

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

## R<sub>2</sub>L – Resolved to Live: In the Heart of God’s Will (Part 2)

Acts 13:1-5

1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.

How was your resolve this week? As you began last week, what did you purposely intend to accomplish? Did you aim at anything, and if you did, did you hit it? Of course, ideally, your resolve should have begun with an included throughout the hearing of the word of God and the doing of the will of God. So I ask you again, how was your resolve this week?

Perhaps it would be prudent for me to define what is meant by the use of the word “resolved.” The word resolve is defined as “a resolution or determination made, as to follow some specific course of action with the full intent of accomplishing that action.” So, what did you resolve this past week, and if you did resolve anything was it that which was of eternal value? As lofty and grandiose as it may sound, I believe that 1 Corinthians 15:58 offers us a fantastic summary of what it means to be biblically resolved to that which is then of eternal value. There we read:

***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.***

As we continue this morning in our study of Acts 13:1-5, Let me remind you that we are looking here at the early church’s resolve to live in the heart of God’s will. God’s will, that which is a seemingly elusive course of action that God has for not only individuals, but also for His church. How many of us have asked the question in a variety of forms, “What is God’s will for my life?” If you have been involved and at all concerned about the course and direction of Hope CBC, you may have asked the question, “What is God will for our church?” And, generally speaking, whether it is of our individual lives or the life of a church, if things are going well, we assume that we are in the heart of God’s will; and if we find that things are not going so well, we assume that we are not in the heart of God’s will. There is a problem with this kind of thinking. For if the early church had operated on such a premise then we would not be meeting here this morning. Up to this point in the history of the church, the church has already undergone a number of persecutions, persecutions that seemingly spread thin the concentration of Christians. Just back in Acts 12, one of the key leaders of the church, James, was killed and another key leader, Peter, was imprisoned.

No, no beloved, the circumstances, the happenings to a church or to an individual cannot alone be the basis of whether or not you are in the will of God. I do believe that difficult circumstances cause us to more carefully examine where we are with the Lord, sometimes revealing sin in our lives, but difficult circumstances in themselves are not the sole determination as to whether or not you are in the will of God. Both people and churches who have been

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faithfully following the precepts and practices of godliness have suffered for their actions. Look at Job, or Jeremiah, or Paul and of course even Jesus Himself. Persons who practiced holiness, people who were in the middle of God’s will and yet their circumstances were not easy. And the converse is truth, that there are people in churches who have not been faithfully following the precepts and practices of godliness have at times greatly prospered.

So the question for us is this, “How can we know whether we or our church is in the heart of God’s will?” We can answer that question in part by examining how the early church, the church found here in Acts 13, knew that she was in the heart of God’s will. And this is where we began last week examining what the early church valued, what they deemed as of most importance. And so my basic premise is this, if we can determine what the early church valued and then adopt and incorporate those values into our church life as well as our individual lives, then we can know and will know that we are in the heart of God’s will. And I want to know that I am in the heart of God’s will.

I sincerely believe that far too often people and churches concern themselves with what we call the “gray areas” of determining or knowing God’s will. Does God want a church to sell its facility and move to another location? Does God want me to marry this specific person or to wait for someone else? For questions like these you will never find “the” answer for in the word of God. Yes, we are to pray about such things. Yes, God does have a will or a plan for such things. But sometimes we spend too much time and too much effort trying to determine those specifics and thus fail to do what God has clearly revealed for us to do in His word. Thus, a church that is preoccupied with accomplishing God’s revealed will, things like preaching the word of God, devoting itself to fellowship, praying with and for one another, being committed to the partaking of the Lord’s supper, and things like that, this church will find itself in the heart of God’s will. Everything else needful will be revealed in time. The same is true for us as individuals, if we will preoccupy ourselves with what we know to be God’s will; to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ via His Word; a consistent prayer life; consistent and meaningful fellowship with the saints; the daily pursuit of becoming more and more like Jesus; to be sanctified, set apart from the world; to demonstrate, and reveal myself to be different from this world because of Christ in me - as we practice such things the rest of God’s will that we do not yet know will become known.

