

Knowing and Doing God's Will

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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One of the most enduring questions that people ask, and this has been suggested to me by several people that I might address it, is the question, "How can I know God's will for my life?" I remember when I was just a college student, and I was very involved in athletics. I was playing football and basketball and baseball and all of that, and athletes gain a certain amount of notoriety. I was asked because I was a Christian if I would come and if I would speak. So I began speaking as a college student here and there. It was my first sort of attempt at being a preacher. In the process, it became apparent to me that people were always asking the question, "How can I know God's will for my life?" So very early on, I began to study that, and to try to discern the pattern of Scripture for knowing the will of God.

Early on then in my preaching, that was sort of a substantial element of the content of what I would give when I spoke to young people's groups as I did very regularly. For a number of years, probably about three years, I preached about 30 to 40 times a month all across the country to youth groups. One of the main subjects I was always asked to address was this issue of knowing the will of God. Now, I had the occasion during those years to come to the Moody Bible Institute. Phil Johnson reminded me of this. He has reminded me of it several times. He was a student there when I came to speak. He said to somebody, perhaps Darlene, but they were not married at the time, "I hear there's this guy named MacArthur who is coming. What's he going to speak about?"

I had told them that I was going to speak on the will of God, and Phil said, "Doesn't he know that everybody who comes here speaks on the will of God? That's all we ever hear in chapel. What makes him think he can say anything that already hasn't been said?" Well, I didn't know that everybody spoke on that, and I did know it was a pertinent subject. Phil said that in spite of the fact that he did not want to hear me and did not want to hear another message on the will of God, he did want to sit by Darlene. So, as a result of that ill-conceived motive, he showed up in chapel. He has reminded me that I preached on the will of God. Now, I don't know what it did to anybody else, but Phil has been following me ever since, so I think it was God's will that he hear that message that day. You never know the turn that the will of God may take you.

Now, it is an enduring question and young people ask it, and not only young people, but it is asked repeatedly throughout our Christian experience. Where do I go to school? Who do I marry? What is my career path? Do I take this job, that job, this opportunity, that opportunity? Do I buy this, sell this, do this with my children? Do I homeschool? Do I put them in a Christian school? There's an endless string of decisions that are being made by people all through their lives. When am I going to retire, and what am I going to do when I do, et cetera, et cetera? I mean that is not just the big decisions. It is those routine things that we face day in and day out.

The question is a compelling question. How can I know what God wants me to do? Now, there is a general confusion about this. There are some people who think that God is somehow reluctant to let us know His will because He gets some kind of strange pleasure out of hiding it. So we go through

life sort of like we're in a divine lottery hoping we can kind of get the lucky ticket, and that God is sort of dispensing scratchers and maybe yours says the right number, and maybe it doesn't. And God is somehow gleeful about the fact that it's limited to just a select few. Nothing could be further from the truth.

There are other people who think that God's will is some kind of an almost transcendental experience. You're running down the street in the rain and you somehow slip on the pavement, fall down, land in the gutter on a map of India, and this constitutes the divine call. So you rush off to sign up to missionary work. There are others who are waiting for a voice. They're waiting for some kind of inner voice or some kind of external voice commanding them to do something. This is very, very common.

This week I received an e-mail, an interesting e-mail. It was a lovely gesture, telling me that someone generously had given a copy of *The MacArthur Study Bible* to every member of the United States Supreme Court. That's a wonderful thing to do, and I was appreciative of it. The person sending me the e-mail said they were very excited about this because the person who did it said that God told them to do it, and that they were doing, therefore, the will of God. The person who sent the e-mail was thrilled that God had told the person to do that. I'm glad that they were generous enough to give those Bibles to the Supreme Court, but I doubt that God told them to do it. There may have been a strong impulse to do it, a strong feeling that they interpreted as God telling them to do it, but there wouldn't be any way to know that. God doesn't reveal Himself audibly anymore. He has closed the canon of Scripture. The Word of God is complete. It is the, "Faith once for all delivered to the saints." God now speaks to us through His Word.

