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Not My Will, but God's

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A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is shown in profile, looking down at a smartphone she is holding in her hands. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white, suggesting an outdoor setting. The text "NOT MY WILL," is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif font.

**NOT MY
WILL,**

A close-up shot of a person's hands clasped together in a prayerful gesture. The person is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved shirt. Below the hands, an open book with text on its pages is visible. The text "BUT GOD'S" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif font.

**BUT
GOD'S**

The key to self-control

JOHN PECKHAM

Soon Jesus would be crucified. As the day drew near, Jesus was deeply distressed and withdrew with His disciples to Gethsemane to pray. He instructed Peter, James, and John to also pray and keep watch.

While Jesus prayed, however, they slept.

Finding them sleeping, Jesus lamented, “Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:40, 41).

THE STRUGGLE

The flesh is weak indeed. Have you ever felt as if you face a war inside your own mind? As Paul describes this struggle: “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:22, 23).

Why do humans struggle so much with self-control, and what can we do about it?

The answer to the first part of this question is simple. Since the fall of humanity in Eden, we are vulnerable to the deceptions and attacks of the fork-tongued serpent of old, “the devil,” who “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8), and we inherit a bent or inclination toward sin—what Paul referred to as “the law of sin which is in my members.”

Have you ever experienced two conflicting desires at the same time?

Perhaps you want to eat another plate of a delicious meal, but you also do not want to do so because you do not want to gain weight. At one level you desire to eat more (a first-order desire), but at another level you desire not to desire more (a second-order desire).

When faced with real temptations, we just need stronger willpower, right? If I just try hard enough, perhaps I can impose my better will over my lesser inclinations. I might achieve some success by sheer willpower. Yet, insofar as my inner desires and incli-

nations continue pressing me in the opposite direction, relying on sheer willpower will amount to setting myself up to fail—sooner or later.

What we need, then, is not merely to resist such inclinations, but to be transformed at the level of our deepest inner desires, because sooner or later our actions follow what we desire most deeply—consciously or subconsciously.

What can we do, then?

In three words: Look to Jesus.

More specifically, look to Jesus—“the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2)—as our perfect example and intercessor.

JESUS, OUR PERFECT EXAMPLE

Jesus provides the supreme example of self-control.

In Gethsemane, Jesus faced the ultimate trial.

While His disciples slept, He prayed that, if possible, the Father would deliver Him from the suffering and death of the cross, but He also prayed, “Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

He thus surrendered His will to be aligned with the Father’s will.

At one level Jesus wanted to live rather than suffer and die. This was not a sinful desire, but it conflicted with His deeper desire to save the world, in accordance with the Father’s will.


He chose not to avoid the cross as He desired, but “for the joy that was set before Him” Christ “endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2).

As Christ faced the cross, He could not see through the clouds of darkness. He could not then feel the joy that would result from His sacrifice for us. He could not safely rely on His emotions, His bodily impulses, or His immediate desires. Instead, He relied on the truth of divine revelation about God’s will, which revealed what was really for the best in the long run, even when circumstances seemed otherwise.

Jesus overcame through fervent prayer and surrendering His will to the Father’s will.

In contrast, His disciples failed.

Not long before, Jesus foretold that Peter would deny Him three times, warning that Satan demanded to “sift” Peter like “wheat” (Luke 22:31, 34). Peter protested, but after Jesus was arrested, Peter did just as Jesus foretold, cursing and vehemently denying that He even knew Jesus (Matt. 26:69-75).



The great controversy is primarily a conflict at the level of our minds—relative to what we believe and will, ultimately coming down to whom we trust and love.

RUAN CARLOS / LUKASZ SZMIGIEL

The other disciples fell away also, just as Jesus foretold (verse 31).

In contrast, through fervent prayer and surrender to the Father's will, Jesus stood firm in the face of the ultimate trial—so severe that He even sweat drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

This was no easy task for Christ. Although Jesus had no inclination toward sin, the temptations He faced were far greater than any we will ever face. He carried the weight of all the world's sins on His shoulders. As Ellen White put it: "Never will man be tried with temptations as powerful as those which assailed Christ."¹

Imagine the temptation in Gethsemane and beyond. Imagine the pull to just walk away.

Though divine, Jesus was not to use His divine power for Himself, so He did not employ His divine power to resist this or other temptations. Instead, He prayed to the Father for strength and sustenance, surrendering His will to the Father.

Christ's self-control was inseparably tied to His surrender to the Father's will and reliance on power from on high through prayer.