But all of this begins, and all of this began for the early church, with a resolve, “a determination to follow a specific course of action with the intent to accomplish that action, and that resolve is to value what God has revealed as most important. The early church accomplished this resolve. And now we are examining from our text four such resolves of the early church that allowed her to be in the heart of God’s will. We look at the first resolved last week, let me review that with you quickly as we then move on to the other resolves that we are to know, adopt, implement, and carry out fully in both our personal lives, as well as in the life of our church.

## **Value #1: The Importance and Influence of the Word of God (1)**

*Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*

The church is to value the importance and the influence of the word of God. The church had both faithful men who were prophets and teachers as well as faithful hearers and doers of the

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Word of God as evidenced by Luke’s placing this resolve to the Word of God first. And all of this reminds us; *if we cannot justify an action, behavior or attitude based upon the word of God, we have no business indulging it, engaging in it, or entertaining it.* And thus, to serve as a safeguard against such things, God has given to the church prophets and teachers, proclaimers and explainers of the word of God, So that, in the words of 1 Timothy 4:16, we might watch our life and doctrine closely.

And so, what we find in the early church, is a commitment, and a resolve to the importance and the influence of the word of God upon the entire church, made up of individuals who also value the hearing and the doing of the word of God. We value the importance and the influence of the word of God, the word of God taught, the word of God applied, the word of God executed in our lives. If this be your value, if this be what we value as a church, then we have a guarantee that we will find ourselves in the heart of God’s will. This was the very demonstration, the very practice of the early church as seen in Acts 13. This leads us to the second value:

## **Value #2: The Implementing of God’s Revealed Will (2)**

*While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”*

This second point is closely related to our first point. We are to implement – that is to fulfill or carryout the will, the purpose, the revealed plan of God. But we cannot implement, bring into use, and live in the heart of God’s will apart from knowing this will of God apart from plunging ourselves into the Word of God. And, as will come to see from our text in just a moment, the early church busied herself doing what she knew to be God’s will and thus did not concern herself so much with those things of which she was uncertain.

It is clear from our text that to know what God wants you to do in anything, you must be constantly exposed to God’s Word. Oh that is was so simple, right? For those of us who live in the “real” world understand that knowing God’s will and doing God’s will are not one and the same. We can sit in a service like this and hear God’s word taught, the precepts and the principles of God’s word explained, the applications of God’s Word given by which we might implement what we have heard, and yet leave without any intention, any resolves, any real plan of attack when it comes to actually doing God’s word or doing God’s will.

And so, to borrow from the language of James, how do we move from being merely “hearers” of God’s word to becoming effectual “doers” God’s word, those who implement God’s will as revealed to us in the Bible? As we look here in Acts 13:2, I believe we see the church valuing the implementation, the putting into practice, the will of God, and from what we see in our text, this involves something in addition to hearing God’s word, which is our first value; to hear God’s word recognizing the importance and influence of it; but now we see our additional responsibility; to implement God’s will. And I think I can demonstrate to you two responsibilities we in order to implement God’s will in our life and in the life of our church.

First, and this should come as no surprise to us, but if we are to implement God’s will in our lives, the doing of things God’s way, ***we must deny ourselves.*** We must deny ourselves; that is to say, we must go against our natural tendencies and desires. Now I need you to understand this, that in our natural state, in our flesh, when we are left to ourselves; when we live apart from the Word of God; we want to do things that please ourselves. Because of sin and its effects in our lives, our natural inclination, our default when we wake up in the morning and as we

