

Introduction

In this series we have identified a number of life issues that can cause us problems in our relationship with God, ourselves and with others. All of the subjects are simply effects of a root cause which is a battle of wills; self v God. The effects can be quite devastating or they can be things we accept and allow, or somewhere in between. Our aim of this series is to bring into the light that we should not be accepting the status quo and how we can apply God's winning wisdom.

There are 2 basic principles that underlie the series Peter & I are speaking on:

1. We were made by and in the image of God
2. Our self will is easily distracted from God's will

...and 2 important states of mind to adopt:

1. Everyone has to battle between self and God; so I must not judge others
2. My achievements are made with God; e.g. There but by the Grace of God go I

Who are we? In the image of God

Let's start by reminding ourselves of who we are. A good place to start is at the making of man as told in Genesis 1 26-27:

Then God said 'Let us make man in Our image according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'.

So God created man in his own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

So what does this mean now?

That's great. We can celebrate that God has made us to be thinking, feeling and imaginative beings. We should also recognise that God made us to be interdependent beings. That means we do make our own decisions, we have free will but we are at the same time dependant on God our Father for His love, hope & joy.

There were 2 terms I just used;

- **Independent:** This means self-governing, self-determining or self regulating
- **Interdependent:** This means mutually supporting or mutually dependent. Being reliant on each other.

A picture that may help to understand this is that of children with their parents. The children make their own decisions have their own characters and become more confident and independent as they grow. They still need their parents, parent or guardians as they grow and their parents still need them. Boy do we know that when it is not in shape with what we want of them!

The problem of Self Will

This takes us straight into our first problem. You may not even have noticed it? I would love to have written 'children and parents'. That would picture there a simple problem free life where we all get on with each other, meet & make great decisions on life partners and don't suffer from any accidents or illness. Life is not like that and everyone knows families of differing shapes and sizes; both parents, 1 parents, 2 parents but not the original 2 parents, no parents but 1 or more guardians instead or perhaps local authority appointed carers.

It is clear to me that we live in a broken world and that there are a great many reasons for it. Just one of those reasons is putting self interest first and that often results in conflicts of interest, upset, arguments between people and even within a person.

We are not going to solve the world's problems as individuals or even as larger groups. We can though take responsibility for ourselves and in so doing we will find peace, purpose and persuasion. In the image of God we can be content and at peace in our lives. In the image of God we have something to live for and we are persuaded that God's way is the only way and will be persuading others.

As we were made in the image of God do we not have a responsibility to look after the body, mind & spirit he has given us?

It is possible that you've just answered that question with a 'Yes, but'! A part of us recognises that that we fall short of God's requirements of us. Another part is very persuasive in saying to us 'oh, but and 'treat yourself' and we flirt with these thoughts. We allow them in because they give us an instant sense of pleasure in our minds, even before we've acted on them. That is where the trouble starts and that is the war within.

The apostle Paul spoke on this subject and notes the constant battle. Romans 7 v 18:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

A lady called Catherine, known for her love for God and her love for others said:

'Our self will is so subtle and so deeply rooted within our own selves and defends itself with so many reasons, that when we try to fight it we lose in the end. We end up doing our will under many covers – of charity, necessity or justice. But God's love will stand naked and without any cover since it has nothing to hide.

How do we deal with our self will?

Now that we've had a little look at who we are and seen that there is a basic problem of conflict between God's will and our own will it would be good to know what the answer is. Would you like to know?

Well, when we will look at the answer we realise that it is one of those answers where we can be told what it is but not understand how we get to that answer.

Indulgence of Self

Let us look then at:

1. The answer
2. Why we struggle to achieve the answer
3. Some practical ways to achieve the answer

1. The answer (given by Paul and Catherine)

The apostle Paul continued his recognition of the problem and gave this answer: Romans 7 v24- 8 v1

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

I then saw others who were fighting against their evil inclinations and forcing themselves to resist them. But I saw that the more they struggled against them, the more they committed them. So I said to them ‘You are right in lamenting your sins and imperfections, and I would be lamenting with you if it were not for the fact that God is holding me. You cannot defend yourself and I cannot defend myself. The thing to do is renounce the care of ourselves unto God who can defend our true self; only then can God do for us what we do cannot ourselves’.

2. Why we struggle to achieve the answer

When we choose the path of independence we are choosing to be self-governing. That means we want to have control and often put our own interests first; as exemplified earlier by Catherine who talked about our self will defending itself with many reasons including good acts.

Now some people can be extremely self-disciplined. They avoid excesses and appearing to keep on a straight path. Internally however they will still be battling away knowing that they have weaknesses, areas where they struggle and areas where they don’t meet their own self-decided standards. There will also be areas where they don’t know they have weaknesses or mistake them for strengths.

Simply put, none of us are perfect.

We are given an example is the apostle John’s Revelation with the words to the loveless church:

Revelation 2 v 2-4: *‘I know your works, your labour, your patience and that you cannot bear those who are evil.’ (these are good things – right?) ...*

... going into verse 3: ‘and you have persevered and have patience and have laboured for My name’s sake and have not become weary’ (again, good things – right?)

Verse 4: *‘Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.’*

What is mankind’s first love? The question should really be ‘Who is mankind’s first love?’ The answer is that the God of all creation, the God who made us in their image, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is love.

Indulgence of Self

The people described were working hard to be God's people but they were trying to do it by their own efforts. In so doing they had, without realising it, turned away from God's love. They were independent instead of being interdependent on Him.

When we are independent we open ourselves up to indulging in ourselves. When we do that we can lose the clarity between what is good for us and what is bad for us. We have a blurred line between looking after our bodies, mind and spirit and over indulging in any one or more of those parts of us.

There are some obvious indulgences that we would recognise in life. We may over indulge in food & drink that we put into our bodies, in having too much rest, perhaps too much leisure or in doing too much. Less obvious indulgences over indulgences may be in our choices of what we watch on TV or in what we choose to read.

I remember an episode of Vicar of Dibley where Dawn French, who played the vicar ended up having several Christmas dinners. The cause was that she was unable to turn down the kind offers of invitation. The scene ends in her being carried in a tractor bucket back to the vicarage.

Although it was funny, I have noticed that we are in a culture where it is ok to over indulge. Companies encourage that because they want us to buy their products and services. We probably encourage each other because it gives us an excuse to do what we want. That is not a new thing to what we see as modern society but an old problem. In the story of Israel we are informed that in the time of the Judges (17v6 and repeated at the end of the book 21 v25)

'In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes'.

There is an external pressure or culture to do what is right in your own eyes. We have seen this in the excesses of greed through corrupt banking professionals, MP Expenses, obesity and binge drinking. The extreme excesses are very obvious and far too many to list but we should remember that we don't suddenly become excessively greedy, lazy, proud or ignorant. It is a process and one that is started by allowing ourselves to flirt with indulgent thoughts, to avoid facing up to an issue and to avoid seeking God's truth or direction for us.

3. Some practical ways to achieve the answer

So how do we renounce, or give up, the care of ourselves and give over to God?

- i. The first step is to **recognise** that we must be wholly reliant on our creator.
- ii. Second is to daily **ask** God to sift our desires
- iii. Third is that we must **allow** Him to do that sifting; to
- iv. Fourth is to **accept** God's plan for us over our own plan for us.
- v. Share the burden. We do not always know or want to accept what is good or bad for us. If you're struggling then chew it over with God, read bible passages and talk to someone who has a deep love for God and wise counsel.