TRAINING IN PREPARATION FOR THE TRIAL

Jesus, however, did not *begin* praying and surrendering to the Father's will in Gethsemane. Both were His continual practice throughout His ministry. When severe trial came, He was already prepared.

Earlier, when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness, Jesus met each temptation with Scripture—"It is written" (see Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

If we are to stand, particularly during the final crisis of the last days, we must follow Christ's example of ongoing fervent prayer, utter surrender

to the Father's will, and internalizing and following the teachings of Scripture—living "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (verse 4).

To do so, however, requires more than a surface reading of Scripture. Even the devil can quote Scripture—as he did while tempting Jesus in the wilderness (see verse 6). But Satan quoted Scripture out of context, twisting it. We can also do so or be susceptible to others doing so if we neglect careful and deep study of God's Word, if we neglect to understand each part of Scripture in light of the whole of what Scripture teaches.

The great controversy is primarily a conflict at the level of our minds—relative to what we believe and will, ultimately coming down to whom we trust and love.

This is why Paul emphasizes "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). This can be accomplished not merely by wishing away corrupt thoughts; discipleship of one's mind requires *filling* one's mind with good things—through Scripture and prayer.

This requires discipline and regular practice, like an athlete training for a contest. One does not simply wake up one day and run a marathon in the Olympics without first training long and hard. The contest Christ's followers face, however, is far greater than any marathon, especially in the last days.

Employing the metaphor of training for a race, Paul writes, "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27).

As the end draws near, such "training" becomes more important. Throughout the great controversy the devil wages a war of disinformation, seeking

to intoxicate people with the teachings and practices of Babylon (see Rev. 12:7-9; 14:8). Powerful delusions and trials will come upon the world before the end that, if it were possible, would cause even the elect to fall.

Ellen G. White wrote, “The coming struggle will be marked with a terrible intensity such as the world has never witnessed. Satan’s deceptions will be more subtle, his assaults more determined. If it were possible, he would lead astray the elect.”²

As the end draws near, self-control—particularly in terms of surrendering to the will of God—will become ever more countercultural. Even now the world regularly preaches self-indulgence—do and be whatever you want, whatever makes you feel good. Scripture, in contrast, calls to self-denial and self-control, seeking to know and follow the truth.

In an age of self-indulgence, self-control is more crucial than ever.

As Peter wrote: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Peter 5:8, 9).

As we have seen, Peter knew what he was talking about.

Although he was at first self-reliant and adamant that he would never fall away like the others (Matt. 26:33), Peter learned that one can stand against Satan’s attacks only through God’s power, and thus he added, “May the God of all grace . . . after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

We must look to Christ, then, not only as our perfect example but also as our continual intercessor.

JESUS, OUR PERFECT INTERCESSOR

Even now Christ intercedes for believers as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, working for and in all who accept Him as Savior *and* Lord. He is “able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

Likewise, we need the work of the Holy Spirit, who “makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26).

Although the time of the devil’s power is running out (Rev. 12:12), he remains a powerful foe,

against whom none should think they can stand in their own strength.

Enduring victory in this conflict can come only through Christ and the power of the Spirit. Indeed, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness,” and last but not least, “self-control” (Gal. 5:22).

As we near the close of earth’s history, the enemy’s snares and temptations will only increase, particularly against God’s people.

Some have the mistaken idea that following Christ will be easy. But Scripture teaches that Christ’s followers will face severe trials. As Jesus Himself foretold: “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

As the day draws near, then, we need to be more diligent and vigilant:

- (1) praying and watching fervently,
- (2) surrendering our will to God’s will—not my will, but God’s be done,
- (3) disciplining ourselves and taking every thought captive according to the Word of God, and
- (4) being sober-minded and prepared to stand against the enemy’s deceptions and assaults in this cosmic conflict.

This all requires continual reliance on God’s work for us and in us—recognizing that Christ and the Holy Spirit continually intercede for us. As Ellen White put it: “Not one moment can we be secure except as we rely upon God, the life hidden with Christ. Watchfulness and prayer are the safeguards of purity.”³

Our self-control is inseparably tied to our surrender to God’s will and reliance on His power. Even as a branch dies if disconnected from the vine, apart from Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). But with Christ the final victory is assured.

Christ will never leave you nor forsake you. He will always help you. Give yourself to Him and trust in Him. You will find self-control in total surrender to Him. ♣

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 4, p. 45.

² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. xi.

³ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), p. 84.

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