***Walking in the Spirit, and the Will Of God
RO98-01***

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Our subject is "Freedom from Condemnation." This is section number 11 in Romans 8:1-4.

The most devoted Christian soon discovers that he has strong inclinations to violate biblical standards of holiness. There is, as a matter of fact, in each believer, a propensity to do that which is evil in the sight of God. Christians usually try to control their sin natures by cranking up a high pitch of emotionalism toward Jesus Christ, expressed in a variety of ways: by repeating His name; by singing; by some systems of self-denial where they can punish the physical body to try to keep it under control; or, by even knocking themselves out in Christian service. All of these, again, are human activities inspired by the sin nature, and they don't do much to bring the evil propensity of that nature under control. Romans 8 is, therefore, a tremendous chapter in the Bible, because it is dealing with God's provision to the Christian, which enables him to reject the appeal to the sin nature, and to obey the Word of God.

American society today, as you know, openly justifies, and in fact, seeks to dignify violations of the biblical standards of conduct. Pornography is tolerated. People can publish the material. It can be sold everywhere. Abortion is an accepted right of a woman. Divorce is considered the sophisticated thing to do, so that there is something wrong with you if you are a two-parent family, or if you are a family that has not experienced the divorce syndrome. Homosexuality is being upheld as simply an alternate lifestyle. Socialism is viewed as the epitome of human compassion.

So, we go on and on and discover that indeed our society has taken the positions that are in direct opposition to what the Bible teaches. This, of course, is the result of the fact that the Bible itself has been rejected. And once the Bible has been discarded as the final word on matters of morality, there is no stopping the downward slide into corruption and perversion as the sin nature runs amuck. That is inherent when you reject the Bible as an inerrant book, which has never been proven to be otherwise than that.

So, we are constantly getting a higher degree of shock as we discover what human beings do to human beings: from the raping of children, to the assaulting and murdering of women, and the mutilation of bodies. There's just no limit to the degradation of the sin nature once you have cut a society off from the anchor point of the Bible. And that's what's happened to us today.

**The Love System**

For the church-age believer, however, there is something better. God has provided a power system capable of controlling the evil inclinations of the sin nature in this evil age. And, as we've indicated, this is the love system. So, the Word of God has indicated that that quality of love, when produced by God the Holy Spirit within us, fulfills all of the requirements of God's moral code.

**God the Holy Spirit**

The key to this divine power system of God, which was first tested out by the Lord Jesus in His period of humanity on this earth, is God the Holy Spirit, who indwells each Christian permanently. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the believer to live in obedience to the standards of the Bible and to the will of God for him personally. Thus, the Christian is not hopelessly enslaved to the sin nature as the unbeliever is, but he may instead pursue an experience of personal godliness.

**Quenching the Holy Spirit**

Concerning the requirements for operating in the divine power system, we have thus far covered two basic points: the two negative points. First, if you want to function in this power system, the Word of God says, "Do not quench the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). "Quench" means not to reject the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that his influence is neutralized in your life. This has specifically to do with producing human good works in your life through the sin nature instead of divine good works through the Holy Spirit. Quenching the Holy Spirit does not have to do with violating moral conditions. It has to do with operating apart from Him; functioning on your own; and, rejecting His guidance.

**Grieving the Holy Spirit**

The second negative stipulation was: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 4:30). Grieving means to live in willful sin, and refuse to repent to the Holy Spirit, consequently, is distressed and saddened. The Christian lives a life of moral evil when he grieves the Holy Spirit, instead of living a life of moral righteousness.

So, either quenching or grieving the Holy Spirit places the believer into a state of carnality, and thus short-circuits the functioning of God's divine power system, which He has provided for the believer. Carnality, furthermore, fractures one's temporal fellowship with God the Father, and prevents the Christian from functioning then on the love of God. At this point, all forward progress in spiritual maturity is halted, and if you persist long enough in carnality, your spiritual maturity will go backward. That is a practically unknown truth among church people today. They all have, generally, the impression that if they have been in church a long time, and if they've been Christians a long time, and even if they're participating somehow in the church program, and attending, they do not seem to grasp that once you enter the status of carnality, you can do all those things, but you're now on a backward scale.

