

Teaching the Preacher

by Warren Wiersbe

The will of God is a bridge that sets us free to be, to do, and to grow in Jesus Christ.

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Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal anecdote about his father's dislike for home movies. He compares this to how some people approach reading the Bible, seeing it as a series of scenes and rules to follow. However, the speaker emphasizes the importance of maturing in faith and living by principles rather than just rules. He then shares an example of Priscilla and Aquila inviting Apollos into their home and teaching him about the Messiah and the Holy Spirit, freeing him from being controlled by the past and giving him hope for the future.

Transcript

My father did not enjoy home movies. Maybe you don't. Whenever the projector would be set up, he would always get a chair close to the door, and then when the lights would go out and nobody was watching, he would just slip out.

Once, I recall, he did it on his hands and knees. I think sometimes when people read the Bible, they look at it somewhat like home movies. The passage that we read this morning from Acts chapter 18, here we have a series of scenes.

First Paul is on the scene, then Paul leaves, then Priscilla and Aquila, then Apollos, and first we're in Corinth, and now we're in Ephesus. When we have our home and foreign mission conferences here at Moody Church, of course many of our missionaries bring films or slides, and by the time the week is over, the Moody Church family is walking around blinking at each other because we have been all over the country and all over the world watching these scenes and these people. But I trust you won't sneak out on this passage in Acts chapter 18 because behind it is a very important principle.

Don't just think in terms of Paul in Corinth or Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus or Apollos going to Corinth. Look behind the whole thing and you'll find a very wonderful principle. It's the principle of living in the will of God.

Paul puts it very firmly in verse 21 when he says, I will return again unto you if God will. And by the way, when you read the New Testament, you find Paul says this quite often. If the Lord will.

I recall the first time I saw the initials D.V. in a letter. Someone had written and said I will do thus and so. D.V. What does that mean, D.V.? T.V. I knew, but D.V. this was something different.

Of course I remember my Latin where it means if God wills. That's a good thing to put in your letters or in your life. If the Lord will.

Now at this point somebody is liable to say, now just a minute preacher, when you start talking about the will of God, I'm not interested. Because perhaps you have the idea that the will of God is a wall. God has a plan for your life and this plan is a wall.

God builds this solid wall around you and there you are and you walk around inside this wall. That's not what the will of God is at all. Now the devil wants you to believe that's true.

So many times young people come and say, you know, if I knew the will of God, I might accept it, but I'm afraid it might be something miserable. You can't conceive of a loving Heavenly Father willing something miserable for his children. My friend, the will of God is not a wall, it's a bridge.

Do you find people here in Acts 18 who are walled in? Just take a trip down to Corinth and here's the Apostle Paul. Is he walled in? Here's Priscilla, here's Aquila, lovely husband and wife team who were such good helpers to Paul. They weren't hemmed in.

Here's Apollos, he came from Alexandria, went to Ephesus, left Ephesus, went to Corinth. Do you find them walled in? No. The will of God is not a wall, the will of God is a bridge.

The will of God opens your life to the freedom of all that God has planned for you. I want to talk with you about that this morning. In this paragraph that we read today, the Lord is explaining to us three freedoms that we have in the will of God.

And he wants us to experience these freedoms, and he wants us to enjoy these freedoms. God is saying to us on a very cold winter day in the city of Chicago, you are not hemmed in. I haven't put you into a straitjacket.

I have not shackled you and bound you. Quite the opposite, I've set you free. And I've given you these wonderful freedoms to experience and enjoy and to have this kind of enlargement in your life.

It's rather interesting to listen to unsaved people talk about Christians, because the average unsaved person has the idea that we Christians live such unhappy lives, that we're behind locked doors, and we can't do this, and we can't do that, and we can't go here, and we can't enjoy that. And they say, you know, we who aren't Christians are really free. We can live it up.

Do you call living it up freedom? That's the worst kind of bondage. No, it's the unsaved person who's in bondage. It's the unsaved person who has a wall around him.

He brought me up out of a horrible pit, says the psalmist. The unsaved person is walking around in the narrow confines of a horrible pit. He thinks it's life, it's death, a living grave.

And so you and I in Jesus Christ have freedom. Having been set free from sin and death, we have freedom in Jesus Christ. And let me share with you from this paragraph in Acts chapter 18 three very wonderful freedoms that God wants you to experience.

