

## Spiritual Last Will and Testament

### Philippians 4:1-9

I won't ask for a show of hands, but my question this morning is this: How many of us have up-to-date last wills and testaments? Regardless of age, all adults who have assets should have a last will and testament. And, as our families grow and assets change, our last wills and testaments should be updated accordingly. Why should we worry about what happens to our "stuff" when we die? We will be gone and our family will figure out what to do with our stuff. Right? Wrong! Without a last will and testament the state will step in and make those decisions for us, and that is not good estate planning. In fact, it is not estate planning at all.

Notice I've used the word "assets" and, more euphemistically, the word "stuff." A last will and testament specifically addresses how we want our tangible property to be disposed of when we die. Tangible property is anything of value that we can touch. It is money, stocks, bonds, homes, cars, stamp collections, Bronco season tickets, and so on. Anything of value – that doesn't necessarily mean fiscal value. You may possess something that has no monetary value on the open market, but has great sentimental value for you, and you want to make sure it goes to the right person. It goes into your last will and testament.

A last will and testament can be simple – give all my stuff to my spouse, or apportion it out by percentages to persons you love, like children and grandchildren. A last will and testament can also be very complex, identifying specific items and to whom they should go. My favorite arm chair to Mike, my coin collection to Marjorie, and so on.

It may sound macabre, but Susan and I treated our six children as assets to be distributed in our last will and testament. After all, they were the most precious things in our lives and we cared deeply about their fate in the event we died simultaneously. So we named in our last will and testament who would receive and raise our children. With so many children, we were most fortunate to have a reciprocal arrangement with our closest friends, who had four children of their own. Jerry and Karen named us in their last will and testament as guardians of their children. I strongly encourage anyone who has children to make provision in your last will and testament for their up-bringing in the event of your death. It can avoid the possibility of messy family guardianship battles with your children caught in the middle.

Here's a question I have. In thinking about last wills and testaments I realized something that had never occurred to me before. Why do we call it a "last will and testament"? Don't will and testament mean the same thing? Turning to good old Merriam-Webster I found this definition of the noun *will*: "a legal declaration of a person's wishes regarding the disposal of his or her property or estate after death." Good. Sounds like what we've been talking about. Next I turned to the definition of *testament*, which is: "an act by which a person determines the disposition of his or her property after death." Same thing. So the term last will and testament appears to be redundant.

Not quite. Here is another dictionary definition for *testament*: "an expression of conviction. So here is a subtle, or maybe not so subtle, difference between *will* and *testament*. A will is a straight-forward distribution of assets at death. The word testament implies that the distribution has been thoughtfully considered, that the testator believes his or her decisions are in the best interest of the named heirs. Thus, I would give my favorite arm chair to Mike, because he always went and sat in it when he visited; I would give my coin collection to Marjorie because she shared my passion and had helped me put the collection together while she was growing up.

Our formulation of a last will and testament would not have meant anything to the apostle Paul. Yet he made one out and it is here in our reading from Philippians 4. Paul wrote this letter from prison. He didn't know how long he was going to live and he wanted to leave important things to the church at Philippi. Paul had character traits and attitudes that he himself evidenced that had been derived from his relationship with Christ. He wanted to bequeath them to the Philippian church that he so dearly loved.

Philippians 4 is the apostle Paul's last will and testament, but it doesn't address his "stuff." Instead, it distributes his spiritual assets. So what exactly does Paul wish to give to the Philippian church? He first wants them to restore their broken relationships. We don't know who Euodia and Syntyche were. This is the only time they are mentioned in the New Testament, but they were clearly co-workers with Paul in the Christian movement. It is also clear that there had been a break in their relationship. Paul doesn't tell us what the problem was between them. Euodia and Syntyche were involved in the same church, they both loved Christ and Paul. The break in their relationship had to be affecting the church as a whole. People in the church may well have been taking sides between Syntyche and Euodia. Paul wants their relationship restored, not just for the two of them, but for the good of the family, the church family, as a whole.