**Spiritual Reversionism**

So, suddenly people who do not realize that they have been in the state of reversionism, and have moved down many degrees in the quality of their Christian life, still keep living and acting and functioning as if they were up at the top. And they have long since left their mountain-peak experience. They have long since left super-grace status. And one of the terrible things about reversionism is that it's a form of spiritual insanity. And people who are insane always see things backwards. Things come out in the wrong perspective. And that's the problem with spiritual insanity. You don't realize how far you have fallen from the grace standard of God, and how far you have moved backward in your Christian life, and you think that you have move forward. You think that you have advanced to better positions. And pretty soon, things are coming apart, and things are not going so well. The prosperity you enjoy; the functioning that you enjoy in your life; and, the forward motion – everything is coming apart. And finally, when you get bruised and beaten enough, you may stop and look at yourself and realize that something in the way of grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit has torn you down to a level that you had long since matured beyond.

**Walk in the Spirit**

In addition to these two principles, there is a positive requirement, and we begin there today, with this positive requirement for operating in the sphere of God's divine power system. This one is enunciated for us in Galatians 5:16, which says, "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. So, our keyword here is the word "walk." It looks like this in the Greek Bible: "peripateo." This word refers to one's daily conduct. It is in the present tense, which indicates that this is a constant pattern of life that we are called to follow. It is active, which means that you must determine and choose to live by means of the Holy Spirit's guidance. And, it is again, as the previous two were, an imperative. It's a divine command.

**The Techniques of the Christian Life**

The words "walk in the spirit" are an expression of means; that is, it indicates to walk by means of the Holy Spirit in obedience to His guidance – that guidance which He gives through the Word of God. Walking by means of the Holy Spirit means that you use the techniques of the Christian life: the technique of the confession of sin; the technique of faith rest; the technique of Bible study; the technique of temporal fellowship; the technique of operating on divine good point thinking; and, the technique of prayer.

The specific connotations of "peripateo" walking, we can again find illustrated from its use in other places in the Bible, and we'll look at a few of those.

Acts 21:21 is one use of this word: "And they are informed of the you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children neither to walk (there is the word) after the customs." A group of Jews in Jerusalem was accusing the apostle Paul of teaching people not to live in obedience to the principles of the Mosaic Law. That's a good example of the word. "Peripateo" is walking according to certain concepts.

Romans 6:4 also uses this word: "Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism unto death; that is, Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father. Even so, we also should walk in newness of life." We are to behave, Paul says, as those who are born-again.

He uses the word again in Romans 8:4, our passage today that we are looking at: "That the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us who walk (who conduct themselves) not after the flesh, but after the spirit" – walking according to the Holy Spirit, not according to the old sin nature.

In 1 Corinthians 3:3, we read: "For you are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions. Are you not carnal, and walk as men?" Here the references are to walking as if you were a complete unsaved unbeliever.

Then there is Ephesians 4:17: "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord: that you henceforth walk not as other gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds." The activities of daily life should not be according to the emptiness of the unbelievers' minds. That's what he means by "the gentile mind."

Colossians 2:6: "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" – walking by the commandments of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 4:5: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are outside, redeeming the time." Here it's a lifestyle that is characterized by divine viewpoint wisdom relative to unbelievers in your daily life.

Then is 2 John 4. Here's a final one: "I rejoice greatly that I found of your children, walking in truth, as you have received the commandment from the Father.

There are a few verses just quickly jotted down that use this word "walk." And here, in the last one, John is talking about the delight of walking in the truth, not walking in that which is falsehood.

So, as this word is used in the Bible, it simply means your lifestyle. And walking by means of the Holy Spirit is living moment-to-moment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, using the doctrine that you have stored in your human spirit.

So, these three systems (these three requirements) enable the Christian, when he is obedient to them, to live under the divine power system that God has provided, to maintain fellowship with the Father, and thus to be a spiritual Christian.

Now this functioning under the divine power system is described in Ephesians 5:18 as being "filled with the Spirit:" "And be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." "Filled with the Spirit" is our word "pleroo." "Pleroo" is a word that here means "to be controlled by." It is in the present tense, so it is constantly being controlled. That's the status which is expected of a church-age believer. It is passive. It is God the Holy Spirit who does this for you. And again, it's an imperative. It is a divine commandment – to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

You cannot secure this filling of the Holy Spirit through prayer. There is a song in our songbook that conveys this kind of mistaken notion: something about: "Spirit of God, fill me now." And it is a song that is in the form actually of a prayer. You can pray until you're blue unto the ends of your eyeballs, and you will never be filled with the Holy Spirit by praying for it. There are other people who think you can be filled with the Spirit (come under the Spirit's control) by self-crucifixion – by finding something that you really like to do, and not letting yourself do it. It may be something that you really like to eat, and you don't allow yourself to eat that thing.