First, the freedom to be. You say, Pastor, what are you talking about? I'm talking about the freedom to be. Have you noticed how much conformity there is in the world today? You take our wonderful young people in America today.

We have a number of subcultures today. I try to watch the youth scene and notice what's going on. And many of our young people are saying, we don't want to be like the adults.

We're not going to conform. You won't make cookie cutters out of us. We're not going to be conformists.

We're going to live our own life. And so they get off into their own fellowship and they all become like each other. You ever notice that? And you've got a certain subculture over here and they're all like each other.

And you've got another subculture over here and they're all like each other. There's a tendency to conform. Now, in Jesus Christ, we have the power to be.

When I read this paragraph, I say to myself, isn't this amazing? Look at the variety of people who are involved. Here's Paul, the great theologian, the great apostle, the great missionary. There he stands.

And here's Apollos, the great orator, the great scholar from the city of Alexandria. Eloquent in the scriptures. When Paul came to Corinth, he said, I didn't come with the wisdom of men or with the eloquence of men.

I came to you in fear and trembling. When Apollos came to Ephesus, he came with eloquence and with wisdom and learning. And here's two different kinds of men.

And then you've got Priscilla and Aquila. I would like to preach a sermon someday about this husband and wife team. First you find them in Rome and then the emperor issues an edict and all the Jews have to leave Rome.

And so in the providence of God, they came to Corinth. In the providence of God, they were tent makers and Paul was a tent maker. And so the three of them got together and a friendship was formed that lasted a long, long time.

They leave Corinth and they go to Ephesus and then Paul leaves them in Ephesus and he goes to Jerusalem and then up to Antioch and he takes off and goes back to Galatia. And then they leave Ephesus and go to Rome. When Paul wrote to the Romans, he said, greet Priscilla and Aquila.

Then they went back to Ephesus again. When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he greets them once again. Here's a lovely husband and wife team.

They hadn't been to the university in Alexandria. It's possible that one was a Jew and one was a Gentile. We don't know, but there's some hints.

And here they were, just a lovely husband and wife team who opened up their home to people. You see, God can use them. God can use the orator and God can use the theologian and God can use the housekeeper and God can use the tent maker.

And God didn't say, you know, Apollos, you ought to be like Paul. He didn't say, Aquila, why aren't you smart like Apollos? He didn't say, Priscilla, you're a woman. We can't use you.

We have the freedom to be. God got a hold of four people and he said to them, I want you to be all that you can be in Jesus Christ. I don't want you to be like each other.

I want you to be like Christ. Now this is the difference between following Jesus Christ and being the disciple of some great person. I don't want to be misunderstood as I say this, although I probably will be.

We have across our evangelical world today some very strong leaders and we're thankful for them. But God never wants us to be like them. As I travel to different places and speak at pastors conferences and denominational meetings, I find a group here who are worshipping this great man and a group over here who are worshipping that great man.

And with them it's a test of fellowship. Have you read his books? Have you been to his seminar? Have you seen his films? And if you say no, you're ostracized. We thank God for all the great leadership that he's given to the Church.

I think I tell no secret when I say to you, I am no man's disciple and I want no man to be my disciple. The purpose of this pulpit is not to get people to become like Warren Wiersbe, God forbid. The purpose of this pulpit is to introduce people to Jesus Christ.

And here's the beautiful thing, when you get to know Jesus Christ and you start living in him, you become more like yourself and more like him. And he just brings out of you all that he put into you. And you're more and more yourself, your best self, your greatest self, your most dedicated self.

I have noticed that when people follow people, it doesn't always bring out the best in them, it brings out the worst in them. And they become imitators, they become carbon copies, they pick up not the essentials but the accidentals, they pick up the eccentricities of somebody's life. The freedom to be.

Now if you don't know Jesus Christ as your Savior, all of this is locked up down inside. But if you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, all of this can come out. I like the way the Apostle John puts it in the first chapter of his gospel, but as many as received him, Jesus, to them gave he the authority to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

The authority to become, first a child of God, and then to grow into becoming a man of God, a woman of God. The power to become. This is why the Holy Spirit came.

Acts chapter 1 verse 8, you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me. You shall receive, you shall be. That's the Christian life.

You wake up tomorrow morning, you come to the Lord, and you say, Lord, I've got to receive. If I receive, then I can be. You and I as Christians do not have to follow and imitate the activities and the actions of men.