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go through the day, is not to please God, but it is to please ourselves. It is a fight, a resolve to turn our hearts and minds to the will of God. It takes constant determination and our flesh does not like that. We do not wake up wanting to please God, we wake up with either a default to please ourselves or a resolve to deny ourselves and seek delight in God. And so, we play games with this, often justifying sinful behavior, justifying why we don't have to do God's revealed will because we are tired, or because someone else did something to us and thus claim that our anger, our negligence of God and His people, our complacency, our attitudes and actions that are contrary to God somehow please God. But as Romans 8:8 states so clearly, **“those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”** As we delve into our text, we will find a church that by and large was not in the flesh, was not seeking to justify her behavior but rather simply behaved as the Word of God and the Spirit of God directed. And so, if we are to be resolved to live in the heart of God's will, it begins first by hearing God's word, valuing His precepts, plans and principles for our living and then next we must deny ourselves so that we can live according to His will rather than defaulting to our own sinful wills. If we would truly know the heart of God's will then we must learn to deny ourselves. The question now is where do we see this in our text.

Notice verse two where we read, **“they were ministering to the Lord and fasting...”** The word, **“ministering,”** speaks of a person engaging in the service of others. It was used to speak of public servants. It is a person who is working for the well-being others. It came to be used of ministers, those who serve God as pastors, teachers and all who serve in the church. The word speaks of working for others and in this case the primary “other” is the Lord. The Lord was being publically, demonstrably served. The second word used here is the word, **“fasting.”** I find it interesting that this word, **fasting,** is used twice in our text; here in verse two and again in verse three. We are not a people accustomed much to biblical fasting. I heard someone say that Christians today are more interested in feasting than fasting. Not sure if it is true, perhaps it is - we love our food, but what of this thing of fasting?

With regard to fasting, we know that our Lord Jesus taught it back in Matthew chapter 7, in the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus spoke of how we ought to fast. We know that the Old Testament speaks much of fasting. But for some reason we tend to avoid it. I would say to you that the Bible does not “command” fasting per se but it does expect that we would fast. And just what is the point of fasting? If you are following along with this first key point then you will understand that fasting is a way by which we deny ourselves. When we fast from eating, we deny our body food and if we are doing this for a biblical reason, we replace the time we would be eating with some spiritual exercise; be it prayer or Bible reading or some work of ministry. Fasting does not have to be merely with food, it can be from something else that we enjoy that is not already sinful behavior. Beloved, do not fast from sinful behavior; stop sinful behavior. Here we have the church focused on serving the Lord and taking time to deny themselves – but to what end? As our text will reveal they are seeking to know the will of God. They are resolved to know the will of God. And it is a combination of hearing God's word; of being taught and applying His Word; and then denying our own fleshly tendencies, wants and desires so that we might find ourselves in the heart of God's will. To do this, there will be a denial of self.

But there is something else; a second responsibility if we are to implement the will of God. Not only must we deny ourselves, but we must purposely, intentionally submit ourselves, resign ourselves to, give ourselves over to the controlling, ruling influence of the Holy Spirit. **We must submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit.** Looking back at the beginning of verse two look at how

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Luke begins this explanatory narrative saying “**while**,” – “**while**” they were ministering, in the middle of their service to God, while they were fasting, in the process of denying themselves. Then we read that the Holy Spirit spoke to them. Can you imagine? The Holy Spirit conveyed the will of God to the Church. And it was in the process of implementing what they knew to be God’s will, while they were serving the Lord, worshipping Him and while they were denying themselves that they got further instructions, further insight into what God would have them do. God is about to send them out to the uttermost part of the earth, but they do not yet know that. All they know is that they are serving the Lord and they are denying themselves and as they do, they hear the Holy Spirit speak to them. If we would find ourselves in the heart of God’s will, it begins as we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit. If you are not doing what you know God wants for you; if you are not denying yourself; if you are more concerned about your job, or your favorite TV show, or getting some rest rather than fighting against those desires of the flesh, resolved to know God through His Word, to fellowship with His people, to actively engage in serving others as unto the Lord, then you will not and cannot be in the heart of God’s will. God’s purposes for your life will be elusive and dark. What is the correction for this? Be resolved to do what you know God has revealed, then the Spirit will direct you rather than you flesh. As the Holy Spirit is about to reveal to the early church, there will be a whole new opportunity for service. One of the lessons that we glean from this verse then is that worship and service are married together – they are the two sides of the same coin. We cannot worship the Lord without actively serving Him, and we cannot rightly serve Him without worshipping Him.