**Lent**

People love to do this at the period preceding the 40 days before Easter called Lent. They think that somehow God will be pleased, and you will gain merit, and He will shower you with blessings if you deny yourself something. So, you come to the period of Lent, and you say, "I just love tortillas, and for 40 days I won't touch a tortilla. I just love wienerschnitzel, but no wienerschnitzel for 40 days." And they think that God just sits up in heaven and exudes His joy over the fact that you have self-denied yourself, and you think that, thereby, you have come under God's control. That is nonsense. The whole system of legalism is useless. The only way that you can be filled with the Spirit is to not grieve the Holy Spirit; not to quench Him; and, to walk in accordance with His directions to you. And if you break any one of those three, you repaired with the confession to God the Father of that sin, and thereby again come into the status of spirituality where the Spirit of God has you under His control.

**Personal Holiness**

The goal of personal holiness is the objective that we're talking about. And when you do step out of the path of holiness, it is of concern to the reasonable Christians who want to return to that fellowship. Most Christians do not understand the effects of their sin on their own life, or the means of victory over that sin. The sin nature promotes many carnal techniques for dealing with one's evil, but which are useless with God. And that's the thing that you must be careful to avoid. It is so simple. It is so clear in the Word of God.

**Emotional Responses**

However, churches and preachers have befouled this area of truth also, so that they have people chasing rabbits in trying to come under God's blessing. You cannot do this by cranking up a feeling of sorrow and self-contempt for what you did. That is one system – to get people to have a great sense of sorrow and of great contempt for themselves; or, to bestir a heavy emotional outpouring in the form of tears, and maybe even an external wailing. Do not kid yourself that there are not, all over this Metroplex area, churches at this very moment with preachers in their pulpits who are deliberately moving toward the objective of causing people to have an emotional upsurge at the end of that service, so that they may feel that they have now come into a relationship with God's Spirit. And the people go out as detached, out of temporal fellowship, as when they walked in.

**It's not by Shedding Tears**

There is a very large church, not too far from us at this very moment, which has at the front, a place where people come forward to, in order to demonstrate that they want to get right with God. And we're not talking about unbelievers. We're talking about Christians. And all along the front, there are boxes of Kleenex. Why do you think that a church would spread a series of Kleenex boxes up at its front railing? Most of you are smart enough to figure it out. It is because that preacher is zeroing in on that congregation, to get them so emotionally high, and so emotionally bestirred, and so desirous of getting right with God, that they're going to be brought to tears. That's blasphemy. And it's done on a widespread basis, because these poor fellows have never been to a school where they learn what their job as ministers were. They never were told, "Your job is to do what the Bible tells you to do: feed the flock of God upon the Word of God so that you have strong Christians who can meet the crises of life. They can meet life; they can meet death; and, they can meet it all with grace. They can meet the high times; they can meet the low times; and, they can meet it in stride. But it takes capacity of the Word of God to do that.

No, you're not going to bring the sin nature under control by shedding a lot of tears. Nor are you going to bring it under control by making promises to God that you'll never do that again – you'll never do that terrible thing again if He lets you off this time. How many times have we seen people invited to walk forward, down an aisle, in order to promise God that certain problems in their lives, and certain sins in their lives – they won't do them anymore? I mean, people can be really weird when they use the sin nature guidance as to how they're going to get it all straightened out with God again. You're not going to bring the sin nature under control by promising never to do it again, because God knows better. You will do it again.

Nor are you going to get off by making a vow of money; a vow of Christian service; or, a vow of penance to pay for your guilt. You can give all the money you want, and you can perform all the acts of penance you want, but it's never going to change. You can wear yourself out in Christian service activities. That's not going to bring it under control.

Nor are you going to bring it under control if you read the biography of an exemplary Christian, and try to imitate his ways and experiences. That's a favorite way. It does nothing for your sin nature control. That's a carnal technique. God has provided a way through the Word of God, and through the Spirit of God, and that's all that's going to control it.