Does He give us impulses? Does He direct us? Yes, He does, but we don't have any way to know that for sure. I don't have a red light on my head, as I told you some time ago that goes on when it's God and goes off when it's me. I don't have any way to know that. You do what you do and maybe in retrospect, you see the hand of God. But how can we know the will of God? We can't hear voices in our heads. We cannot know that those impulses we feel are God moving us. We cannot wait for some monumental experience to occur before we sort of get insight.

How can we routinely day in and day out know God's will? Let me take you to the place you have to start, Matthew chapter 6, Matthew chapter 6. I'm going to be very practical and somewhat condensed this morning because I need to get this all in the next 35 or 40 minutes. It'll go pretty fast. In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus is instructing His disciples about how to pray. It's very familiar territory, and He says, "Pray - " verse 9, " - then, in this way." This is what I want you to pray for. This is the routine kind of praying. This is the daily kind of praying. Pray like this: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

Now, this is a mindset, and the mindset is, I am concerned that God's name be honored. I am concerned that God's kingdom be advanced, and I am concerned that God's will be done. So if you want to know God's will, this is where you start. You start by praying for it, by praying for it. Yes, you want to know God's will? Pray for it. Pray, "Your will be done on earth." That doesn't mean simply in the broadest possible sense that God would fulfill His will, encompassing all of time and eternity and creation. It isn't just that God would fulfill His will on behalf of the church or my local church or the group of people that I most often socialize with or my family or my marriage. It's a personal thing. I am saying, "God, I want your will done." That is the initial and necessary mindset that

establishes a person in the will of God. You have to want that. You never get to, "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, and don't lead us into temptation," which are those personal things with regard to ourselves, until you have passed through the gate of, "Your will be done."

That is to be our daily position. That is to be our mindset. We want to be in the place of God's will. We want God's will done through our lives. Of course, the Lord Jesus set the example, the perfect servant who, when facing the worst possible scenario, a painful death on the cross at the hands of those He had come to preach to and at the hands, if you will, of God, His own Father; facing that painful death on the cross, He said, "Not my will but yours be done."

You remember in the garden He was saying, "If there's any way that I can bypass the cross, if there's any way that I can escape having to drink this cup, let it happen. Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done." That is the essential mindset. If you are still concerned with your will, your way, your plans, your fulfillment; you really have little or no hope of fulfilling the will of God. Jesus earlier before He ever got to the garden in anticipation of the cross much earlier in His life said, "I have come to do the will of Him who sent me." Paul, who followed Jesus' example and himself stood in the face of potential death said, "The will of the Lord be done."

Now, that I think has to be the underlying foundational mindset for every believer. Turn to Ephesians 6:6, and there is an expression there that sums that up I think in a very helpful way. In Ephesians 6:6, the end of the verse, I just want to borrow this expression because I think it is a somewhat ubiquitous expression. That is, it can be transported into a number of categories and isn't limited to the immediate context. The expression at the end of verse 6, Ephesians 6 is this: "Doing the will of God from the heart." That is, again, reflective of an attitude expressed in that prayer. Your will be done. Doing the will of God from the heart; not reluctantly, not only outside, externally, but from the heart. That's where we have to begin. So you want to know God's will for your life? Then you have to want God's will above everything else, whatever that will might be, whatever it might involve. It has to be, in a sense, the mortification or the slaying of your own agenda, your own will, your own desires, your own longings, your own hopes, dreams, plans, and ambitions. That's where you have to start. I can promise you that if you do not have a from-the-heart commitment to the will of God, you will not experience it in its fullness.

The apostle Paul a number of times in his writings used the little phrase "by the will of God, by the will of God." For example, in the first chapter of Romans, I think it's verse 10. Again, in the 15th chapter he uses it again. Colossians 4:12 talks about "by the will of God" or "in the will of God." Peter even talks about that. He says in his epistle 1 Peter 4 that we are to live, "for the will of God rather than the desire of the flesh." There are two competing issues in your life. One is the desire of your own flesh, what you want, the way you want it, when you want it, how you want it; and there is the will of God. You either live according to the will of God or according to the will of your own flesh.