Now the direction of the Spirit for the early church was straightforward and simplistic here in Acts 13:2. The Holy Spirit said, “**set apart for me Barnabas and Saul,**” **for the work to which I have called them.**” Notice that it is God who calls as well God who enables or gives gifts for the calling. We have already seen how God puts His people right where he wants them, whether it is Philip on the desert road to speak to the Ethiopian Eunuch, or the scattering of God’s people to other cities because of the persecution of church. Here in verse two, the verb, “**set apart,**” is used in reference to both Barnabas and Saul, or Paul. It means to “set a boundary around;” “to mark off or set a limit.” What you might not readily know is that this verb is used three times in reference to Paul. In Galatians chapter 1:15, Paul is said to have been separated “marked off” to God at birth. In Romans 1:1 we are told that Paul was set apart for the gospel. And now, here in Acts 13:2, we see Paul being separated for a specific work, a specific service to God. It is God who separates us out and then gives us a work that we must do.

Notice the end of verse two the description of this setting apart. It is “**for the work to which I have called them.**” Did you catch that? Ministry is “work”. The word means “a toil; a consistent labor.” Just as your employer has called you to work, to your occupation, that job that you consistently give yourself to and to which you realize if you do not do; you are outside the will of your employer, we are called to consistently give ourselves to the revealed will of God. And that is work, isn’t it? Ministry is work. I am not just talking about what you think the pastor does. Some of you could be easily overwhelmed by all of the study, or the interaction, or the patience, or the counseling, or whatever it is that you perceive as being part of the pastoral job description. Yes that is my ministry. But your ministry, your service to God and to His people should be no less a “work” than it is for the pastor. Beloved, if you are not working at a ministry; at a service for God then you are not serving God. Whatever it is God has called you to, it is work, it will not just come easily, your flesh will fight it, you will at times be too tired, ill prepared, not feeling

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appreciated, feeling inadequate for the task, but you are still set apart for a work for God’s glory. The early church valued the implementing of God’s will and as they were in the midst of doing what they knew God called them to, that is serving the Lord and fasting, more of God’s will was revealed by the Spirit. And then they heeded the call of the Spirit. And so, if we would be in the heart of God’s will we must busy ourselves with what we know God has revealed, submitting ourselves to the call of the Spirit.

Let us read verse two again and as I do, notice how the church was implementing, putting into full practice, resolved to be in the heart of God’s will by doing first what they knew to be God’s will, ministering and fasting and that this was followed by God revealing a clear direction to the church:

*While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”*

The church was resolved to be in the heart of God’s will by doing God’s will. As we close this second point, let me make some necessary application; reminding you that to know the will of God you must be already doing the will of God. What does that look like? How can we know if we are in the will of God in order to further learn the will of God? I want you to think of a stepladder; a three tiered stepladder. To move further along into the will of God, we must take each of these three steps in order to know and do the revealed will of God. Some of this is simply a review of what we have already considered but to know and do God’s will there is a steeping, a seeking and a staging.

Step one – ***steeping your mind in the Word of God***. As the tea bag steeps in the hot water, so is the Word of God to steep in our minds, allowing full essence and influence of its flavor to permeate our thinking. In Rom 12:2 we read:

***And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.***

According to Romans 12:2, in order to understand and embrace what God commands in His Word requires a renewed mind, a mind that does not think like and does not depend upon the ways of the world, but one transformed by the Word of God, steeped in the principles and truth of the Scriptures. Beloved, if we do not have a renewed mind, if we do not highly value and thus devote ourselves to the hearing and heeding of God’s Word, I promise you, we will distort the Scriptures in order to justify our own avoidance of the radical commands for self-denial, for sacrificial love toward one another, for uncompromising purity, and thus fail to seek the supreme satisfaction found in Christ alone. God’s authoritative will for us is found only in the Bible. And 2 Timothy 3:16-17 makes a profound statement concerning the all-inclusive ability of God’s Word to change our thinking saying that the Scriptures are inspired by God and make the Christian ***“competent, equipped for every good work.”*** Notice that it does not say for just some good works but for “every good work.” Notice that it is not our past, not our failures, not our logic nor our successes, but being steeped in the Word of God alone that makes us competent, adequate