You cannot control your sin nature by developing positive mental attitudes, which are expressed in external exuberance: clapping your hands; dancing in the aisles; and, walking around, grinning like a baboon all the time. There are some Christians that just believe that that external exuberance is the way they're going to come close to God, and to have the Spirit of God in their lives. And I can tell you that there are services all over the Metroplex right now where the preachers are stalking the congregation, and they're systematically moving in on them to get the clapping going; to get the exuberance up; to get the grinning, baboon, mouthful-of-teeth faces put on; and, then to get them well-exhausted in their exertion, so that they can go home and say, "Oh, didn't we have a wonderful time in the Spirit?"

None of these are biblical methods, and therefore they do not solve the problem of broken fellowship, and restoration to spirituality, and thus to progress in holiness. Those who try to solve their enslavement to the old sin nature by these methods simply remain enslaved, and they have to try something else. Holy living is never the product of human energy; human determination; or, human ability. Holy living is the product of the Holy Spirit leading a believer who's willing to be led, by means of the doctrine which that believer has stored in his human spirit.

**Confession of Sins**

So, it is only confession to God the Father of our known sins, and of our human good, that restores our capacity to live a godly life, and to grow in the spiritual maturity. It's the functioning of 1 John 1:9. The only thing that God values and blesses in us is what God the Holy Spirit produces in and through us. That's a big thing to learn. That's the only thing that God values – what He first puts into us, not what you crank up and bring to Him.

So, the issue in personal holiness is to imitate God, as Ephesians 5:1 tells us, and not to imitate the unbeliever as 1 Corinthians 3:3 cautions us not to do. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to imitate God, and to avoid imitating the unbeliever.

**Being Filled with the Spirit**

So, what we're dealing with here, to sum it all up, is being filled with the Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit means quench not the Holy Spirit; grieve not the Holy Spirit; and, walk by means of the Holy Spirit. When you fail to do that, repair the break by confession of the sin that broke that fellowship, and get yourself back on track. That puts you in the position for growth into spiritual maturity.

What we're dealing with are two basic laws. There is the law of sin and death. That is the law that refers to the old sin nature. That is the thing that drags us all down all the time. It drags us down to hell as unbelievers; and, as Christians, into carnality. This law of sin and death is countered, however, by another law, and that is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; that is, the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus. It counters the law in death relative to salvation, and it counters the loss in a death relative to our carnality. It enables us to rise to heaven, and it enables us to rise to spirituality. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is a permanent effect. It cannot be reversed. It permanently overcomes the law of sin and. So, suddenly the Christian who has been dragged down to grovel in the dirt, finds that he has wings to fly.

We can tie this up today with a consideration of a few important concepts concerning the doctrine of the will of God, because that is what we're talking about. We don't want to live as mavericks. We don't want to live as rebels. We want to live as those who are walking in conformity to the law of God – those who are walking in conformity to the leading of God the Holy Spirit. . . .

**The Doctrine of the Will of God**

We believe the doctrine of the will of God.

1. **The Directive Will of God**

First of all, there are certain types of God's will to consider. There is the directive will of God. This is the sovereign choice of God. This is what God has decided to do. We call it His directive will. This is the plan that God has designed for you in various facets of your life. And he does have a plan.

1. **The Permissive Will of God**

Then secondly, there is the permissive will of God. Man's negative volition is permitted to operate contrary to the directive will of God. God says, "This is what I want you to do." But you come and say, "No, I don't want to do that. This is what I want to do, and God permits you. That is His permissive will. Not God's justice disciplines this rebellion, and He permits it to run its course. Of course, the permissive will of God is also included within the sovereignty of God. He has brought that into account.

1. **The Overruling Will of God**

Third, there is the overruling will of God. The overruling will of God supersedes the directive will, and supersede the permissive wills of God. God directs circumstances so that He overrules Satan's plans. . . . God takes, however, every choice in the life of a believer, and He makes it work for good. That's what the famous Romans 8:28 tells us: "All things work together for good for those who are the called ones according to God's purpose. So, the overruling will of God finally comes into play. And even when we play the fool; scarred up our lives; and devastated ourselves in some way, because we have been rebellious against the will of God, and we have been stupid enough to listen to our society, and to go along with the trends about us, and brought ourselves into some disastrous situation, God comes in, and He reweaves the life. He reweaves the pattern, so that it almost seems as good as the original.