We just fix our eyes upon Jesus Christ, and as we walk with him, the Holy Spirit down inside just begins to develop us. And we have the freedom to be. My friend, don't be ashamed of who you are.

Now there are times when I'm ashamed of what I do, and you are too. But don't be ashamed of who you are. God made you.

You see, what you are is God's gift to you, and what you do with it is your gift to God. And so when you stand before the mirror, don't say, well, you poor big hunk of no talent, you don't have any personality, you aren't very beautiful, and people pay as much attention to you as to a post office drop box. Don't talk like that, please.

You get up and say, I'm one of God's children, I'm made in his image, his spirit lives within me, he's got a purpose for my life, we're going to fulfill that purpose together, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, I have the freedom to be. That's the basic freedom. Now a second freedom comes to us in this paragraph.

We not only have the freedom to be, but we have the freedom to do. Just imagine that you are some watcher or holy one or a cherub or seraph off in a cloud someplace, and God says to you, keep your eyes on that little Jewish fellow down there in Corinth, watch the Apostle Paul. And so there you are, people watching, Apostle watching.

And you get your binoculars ready and you're watching the Apostle Paul, and after a few days you say, he's the most inconsistent man I've ever seen. He comes to Corinth and preaches the grace of God, and then he takes a Jewish vow. How about that? A couple of years before, he tried to go into Ephesus and God stopped him.

God said, don't you go to Ephesus. Now Ephesus is wide open and they're begging him to stay. He says, sorry, I can't stay, I'll see you again later on.

When he made his first journey and his second journey, he took people with him. When he went from Corinth to Ephesus, he took Priscilla and Aquila with him. When he goes on his third journey, he does it alone.

A man was preaching a sermon in the hearing of the great Dr. G. Campbell Morgan. That would be a difficult thing to do. And the man made the statement that somebody was as inconsistent as a weather vane.

And of course he was thinking, you watch the weather vane, it goes around. Mr. Morgan said afterward, I can't think of anything that's more consistent than a weather vane. The weather vane always tells you which way the wind is blowing.

Now the Apostle Paul, to some people, looks very inconsistent. He talks about liberty, he takes a vow. He talks about opportunity, he walks right past a closed door.

He talks about fellowship, takes off on a trip all by himself. Inconsistent? No, not in the least. We Christians not only have the freedom to be, we have the freedom to do.

In the rule of God there are principles that we live by, and these principles are much higher than the mere actions of men. When people are young and immature, you have to do this. You have to say to a child, we fish with worms, but we don't eat them.

And we don't go near the fire. You've got to tell this to a child. But as a child begins to mature, he learns basic principles.

He stops living only by rules and regulations, and he lives by principles. We had an interesting thing happen this past week. I was telling my Sunday school class about it.

The pastoral staff had gone out to lunch, and on the way home my car stopped. At that point the senior pastor of the Church was absolutely useless. I can start a car and I can stop a car and I can keep it on the road, but don't ask me to fix it.

I went to set the emergency brake one day and opened the hood. But you see, one of the men on our staff knows something about cars, and so he took over the situation. Somebody watching that would say, oh, Whispy must have resigned.

He's not fixing that car. He couldn't fix that car. You see, there are higher principles that move into life.

Paul lived by a certain set of principles. If you want to read them in detail, 1 Corinthians 9. This vow has some problems to it. I don't think we can answer all the questions that are involved.

Some people say that Paul took a Nazarite vow. Remember back in the Old Testament, a man or a woman could take a Nazarite vow for 30 days or 60 days or for life. And you couldn't touch a dead body, and you couldn't drink anything from the vine, and you let your hair grow.

Apparently Paul had taken some kind of a Nazarite vow. The first thing you must remember is that this vow was not commanded. It was voluntary.

Nowhere did God command it. If you had come to Paul and said, Paul, the law says you have to do this, he would have said, I won't do it, because I don't live under law. I live under grace.

I heard about a preacher who went to a church to preach, and at that church you always wore a robe in your preaching. He'd never done this before. And so the elder said, well, now our pastor always wore a robe.

The preacher said, do I have to? The man said, well, of course not. He said, then I will. That was Paul's attitude.

If the law said you have to do this, he'd say, I don't live under law. But the law said you may do this. It's voluntary.

He said, I think I will. Now I don't think that Paul had a strict Nazarite vow for this reason. If he did, he could not have participated in the Lord's Supper, because you use the fruit of the vine at the Lord's Supper.