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and complete for “work.” Thus we must resolve to spend more time, energy and devotion in meditating on the written Word of God. That is the first step to knowing and doing God’s will

The second step in knowing and doing God’s will is ***seeking to apply the Word of God***. We need to put into practice the precepts and principles of God’s truth to new situations or circumstances that may or may not be explicitly addressed in the Bible. As we noted before, the Bible nowhere tells you which person to marry, or which job to take, or what even brand of orange juice to drink to the glory of God. So how do I know God’s will in these areas and a thousand other choices and decisions I must make?

Beloved, if you have you have a renewed mind, a mind so shaped and so influenced by the revealed will of God in His Word then you will begin to see and assess all the things you do with the mind of Christ and will learn how to discern what God is calling you to do. While it might be nice if Holy Spirit spoke directly to us as He appeared to do in Acts 13:2, that is not the way God “speaks” to us today. Those who seek to know God’s will by hearing voices are not living by the principle of Romans 12:2. There is a difference between praying for and laboring toward a renewed mind that seeks *how* to apply God’s Word in everything you do – which is a constant work, and the practice of asking God to give a new revelation of what to do. The asking God for a new revelation is nothing short of divination and divination does not require transformation. And God wants you transformed. God’s goal for us is a renewed mind, a new way of thinking and judging, not just new information. Remember that the early church was not seeking new information from the Spirit, rather they were simply doing what the Spirit has already commanded. And then, in the process, God directed them.

The final step in knowing and doing God’s will ***staging the Word of God***. I know that this sounds strange, the staging of God’s word, but to stage something is “to plan, organize, or carry out (an activity), especially for dramatic or public effect.” It is to resolve to set up carefully everything we do in accordance with God’s revealed will. The problem is that the vast majority of our actions are done with little or no conscious reflection upon whether or not it is biblical. I think it safe to say that some 95% of your behavior you do not premeditate. This means that naturally, most of your thoughts, attitudes, and actions are spontaneous. They are the overflow of your heart. Recall what Jesus said in Matthew 12:34-37,

***34...For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. 36 But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.***

We have to set up, or stage the Word of God to address every circumstance we find ourselves in. Remember that it is God’s revealed will that we are not angry, prideful, covetous, jealous, envious, and anxious. Do you realize that such actions are not generally premeditated? Such things simply rise up out of the heart with no conscious reflection or intention. And each of us are guilty because of them. They violate God’s will for us.

Thus we are left with this great task if we would be found in the heart of God’s will. We must be constantly transformed by the renewing of our minds. We need new hearts and new minds. We need to stage the Word of God in such a way as to know it and do it when we find ourselves in those situations where we are quick to react according to the flesh rather than

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according to the Spirit. Why, because Romans 8:8 says, “**those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**” We must strive to not afford a moment of our personal lives or in our corporate lives be lived in such a way as not to please God. And God calls us to live by the His Spirit, not by the flesh. The problem is that we cannot do this on our own. We need Christ in us, the one who died for our sins. We need the Holy Spirit to lead us into the knowing and the living of Christ-exalting truth.

If you would resolve to live in the heart of God’s will, then you must immerse yourself in the written Word of God, to steep your mind in it, to seek to apply to every situation of your life, to set the stage of your life in such a manner that it depicts a life given over to God. Let us pray that the Spirit of Christ would so renew our minds that the overflow would accomplish the rest of Romans 12:2, so “that you may prove [manifest, complete, reveal, demonstrate] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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