Here's an example of these wills. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, we have a directive concerning marriage: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship has righteousness with righteousness, and what communion has light with darkness?" God's directive will – What is it? "Do not marry an unbeliever if you are a Christian." What is God's permissive will? You come along, and you marry an unbeliever anyhow. OK, God will let you do that. You come along, and you say, "Oh, I'm going in for evangelism marriage: marriage evangelism. I just feel called to it. I'm going to marry this bum and bring it to the Lord and convert him. And so you go into marriage evangelism. The Bible says, "Don't do that. Do not marry somebody who is not a Christian."

In 1 John 3:23, we have another example: "And this is His commandment: that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ." The directive will of God here is that we should believe in Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that it is the directive will of God that all should be saved. Now God's permissive will permit you to exercise your negative volition against the gospel, and then divine justice will condemn you.

You have another example in Ephesians 5:17-18 of the functioning of these two wills: "Wherefore, be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." It is the directive will of God that every Christian should be filled with the Holy Spirit – and that it should be under the control of the Holy Spirit. However, it is under the permissive will of God for you to refuse to be under the leading of the Holy Spirit. That's why 1 John 1:9 said, "If you confess your sins" is the third-class condition, which means: maybe you will; and maybe you won't. But if you choose to do it, here's the consequence either way. So, the directive will is for you as a Christian to be filled with God. God will permit you to bypass that, and you will pay the consequences.

An extended passage of Scripture concerning the prophet Balaam is in Numbers 22:12 through Numbers 31:8. In this, there was a directive will of God to Balaam. He was asked to go and curse the people of Israel for a certain price. And the directive will of God was, "You shall not go." And the directive will of God was, "You shall not curse." Now the permissible of God came into play, and Balaam went anyhow. But then the overruling will of God came in, and it prevented Balaam from doing it. Now if you remember the details of the story, he was offered the sum of money, and he said, "Yes, I'll go curse them. I'll set this up." And then when he got into position to pronounce his curse, he opened his mouth, and nothing but blessing flowed out. The overruling will of God countered what he was going to do.

So, you have these wills: the directive will; the permissive will; and, the overruling will of God.

**The Three Basic Elements of the Will of God**

There are three basic elements in the will of God, and this is how the divine power system works in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

1. **The Operational Element – Be Filled with the Holy Spirit**

Number one is the operational element. What does God want me to do? That's a question we all must ask. And this is the same for every Christian. Basically, what God wants every Christian to do is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and build a spiritual maturity structure in your soul – to be yielded to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If you do that, everything else falls into place. That constitutes yieldedness to God. And, of course, He has provided us with the means to do that through the Scriptures; the local church congregation; the pastor-teacher Gift; the indwelling Holy Spirit; our living human spirit as a storage warehouse; technique of confessing sins to keep us on the track of receptivity; the fact that we have universal priesthood to approach God; and, all the facets of our soul, which can be brought under control of the Word of God. And He has made it possible for us to function on the Word of God in this way. That's the operational element. What does God want me to do? Be filled with the Spirit.

1. **The Viewpoint Element – Divine Viewpoint**

That is the viewpoint element. What does God want me to think? How does God want me to look at things? That's involved in the will of God? Well, this also is the same for every believer. The viewpoint that God wants you to function on is what we refer to as divine viewpoint. Divine viewpoint comes from the full knowledge of the Word of God, which is stored in our human spirit. From divine viewpoint of Bible doctrine comes the spiritual growth that develops our spiritual maturity structure. And that viewpoint is the key to all other growth.

1. **The Geographical Element – Where Does God Want Me to Go?**

Then there is a third factor in our personal walk in the leading of the Holy Spirit and into the will of God. The first one is the operational element – learning the Word of God. The second is the viewpoint element – functioning on the divine viewpoint of the Word of God. And the third is the geographical element. Where does God want me to go? And this is the element that Satan uses very effectively to bring many a functioning Christian down. How many Christians were on track: prospering; growing spiritually; and, moving forward in the things of the Lord, and all of a sudden a company said, "Hey, I'll give you a job out here across the country. I'll give you lots of more money if you'll come and take the job." And these poor Christians have said, "Oh, I'd love to have the more money. I could give more to the Lord's work." And they had all the rationalizations, but the number one question they did not answer was: where does God want me geographically?

