

God's Will – Be Reformed by It

Romans 12:2c (10/13/13)

Ernie Godshall

Faith Bible Church

Evansville, Indiana

I almost always get in trouble when I teach on God's will. It comes so close to our personal lives, and everyone seems to have their own ideas of how God guides them and tells them what to do. And there is much wrong teaching and just plain weirdness being taught about God's will. The ancient Babylonians and Romans believed that the gods showed them what to do by signs on the livers of sheep or birds. Ezekiel 21:21 includes looking at the liver and shaking arrows for guidance. New believers sometimes carry similar pagan ideas of guidance with them into the Christian life. "Now that I'm a Christian I'm going to get these special messages from God to tell me what to do." This approach is encouraged by sincere but sadly mistaken teachers who assure you that if you pray and fast and listen carefully, you'll hear from God and He will tell you what to do. Or He'll give you signs or impressions or feelings of peace about whether you should go to USI or Ivy Tech, or go ahead and date that girl, or go to seminary, or buy that house. And of course, we don't want to make a bad decision. We're told to look for green lights and red lights and closed and open doors. We would love to have God put a detailed to-do list on our night stand right beside our alarm clock every morning.

Some techniques really put God on the hot spot. Mark Batterson recently wrote *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears*. Based on a legend about Honi the Circle Maker, he drew a circle in the sand, got in it, and wouldn't budge until God answered His prayers. Sounds like a hostage situation to me. Is that really biblical?

Another whole line of books by author Sarah Young has mushroomed out of her original book, *Jesus Calling*. Now I don't want to offend anyone here and I'm sure Sarah is a sweet, wonderful person, but I do believe she and her books are misguided. She wanted a more personal walk with God, so she decided to listen for Jesus' voice and write down whatever He was saying to her. It seems the Christian world just loves getting direct communication from heaven. In her journal for January 8 Jesus said, "Softly I announce my Presence. Shimmering hues of radiance tap gently at your consciousness, seeking entrance. Though I have all Power in heaven and on earth, I am infinitely tender with you.... Whenever you feel inadequate, remember that I am your ever-present Help."

Sarah says, "I have continued to receive personal messages from God as I meditate on Him." So what's the problem with this? First, is Jesus really talking to her like this? Second, isn't the Bible sufficient to help us through all our trials and troubles? And if Jesus is really talking directly to Sarah, we don't need His communications to her; we should be getting our own. (See reviews on both of these books by Tim Challies at <http://www.challies.com/>).

We live in a world of many voices. How do we know which is God's and which is not? 2 Timothy 3:16 says your Bible is God's voice speaking to you – "All Scripture is God-breathed." Paul never counsels Timothy to listen for Jesus' voice in first or second Timothy. He tells him to continue in the Word, it is sufficient for all he needs for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. This Word, your Bible, is all you need to know Christ, to know God's will, and to live for His glory.

This morning we're going to find out how God wants to reform your life by His Word. First, you must reject the world's false values and lies and godless agenda. You will not discern God's will as long as you are deep in the world's woods. Come out. Second, you must keep on being transformed from the inside out by renewing your mind, restructuring your way of thinking, driving the truths and convictions of God's Word deep into your inner man, where you think and choose and love and hate and desire. We are in a life-long relearning process because we still have much of the world's influence in us and knocking on our door.

Now you are ready to discern God's will for your life, and there's nothing weird about it: Romans 12:2c, *So that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

God has a purpose for your life. Christ died on that cross to not only give you a place in heaven forever, but also to fulfill God's will in your life every day. We're looking at a purpose clause here: Be transformed by the renewing of your mind SO THAT you can discern God's purpose for you. No matter how dull and routine and unexciting your life is, God has a plan and a purpose for your life every day! Every day when you get up, you are getting up to a divine purpose. There isn't a moment or detail in which God doesn't have purpose for you. Every thought you have, every word you speak, every action you perform is fulfilling God's plan for you. That, my friends, is very exciting.

The world may say there is no ultimate purpose in this universe or for our lives and that we're only here by pure random chance, but that's not what God says. God chose you in eternity past to be His. Christ came to redeem you out of this present evil age, and now every day has eternal significance. Every day you are walking a glory path, filled with God's presence. He assures you, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5)

And God will give you daily grace through your faith in His Son to fulfill His will. Listen to Hebrews 13:20-21.