So, as we begin to talk about the will of God, we have to start with that foundation. Are you willing to do the will of God from the heart whatever it involves, whatever it means? That is where you begin to take the steps necessary to experience the will of God. As long as you are still holding onto your will, your agenda, your plans, your ambitions, your purposes, there is a conflict there that will not yield the will of God.

Now, let me just define the will of God for you so we know exactly what we're talking about. If we

were to take this comprehensive concepts of the will of God, we could break it into three categories. First of all, there is the will of purpose or theologians might call it the will of decree. There is a will of God that is bound up in His eternal plan. That is referred to a number of places in the Bible. I'll just give you one illustration, Jeremiah 51:29. It says, "For every purpose of the Lord shall be performed." There is a will of God that is His purpose that He does accomplish. It is not something He wishes that doesn't happen. It is what He purposes that does happen.

It is that will of God that is essentially expressed in Romans 8:28. "All things are working together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose." It is the will of divine purpose. He purposed to create man. He purposed to redeem man. He purposed to save those that the Father chose. He purposed to elect the nation Israel to be the transmitting nation of His law and His gospel. He purposed to set that nation aside in unbelief, but some day to restore that nation and save them. He purposed to send His Son into the world to live and to die and to rise again and to ascend to the right hand, and to send the Holy Spirit and establish the church. He purposed that the church would go into the world and preach the gospel.

He purposes that the church would be the collected redeemed that would be raptured. He has purposed there will be a time called the Tribulation, which will end with the return of Christ, the establishment of 1,000 year millennial kingdom, which becomes the fulfillment of all of the promises to Abraham and David. At the end of that time, the destruction of all of the ungodly men and demons and the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth, which is the eternal state. The sweeping plan of redemption is God's will of purpose, and every purpose of the Lord shall be performed.

To show you that, again, back to Ephesians 1 if you're still in Ephesians 6, the verse I commented on a moment ago. If not, look at Ephesians 1. It's worth examining briefly. In Ephesians 1:9, we see the phrase, "He made known to us the mystery of His will." He has a will here, and it is the will of that eternal plan and purpose, which was mystery before He revealed it. He has revealed it to us, and here it is: "According to His kind intention, which He purposed in Him," meaning Christ. All right, now we're looking at the will of purpose. This is God's will, which was hidden, is now revealed, which He purposes to express His kind intention toward us in Christ. So therefore, it is the purpose of God to be kind to sinners and redeem us through Christ.

Verse 10 says, "It is a dispensation," or administration that includes or fits into a scheme that culminates in the, "fullness of the times." What is that? "That is the summing up of all things in Christ; things in the heavens and things upon the earth." So that's the big picture from God's intention, which He purposed before time began in Christ through the whole redemptive plan into the fullness of times, which is the summation of everything in the glorious millennial kingdom and the eternal new heavens and the new earth. That is His will of purpose.

We share in that, verse 11. "We have obtained an inheritance because we have been predestined." He planned at the very beginning that we would receive an inheritance at the very end, and He did this, verse 11, "According to His purpose, and He works all these things after the counsel of His will." So there it is said at least three ways. God has a will of eternal purpose, which He is working out. That refers to His eternal plan.

The second element of God's will is His will of desire. Let's call it His will of desire. In the first, the will of purpose, everything God purposes happens exactly the way He purposed it. In the second

category, His will of desire, God wills things that do not happen. God wills things that do not happen. This, too, is mysterious to us. This element of His will is not fully explained to us in Scripture, but there are things that do not please God. They do not please Him. For example, God says, "I have no pleasure in the death of – " whom? " – of the wicked." He desired Jerusalem to be saved, Luke 13:34, and they were not. He does not desire that any should perish, that all should come to repentance. That is a limited one. We'll say more about that in a few moments.