The sure sign that God is not moving you geographically someplace else is if you have to step down in your spiritual heritage – if when you get there, you find yourself denied the spiritual instruction; the spiritual development; and, the spiritual enlightenment that God has given you before. He doesn't step down now. You can go down the street – make that much of a geographical change, and have that destruction. In the grace of God, here and there, a Christian will be jerked up; alerted to what he has done; and, he backtracks. And in God's mercy, he gets back to where his maximum blessing lies. For most Christians, once they make the move, they're devastated. They can't make the change back. And for all eternity, their enjoyment of eternity, the effects are there. For all eternity, it will have an effect upon them.

So, the geographical element is different for every believer – the specific place that God wants you to live; the specific church that he wants you in; and, the specific pastor-teacher under his influence, he wants you to be nurtured. The Christian who is filled with the Spirit will respect the spiritual heritage he has, and he will know that this is something that God has provided for him. And he will not be so arrogant (and here's where the breakdown comes) to say, "I can do it on my own. All I have to do is: I can take my Bible, and I can study it, and I can learn it. And you may be a multi-graduated, many-degreed personality. And I can guarantee you that without being in the presence of the right pastor-teacher in your case, you will go exactly no place.

So, this geographical element is very important in the will of God. And one of the greatest tragedies at the Judgment Seat of Christ is when Christians discover that they have a huge mass of rewards, and all of a sudden, it just stops. It just comes to a drop-off, and they're going to look at the point in time, and they're going to realize: "That's when I cut out of the place where I was really being brought into confrontation with the realities of the Word of God – I was being put downwind of myself, so I really knew what I was. And I wasn't being complimented into thinking more highly of myself than I ought to. I was being cautioned and warned. I was being alerted to what God had, and that's where I resisted. Somebody crossed me. Somebody denied me, and I cut out. And I thought I was doing so well. My family life went on; we went on; our money went on; and, our activities went on. We even found ourselves in other religious activities. All was wonderful. But look. Up to this point, I had a full warehouse. Since then, I've been a pauper spiritually. Think carefully. It's a grim thing to discover at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

We'll close with reviewing briefly the mechanics of divine guidance. We have an example in Acts 11:1-4, with the experience of Peter: "And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the gentiles had also received the Word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, 'You went into men uncircumcised, and did eat with them.'"

Peter has been brought under the criticism by Jewish Christians that he went up and he ate with non-Jewish believers. As you know, the Jews would have nothing to do with gentiles. Gentiles were viewed as dogs. And here, for the early years of the church (something like maybe the first seven years), there were nothing but Jews in the Christian church. It was all Jews. It is entirely a Jewish heritage. Suddenly, Peter goes, and he's sitting down with a group of gentiles in the household of Cornelius, and he even sits down and eat with them.

So, the apostles hear of this – of the conversion to Christianity of gentiles, at Caesarea. And the legalists attacked Peter. Peter meets this criticism by relating the facts of God's leading relative to the gentile Christians here in the house of Cornelius. So, here are some factors as Peter made the decision as to what was the will of God for him.

**Prayer**

Verse 5: the first thing Peter turned to was prayer: "I was in the city of Joppa praying. And in a trance, I saw a vision – a certain vessel descending, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners, and it came even to me." Peter said, "I was in a status of prayer. God brings us information in some way. Peter had a vision. God brings up information in a variety of ways. He gives us the guidance as the result of prayer. And He guides situations to give us the answers that we need. We do not seek guidance to God's will through prayer, however, if God has given us some direct commandment in the matter. We do not, for example, come into an emotional relationship relative to a potential marriage with somebody who is not a Christian. If you are a Christian, God has already told you, in 2 Corinthians 14, "You can't marry that person." So, you don't pray about marrying some unbeliever. But you do pray that God would guide you to the person that he has prepared you to marry. Hebrews 4:16 tells us to come to that throne of grace to seek the answers so that guidance.

So, the first thing in finding the will of God is to be a praying Christian. Now those of you who are not in the habit of prayer, you're just about zilch guidance. You're not going to get very much guidance on how to live in your marriage. You're not going to get much guidance on how to conduct your home; on what to do with your career; or, anything else. If you're not a praying person, you're pretty well zilch on this business of being led of the Holy Spirit right off the bat.