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

But which of God's will are we talking about here? Certainly not His sovereign, decreed will. We don't need to be concerned about God fulfilling that. He is doing a great job. We are just blessed to know that He is at the controls of the universe and everything is on schedule.

No, this is what God wants us to be and do as He has revealed in the Bible. Sometimes it's called God's revealed will or God's will of command. Some teach that God's personal will is like a dot that you have to try to hit. Sincere Christians will lament that God's will was for them to be a missionary, but they didn't follow it, so now they have to settle for God's second best.

God's will is a circle of legitimate choices, not a dot you might miss and blow it for the rest of your life. God gives us lots of freedom in making choices. Adam and Eve were free to eat from any tree in the garden. Eve didn't have to pray and ask God which veggies to make for supper. She should have prayed and asked God to give her strength to resist temptation. God says in 1 Corinthians 7 that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if he dies and she wants to remarry, God gives her two guidelines. First, be sure that handsome fellow you've got your eye on is a Christian. And then, marry whomever you want within that circle of possibilities – David, Fred, or Aaron. Which one do you like? Marry him! "You mean God doesn't have that special someone for me that He's going to reveal to me?" Once you are married He does have that special someone. You chose to marry Aaron, and not David. Now, what God has joined together, let no man separate.

Second, how do you know what God wants you to do? God lays the responsibility on you to "prove" or "evaluate and determine" what God wants, based on biblical truth. That word "test" or "discern" is used of testing coins or metals to see whether they are the genuine thing. Ephesians 5:10 teaches the same thing: "Trying to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."

So here you are, every day moving through life, living one day at a time. Every day you should be building a spiritual grid in your mind by feeding on God's Word, hearing God's Word, fellowshiping around God's Word, praying God's Word, and being changed by God's Word. As you move through a typical day, you're going to face any number of challenges that you will process through your mind that is being renewed by God's Word.

First, you face your own personal issues; getting out of bed may be the first thing. The Bible says don't be a sluggard, so up you go. Then, you begin dealing with your temptations and desires and fears and habits. You'll meet your family, people at work, your boss. Stuff happens you weren't prepared for – we call them crises, accidents. It may be the water heater is leaking, or maybe a more serious situation

causing severe pain and trouble. You face decisions, opportunities, conflicts, blessings, nice people, not so nice people. Every day is the unfolding of God's providence in your life, although He doesn't tell you in the morning what's coming; you might stay in bed and pull the covers over your head. No, but He is involved in every moment of every day, in every detail. He knows how many hairs you lost yesterday. And He has given you His Word which is sufficient to give you the wisdom you need as you prayerfully apply what you know to the situations you are facing. This is how you evaluate and determine God's will every day in your life.

If you handle a situation biblically, praise the Lord. If you mess up, praise God; there's the wonderfully gracious 1 John 1:9 reboot button. You confess your sins and He is faithful and just to forgive. You don't have to go all the way back to the beginning in your Christian life and start all over, like that annoying game Chutes and Ladders. You land on a chute and zuuump – way back you go. No, you may stumble in your Christian walk, but by God's grace you can get right back up and keep going.

So as you walk by faith, you process each day through this growing mental grid of God's truth. And through the grid of God's truth, you are learning how God wants you to respond. You are learning to make choices and decisions that please God. Philippians 1:9-10 says, *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may **approve the things that are excellent**, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ.* There is nothing mystical or weird here. No voices in the middle of the night. Ephesians 5:15-17 is a perfect cross reference for our text:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

You must test everything by the Scripture. What does God say about this? Are there clear commands to help me here? Are there principles I can apply to this situation? Will this decision bring glory to God? Has God equipped me to pursue this calling in my life? Does this young man I'm attracted to love Christ and want to serve him? Can we afford this new purchase? Will it help us grow and serve Christ more effectively?

Some aspects of God's will are really obvious. God's Word is clear about moral impurity. 1 Thessalonians 4:3, *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.* You don't have to ask God if He wants you to live with this person before you get married. Pray that He will help you resist sexual temptation.

Colossians 1:9-10 clearly tells you God's will is that you grow in wisdom and understanding so you can know Him better, walk worthy of Him, and bear fruit for His glory.

What is God's will for your attitude at work? Ephesians 6:6 says don't be a man-pleaser or work only when the boss is watching, an "eye-servant," but to do the will of God from the heart.