And I can't conceive of the Apostle Paul abandoning the Lord's Supper. It meant too much to him. But Paul had taken some kind of a vow.

He had the freedom to do so. It's interesting to point out in the Word of God, we have the freedom to give up our rights. We do not have the right to give up our freedom.

Paul gave up some of his rights. He said, I'm going to take a vow. For what purpose? I don't know.

Maybe in praise and thanksgiving, because God spared his life, because God blessed the work. I don't know. But I'm not going to criticize him, because we have the freedom to do.

And the time has come for some of us to move out of the kindergarten stage of don't do this and don't do that and don't do something else, unless it's a clear warning against sin, and to move perhaps into the graduate stage where we live by principles. Paul said, I am become all things to all men that I might by all means win some. That's not compromise.

That's not cowardly compromise. When Paul was with the drunkards, he was a drunk. When Paul was with the polluted gamblers, he was a gambler.

No, of course not. Paul was simply saying, I identify myself with the people I'm trying to reach. How foolish to go into the synagogue and act like a Gentile.

How foolish to go among the Gentiles and act like a Jew. Now, this is a hard life to live. It means sacrifice.

It means paying a price. It's much more difficult than rules and regulations. When you live on the level of the principle of love, I will do nothing that will keep you from coming to Christ.

I will do nothing that will keep you from growing in Christ. My friend, when you live on that level, it's much harder than carrying a rule book around. And that's the level Paul lived on.

I'm excited about this because God gives to us the freedom to do. It's motivated by love. Not motivated by fear.

I'm afraid of breaking a rule. It's motivated by love. It's the kind of thing we want to see happen in our children, our students, that they grow out of the necessity for discipline into the kind of self-discipline on the inside.

It's a wonderful day when one of your children says, No, I won't do that, not because my parents may hurt me, but I may hurt my parents. That's a great place to be. We have the freedom to be and the freedom to do.

There's a third freedom that God has given to us, and that's the freedom to grow. When you're living by a little rule book, you'll not do much growing. I'm not against rules.

In every church, in every school, in every family, there are those who really couldn't function without rules. They haven't quite grown into the place of self-discipline yet. I'm not against rules.

I am against anybody saying he's spiritual because he keeps the rules. The Pharisees used to keep their rules, and you could hardly call all of them spiritual. We have the freedom to be and the freedom to do and the freedom to grow.

Now let's look at Apollos for a moment. I like this man. Later on, when the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth, he said, Some of you are saying I'm for Paul, and others of you are saying I'm for Apollos, and a third group is saying we're for Peter.

The Apostle makes it very clear that he's not in competition with Apollos. He was different from Apollos. We hear this among Christians every once in a while.

Don't you just love the way so-and-so preaches? Yes, I do. I wish I could preach like him, but I can't. And for me to imitate him would be hypocrisy.

There are times when I have heard men preach and I've gone away saying, Oh my, if only I had that gift. But God makes us different. So here's Apollos, eloquent, educated.

Alexandria was a center for learning. This is where the Septuagint was translated down in Alexandria. At one time they had a library of 700,000 volumes.

And Apollos was a learned man, and he was a brilliant man, an eloquent man, a fervent man. But you know what? He was living in the past. All he knew was the baptism of John.

You see, God has revealed his truth to us in stages. God didn't throw a book down from heaven and say, Here it is, folks. He couldn't do that.

Jesus said to his disciples, I have many things to tell you, but you can't take it now. As soon as you can take it, I'll tell you about it. We teach our children this way.

No, God said, I'm going to reveal it to you gradually. And God gave us the old covenant law, which was when the nation was in its childhood. And then the law led to the coming of John the Baptist.

And John said the Messiah is coming. So Jesus came. Then the Holy Spirit came.

And Jesus said the Holy Spirit is going to guide you into truth. And so we have an expanded revelation from God. It's a beautiful thing.

Now God has completed his revelation. The book is finished. But God hasn't completed his illumination.

When our Pilgrim Fathers came to this country, their pastors said, For we believe that God hath yet much more light to shine forth from his word. And he still does. Here comes Apollos, and he's in the synagogue, and here's Priscilla, and there's Aquila.

And Apollos is a teacher, and they say, Brother, would you like to say a word? And he gets up and he begins to preach. And Aquila looks at Priscilla, and they realize that this fellow has the beginning, but not the end. He had the foundation, but not the superstructure.