**Guidance through the Mind**

Then verse 6 tells us that there was guidance to Peter through his mind: "Upon which, when I had fastened my eyes, I considered (I mull this thing over) and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creepy things, and fowls of the air." Peter said, "I considered," meaning "I observed it." He thought about the matter. This requires a mind which is free of spiritual callouses, so that you can think objectively. You cannot find the will of God when you think emotionally. You cannot approach God emotionally. That distract you from the mind of Christ. You have to be able to think objectively. God does not guide us in the heat of emotion. God leads us by guiding our thoughts objectively to His thoughts.

Then, in verses 7-10, we see that Peter, after prayer, and after letting God guide his thinking, also found guidance through the Word of God that he had learned. Doctrinal principles came into play. Acts 11:7 says, "And I heard a voice saying unto me, 'Peter, arise. Slay and eat.' But I said, 'Not so, Lord, for nothing common or unclean has at any time entered into my mouth.' But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed, do not call common.' And this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven."

Peter received a divine revelation directly here from God. He heard the words. The revelation of God today is, of course, to us through the Bible. There are no more prophets in the world. No matter how many times your charismatic friends stand up and say, "I want to prophesy, because God has just said something to me," that's a bunch of baloney. There are no prophets. The gift of prophecy is gone. And there's one thing that a prophet did primarily. He brought revelation from God. And if you have some friends who are spiritually disoriented, who are insisting that they're receiving prophetic utterances from God, then you suggest to them that they should write it down, because if they're receiving prophecies from God, that's Scripture, and we should want to preserve it. The revelation of God today is complete in the Bible. God leads through His words, as you have previously stored it in your human spirit. And God has given us the grace system that enables us to do that.

**Providential Circumstances**

Then, verse 11 says that there was a providential circumstance that guided Peter: "And behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me." These three men arrived even while Peter was still on the rooftop in Joppa. They had left Caesarea previously, sometime before the vision. God was directing the men so to act; thus, a providential circumstance was created. And that is one of the great elements of God's directing us. This is the way the Holy Spirit works tremendously.

Now in verse 12, the Holy Spirit comes directly into the picture: "And the Spirit let me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house." Now God the Holy Spirit made it very clear in some way to the mind of Peter, that he should accompany these men to the household of Cornelius. The Holy Spirit never guides today contrary to the Bible. He never guides us apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit. He never guides us apart from a knowledge of doctrine which we have previously stored. But then He does guide. God the Holy Spirit will burden your heart. He will just push you in the right direction. And if you are sensitive, you will go.

**Guidance through Comparison**

In verses 13-15, there was the guidance through comparison: "And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house who stood and said unto him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter, who shall tell you words by which you and all your house shall be saved.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them as on us at the beginning." Here was a frame of reference. The phenomenon of Pentecost was repeated among the gentiles at Caesarea, so that this confirmed to the gentile Christians that they were as much a part of the body as the Jewish believers.

Ephesians 2:14 told about that – two different groups: the middle wall of a partition being removed, and they being made one body, And here it was actually taking place.

So, God set up an occasion here for Peter to make the comparison. He had a basis (a "frame of reference," we call it) to confirm that we are moving in the direction that is compatible with God's mind.

**Guidance through Scripture Memory**

Finally, verse 16 is guidance through Scripture memory: "Then I remembered the Word of the Lord – how he said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" Peter remembered the Word of God and said, "Here it is. It's happening again. The Acts 1:5 statement of Jesus is being executed right here before our very eyes." And Peter, at the right time, recalled the Word of God. Today, of course, we have a whole Bible that we can consult to confirm what we are doing.

The guidance into the will of God is not all that great a mystery if you know the Word of God. You will be amazed how much the Word of God is the key to guidance into the will of God in all kinds of elements of your life. And the Spirit of God uses just exactly that in the pattern in which He did here with Peter. He brings those providential circumstances together. He gives that direct leading – that sense of burden from the Holy Spirit. He gives you a frame of reference by which to make these judgments. And He gives you the Word of God to confirm and to conclude what He is doing.

So, the Word of God says that the requirement is: be filled with the Spirit. When you are that, then you will not serve the law of sin and death, but you'll serve the law of the Spirit of God and of life in Christ Jesus.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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