Here's a really good one you can use to process everything you meet every day. It's in 1 Thessalonians 5:15-17, and I call it my RPG – Rejoice, Pray, Give thanks. Whatever comes your way today, always meet it with rejoicing, pray about it, and in everything give thanks. Why? This is God's will for you! Whatever isn't included in "everything" you are free to gripe and whine about.

Paul describes God's will three ways in Romans 12:2c. God's will is always for your good. You will never be sorry when you follow God's will. His will is never destructive. Everything God calls us to, even if it isn't easy, is good. God's will is always pleasing to Him. When you obey God, God is pleased. R. C. Sproul wrote: "A passion to please God should be the focus of every Christian's life." And God's will is complete, always moving you toward the goal of becoming like Christ.

Here are five essentials to help you discern and then actually do God's will.

GOAL-ORIENTED You need to remember God's goal. It's not to make your life easier or to make your decisions for you. He is after your mind, your heart, and your character. God's goal every day is for you and me to become more like Christ.

DISCIPLINE You need discipline. 1 Timothy 4:7 says, "discipline yourself for godliness." Lazy people aren't fulfilling God's will. We need structure and perseverance. We need the structure, for example, of a reading plan. You don't want to follow the plan we've provided? Fine, go to YouVersion on your device and choose a plan that works for you and follow it. I think you can even set alerts to remind you to read today! Also the discipline of progressive sanctification is not a sprint; it's a lifelong marathon and we're never finished as long as we have breath. God never sent a memo that said, "Okay, you're 65 now, you can quit growing."

OBEDIENCE You need a heart to obey, whether you feel like it or not. We're too prone to follow our feelings, aren't we? This goes with discipline. Jesus didn't say, "If you feel like keeping my words, then you are my disciples." "Did you read the word yesterday?" "No." "Why not?" "No time." "Did you watch TV?" "Uh, yeah." "How much?" "Uh, let's see, the Alabama game, then the Ohio game. Eight hours?" "So, you felt like watching the games, but you didn't feel like reading God's Word?" As one biblical counselor told a husband, "No TV until you've read the Word!"

APPLICATION You need to learn to apply the Word. You go to Home Depot, pick out a nice color of paint for your walls, bring the can home and set it down. Now what? You've got to apply the paint to the wall. It won't jump out and apply itself. And like the paint brush dipped into the paint, we've got to dip the brush of our minds down into the bucket of Scripture and then start applying it to our lives, sometimes in big, broad strokes and sometimes with tiny, short strokes.

God's will gets really specific in His Word. He doesn't just tell husbands to love their wives in a general way. He commands us to live with them, spend time with them. He says live with her in an understanding way. Be thoughtful of her, learn what makes her tick, how you can help and bless her. Treat her gently like you would a valuable, fragile vase. Treat her with honor every day (1 Peter 3:7).

Kids, God has a plan and purpose for you every day. Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor them. (Ephesians 6:1-3) That's not just a good idea. That's God's will for you.

Learn to apply God's word to your life. That's God's will for you. And it's good for you and everybody in your life. Just ask your wife if she thinks it's good for you to treat her with honor? Ask your husband if he thinks it's good when you focus on living with him with a submissive spirit and grow that gentle and quiet spirit God says is precious (1 Peter 3:6). It's good. It's pleasing. It's becoming like Christ.

ACCOUNTABILITY You need God's people in your life. God never called you to be a "Lone Ranger Christian." We need the encouragement and sometimes correction of God's people. Hebrews 3:13 says we are to encourage one another day after day, so we don't become hardened by sin's lies. Hebrews 10:25 says we need to meet together so we can encourage each other in the things of God. Small groups, Bible studies, one on one, praying for one another all provide the accountability of other believers we need.

SO WHAT?

What a great verse to establish the pattern of progressive sanctification, or growing and changing to become more and more like Christ. Refuse to let the world set your agenda for you. Keep being transformed as you feed your mind with the nourishment of God's Word. Then apply that grid of God's truth in your heart every day to everything God brings into your life. You will be proving and doing what God wants you to do, from here to heaven.

Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners. He went to the cross to pay the penalty of death in the place of guilty sinners. He rose again to give us eternal life. If you have come here this morning and you know you're not a true Christian, you have to admit you've never surrendered your heart and life to Christ,

I am calling on you to do that right now. God's will is for sinners to turn from their sin and receive His Son. Will you do that?

(See Kevin DeYoung's book *Just Do Something* and Garry Friesen's *Decision Making and the Will of God* for further help about a biblical view of discerning God's will for your life).