is about desiring God's will over one's will.

You may remember that Paul wanted to preach in Ephesus some two years earlier as it was mentioned in chapter 16, but he was prevented by the Holy Spirit. Now, the Holy Spirit gave him the freedom to preach in this important city, and great results were seen.

God has a special timing for everything in our lives. If Paul could have discerned it, the Holy Spirit was really saying, "wait" when he wanted to go to Ephesus, instead of "no." Sometimes God says, "wait" and He always knows what He's doing when He says it.

B. KEEPING THE COMING FEAST?

Acts 18:20-22 When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, 21 but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus. 22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.

What Paul said in v21 should not be interpreted to mean that Paul felt obligated to observe the Jewish feasts. Being in Jerusalem during the important feast, in this case, Passover, would give Paul opportunities to meet and witness to key Jewish leaders who come from throughout the Roman Empire to visit their homeland for the feast.

C. OUR WILLS BASES ON OUR PRIDE

One of our foolish thoughts is that whatever we choose to do in our lives is what God wants in our lives. Actually that is pride and dumb presumption in our parts.

On one Sunday morning, a pastor really nailed his congregation about the pride problem they are going through. After the service was over, a lady came to him and said, "Pastor, I must confess one thing. I have a sin of pride. Before I came to the church, I sat in front of a mirror and admired my beauty for an hour." The pastor replied to her, "My dear lady, I don't think you have a problem with sin of pride. You have a problem of imagination."

Our will never remains the same way as God's will all the time because we have these containers called "FLESH". Often we are driven by this fleshly desire which is against God's will according to Gal 5:16-17:

Galatians 5:16-17 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Does it mean whatever our wills are, they are always against God's will? No, as we learn the Word of God and obey His commands, God changes our desires closer to His desires. So as we walk closer with Him, our desires and wills would match with His. But there would not be the time that everything we want is what God wants.

D. GOD'S MIGHTY WIMP

We just learned about the Nazirite Vow. Among all the well-known OT people from the Bible, we remember Samson who was born with the Nazirite vow in the Book of Judges chapter 13. I don't think for even one moment that he would take the vow on his own because of his carnality, but his mother was told by the Lord that her son would be in the Nazirite vow from his birth. That is why Samson was not allowed to cut his hair.

I am sure that the U.S. Military would love to have soldiers like Samson who can improvise a jaw bone of a donkey as a lethal weapon to kill 1,000 enemy soldiers. But the major problem is that Samson was unpredictable and undependable because he could be tempted so easily.

Bold before men, Samson was weak before women and couldn't resist telling his secrets to his wife who was an enemy. Empowered by the Spirit of God in battles, yet completely enticed and slaved by fleshly temptations. He fought the Lord's battles by day and disobeyed the Lord's commandments by night by sleeping with an enemy. Given the name Samson, which means "sunny," he ended up in the darkness, blinded by the very enemy he was supposed to conquer.

The Lord gave Samson the position of a judge to rule and lead the nation of Israel to follow Him, yet he wasted his life away by disobeying the will of God.

I am not asking you to take a Nazirite vow this morning. But please consider and do this for your own soul and for the glory of God:

- **Stop pursuing what pleases your fleshly desires, rather seek to please the Lord.**

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.

- **Be filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit.**

Ephesians 5:15-19 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord

The Greek tense of the word “filled” is ‘present.’ It means that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit constantly. “What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?” some of you might wonder. It means that you are relying on the Spirit of God and directed and empowered by Him all the time rather than you running your own life.

Judges 14:8-9 After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion. 9 He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

When Samson ate the honey from the lion’s carcass, he was defiled by a dead body. And that part of his Nazirite vow was destroyed. Though Samson flirted with compromises – both with his impending marriage with his enemy and the vineyards in Timnah – he still had miraculous strength because the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.

Significantly, Samson did this stupid thing after he was remarkably filled with the Holy Spirit. This shows that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit does not automatically make us godly. A person can be wonderfully gifted by the Holy Spirit and yet very immature spiritually. A prime example would be the church of Corinth. The Bible tells us that they were gifted people by the Holy Spirit, but they were carnal to the core according to Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians.

Samson also is a good example of a carnal Christian who was mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:5:

2 Timothy 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

The Holy Spirit of God wants to come upon us and give us power. But that power is something far more important than showing off what we can do. The Holy Spirit comes upon us for the empowerment to live for God as we should and for the power to tell others about Jesus effectively. That is where we yield our will for the will of God.

Many people think that the secret to Samson’s strength was his hair. No, it was not the hair. The secret to his strength was the Holy Spirit who empowered him. Even though he was a carnal believer, because the Lord committed Himself to bring down the Philistines through Samson, the Lord gave him strength when he needed it. But when he discarded his commitment to the Nazirite vow, the Holy Spirit left him. And he became a Joe Blow in the street of Israel.

We have two biblical characters to compare:

Apostle Paul who had an awful beginning – fighting against the Lord. Once the Lord got hold of his heart, he’d never looked back. He kept his eyes on the Lord and obeyed His commands though he was jeered, ridiculed, tortured, stoned, and executed. He brought glory to the Lord.

Then, we have Samson who was born with God’s promise. Though he was the ruler of Israel and empowered by the Holy Spirit, he was a slave to his carnal body that he disgraced the Lord. If Samson could communicate with us from his grave, he would say, “There is nothing in this world worth for being disobedient to the Lord.”

E. APPLICATION

Put God's will over ours ALWAYS.

For richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, our commitment to God must be steadfast to allow God's will in our lives. This is the only way we'll be able to stand strong when tempted – the only way we'll have the strength to pass up the tantalizing bait of fame, power, money, and sensuality this world dangles in front of us.