

Title: A New Will

Series: Made New

Scripture: Genesis 4:1-15; Philippians 2:12-13

Date: May 11, 2025

Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Philippians 2:12-13

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, "Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature."

As we continue to explore how the resurrection changes us as humans, God desires to transform every aspect of our lives through holistic formation into the image of Jesus (2 Cor 3:18). The various dimensions of the human self are not autonomous and disconnected. Spiritual formation is the formation of the whole integrated person. The heart, the mind, and the will are integrated, and God transforms each part together.

What is the will?

- We use "will" in various phrases that communicate determination, strength, and choice. Such phrases include "a strong will," "willpower," "the will to survive," "where there's a will there's a way," "free will," and "God's will."
- The will is the human capacity and power for volition, choice, and action, in which we can exercise good or evil by originating things and events that would not otherwise occur.
- The will is closely related to desire, the intense feeling of wishing, wanting, longing or craving. Our will enacts desires, whether good or evil desires.
- As a result of the Fall in Genesis 3, the will, like the heart and the mind, has been marred by sin and is continually inclined toward sin.

Genesis 4:1-8

- Most of us know the story of Cain killing Abel, but do we remember what God said to Cain in Genesis 4:6-7 before he killed Abel?
- Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, were completely different people. Cain is a farmer, while Abel is a shepherd. Both bring sacrifices to God, who accepts Abel's sacrifice but rejects Cain's. While the details are vague, the adjectives used to describe the sacrifices of each reveal why God accepted Abel and not Cain. Abel brought "the best of portions of the firstborn lambs" while Cain presented "some of his crops." Cain is angry that God rejected his sacrifice.
- God, in his grace, comes to Cain to reveal his power to rule over his desires and control his will. Although God rejected him, Cain had the opportunity to change his behavior by enacting his will to choose the good.
- The Lord forewarned Cain that right action would be rewarded, but a wrong course meant allowing sin the opportunity to destroy him.
- Sin is described as an animal "crouching at the door" of Cain's life, "eager to control" him. God made Cain aware of his will, his ability to choose between good and evil. Although sin is powerful, Cain could rule over the power of sin.
- Like Cain, humans can choose good or evil. Our desires and will are tainted by sin, but with the power of the Holy Spirit, we can rule over our desires and choose to do good and not do evil.

How do we work with God to work out our salvation? What did Jesus teach us about the will and the ability to choose to do the will of God? God desires to transform our will through our partnership in two areas related to the will.

1. Obedience

- Cain failed to obey God's desire for him to choose God. Jesus taught us that humanity can will or choose good over evil. Jesus conquered evil desires through obedience to God in the temptation narrative in Matthew 4.
- Jesus also obeyed God by accepting the cross despite not desiring it. Jesus chose God's will over his own. In Luke 22:42, Jesus prayed, *"Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."*
- In Philippians 2:8, Jesus *"humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."*
- Obedience desires and chooses God's will over my own will.

2. Self-Control

- See Galatians 5:16-26 and 2 Peter 3-7 where self-control is listed as a fruit of the Spirit and a gift from God to those who are saved.
- Other verses on self-control include Proverbs 5:22-23; 16:32; 25:28.
- *Self-control is the conquering of self-love by surrendering control to the Holy Spirit.* Self-control comes down to answering this question: *Do I love myself more than I love the way of Jesus?* Ultimately, self-control is only possible through surrender.
- Like Cain, God comes to us to tell us we can rule over the sinful desires and actions in our lives. His Spirit empowers us to control our desires and choices to choose good over evil.

Søren Kierkegaard, a 19th-century Danish philosopher, wrote many prayers about his deep need for God the Father, whom he described as "the One, who is one thing and who is all!" He wrote this prayer, recorded in *Spiritual Classics* by Richard Foster,

So may You give to the intellect, wisdom to comprehend that one thing; to the heart, sincerity to receive this understanding; to the will, purity that wills only one thing. In prosperity may You grant perseverance to will one thing; amid distractions, collectedness to will one thing; in suffering, patience to will one thing.

This week, put this transformation into practice through:

More Prayer

- Use Philippians 2:13 as a guide to pray that God would transform your desires and will. Daily pray something like this, "God, continue to work in me to change my desires and empower me to please you."

More Bible Engagement

- Meditate daily on a different phrase from Philippians 3:10-11. Break the verse into six phrases: I want | to know Christ | and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. | I want to suffer with him, | sharing in his death, | so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!