He had the key, but he hadn't opened the door yet. And so after the service, they didn't do what some people do. Oh, I've had the learned saints of God jump on me after services.

They didn't do that. They came up and they said, Why don't you come home and have dinner with us? He said, I think I will. Priscilla and Aquila were always inviting somebody home.

And so they got home and they fed him a lovely meal. And while they were eating, they said, You know, we appreciated your message. He said, Well, thank you.

He said, You had three points to your message yesterday. You should have had a fourth. Well, what's that? The Messiah has already come and the Holy Spirit has come.

He said, What? They said, Let's explain it to you. And they sat down and they opened up the word of God and they taught Apollos. And you know what happened? Up till that time, Apollos had been controlled by the past.

He was looking at the future in a rear view mirror. He was shackled to the past. All he knew was John the Baptist, and John was dead.

All he could talk about was a memory, history. And Priscilla said to him, Look, we've got something better than a dead prophet. We have a living Savior.

And Apollos said, This is what I have been waiting for. The reason Apollos could grow was because he was a humble, honest man. Suppose he had looked at these two people and said, Sir, what do you do for a living? Well, I'm a tent maker.

I don't think I can learn much from a tent maker. I have a graduate degree. I have two graduate degrees from the University of Alexandria.

Madam, what is your training? Well, we've listened to the Apostle Paul. Well, he didn't talk like that. It's amazing how the Spirit of God teaches us from one another.

People have come in to see me about their problems and we've talked together and prayed together and they have taught me. The reason Apollos was able to grow was because he was honest and open and humble. He didn't come to them with a closed mind and put blinders on his eyes and stoppers in his ears.

He was open to truth. Some people are afraid of truth. Some people are afraid they might learn something.

And it might upset some petty little theory that they have. Don't be afraid of truth. Our God is a God of truth.

And Jesus said, I am the truth. Thy word is truth. The Spirit is truth.

Don't be afraid of truth. We have the blessed freedom to grow. I remember one day many years ago when I was walking down the street congratulating myself that finally I knew all there was to know about the Bible.

And then I woke up to the fact that I was very stupid about the Bible. Everything fit into place and then I found this didn't fit into place so I had to rearrange my thinking a little bit and then something else came along. And the more you grow, the more you learn, the more you're disturbed, the more it kind of sticks you.

And then you grow a little bit more. We have the freedom to grow. I'm glad that our Christian faith is not solitary confinement in chains.

I'm glad that we can grow spiritually. God can get a hold of us and produce the fruit of the Spirit. We can grow intellectually.

We can learn how to think better and understand better. We can grow morally and we can grow emotionally. I feel so sorry for those people who aren't growing.

It's one of the greatest freedoms in all the world, the freedom to grow. But you see, the freedom to grow goes along with the freedom to do and the freedom to be. They all interact with each other.

As you and I are becoming what God wants us to become, we do what God wants us to do and we grow the way God wants us to grow. And God uses a Priscilla and an Aquila and an Apollos and a Paul and Peter and Charles Spurgeon and David Livingstone and D.L. Moody, all of whom were different and yet each of whom glorified the Lord. Isn't this the kind of freedom you want? I don't think anybody here today who knows Jesus Christ wants to become a cookie-cutter Christian.

I don't think you want Moody Church to become a computer that turns all of us out on the same cycle. I think we want to enjoy the privilege of the freedom to be, just to be what God wants us to be, our best self. We're not talking about anarchy where a person becomes less than himself.

And the freedom to do, to live by spiritual principles and by love. And the freedom to grow and to move into whole new areas of spiritual life and service. I want this for myself.

I would not want to be your pastor if I were going to be confined and just bring to you warmed over TV dinners that were used three years ago. Would you pray that this coming year all of us might live in the freedom of the will of God? The freedom to be and the freedom to do and the freedom to accomplish all God wants us to accomplish. Those of you who don't know Jesus as your Savior, you have no freedom at all because you need Christ.

And those of us who are saved, if we're out of the will of God, we have no freedom. That's the most miserable place in the world, out of the will of God. You can't grow and you can't do and you can't be.

And so as we sing our closing hymn, our invitation is simply this. If you don't know Christ as your Savior, you'd like to enter into the freedom of the will of God. If the Son shall make you free, said Jesus, you'll be free indeed.

So you come and give your heart to Christ.

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