But it is also true that God says to Jerusalem, "How oft," through the words of Christ, "I would have gathered you, but you wouldn't." In the Old Testament God says through the prophet, "Why will you die?" In the New Testament, "Come unto me," Jesus said, "all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." When Jerusalem didn't repent, Jesus wept. You see, there is a desire on God's part that doesn't get fulfilled. God doesn't find any pleasure in sin, an act of sin. God doesn't find any pleasure in perpetual sinning. And listen to this, He doesn't find any pleasure in eternal sin, which is essentially what hell is. It is beings, angels and people, existing forever in a state of sinfulness and permanent hatred of God; and yet He allows it. That's the mystery. Why does He allow it? Because it suits His own glory to allow it. It suits His own glory to manifest His nature in wrath and judgment against those who refuse the gospel.

So there is His will of purpose, which always comes to pass. There is a will of desire, which goes against the grain of His own pleasure. But the one that we're talking about is that third category. It is God's will of command. It is God's will of command. There is an element of God's will in the Scriptures that embodies the commands that He desires His people to obey. He wants us to obey them. He gives us freedom to obey them or disobey them. That's what we're talking about. What is God's will for my life? Not in the sense of His eternal plan. What is God's will for my life if I am His, if I belong to His, if I am one who has been chosen by Him and predestined, one selected to belong to Him? What is His will for my life? That's the question. For the living of my life here, that will which relates to His commands for life here. There aren't any commands in eternity because there's only obedience and nothing else.

What does He want from me? All right, I'm going to tell you. But first, I'm going to tell you this: God does want something from you. He has a will for your life. Now, if He has a will for your life, I think it's pretty obvious that He would like you to know it. Would you agree to that? Can we at least make that rational link? God does have a will for your life in terms of the will of command. He does have a purpose and a direction for your life here and now in this world, and if He does have a will, He would like you to know it. If He would like you to know it, then it is conceivable that He would have revealed it in the clearest possible place, right? So the question then remains, where would you look to find it? Well, you only have one place to look. Christian faith is limited to one book, and that's the Bible, and that's where we're going to go.

"Yeah," you say, "but wait a minute. There's no chapter about me in there. There's no chapter in there that says who I'm supposed to marry, or where I'm supposed to go, or what I'm supposed to do and all of those." Oh yeah, you'd be surprised. You're here. You're here. It's not first Albert or third Elizabeth, but it's here, and I'll show you. First of all, the compelling question is this; has God revealed His will in Scripture? Answer: yes. Now, if He has revealed His will in Scripture and you aren't doing His will revealed in Scripture, then what gives you the right to think that you can demand from Him, His will that isn't revealed here? Basically, that's the issue. You don't have any hope for knowing His will for you specifically that isn't revealed unless you're obeying His will, which is revealed, so let's start there.

If you move along with us through some of these passages, you may see this little outline. I put it in a couple of the footnotes in the MacArthur Study Bible hoping it would be helpful. Let's take the first thing we know is God's will. God's will is that you be saved. God's will is that you be saved. God's will, expressed as I noted earlier in 2 Peter 3:9, and I want to define that passage a little bit for you. Here is God's will expressed towards those who are His. Verse 9, "The Lord is not slow or slack about His promise as some count slowness," or slackness, "but is patient toward you, not wishing for any perish," not willing for any to perish, actually, "but for all to come to repentance."

God is not willing that you perish, but that you come to repentance. God wills that you be saved. Now, this is a very interesting verse. We'll just briefly look at it. The context is judgment. Look at verse 7. It talks about the heavens and earth. "The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, for the day of judgment, the destruction of ungodly men." Down in verse 10, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief and the heavens are going to melt, pass away with a roar; the elements destroyed with intense heat, the earth and its works burned up."

So we're talking about a final judgment here, final judgment. Peter understand that this is coming, but the question that remains is why does God not bring judgment? Why does He allow things to get worse and worse and worse? Why doesn't God step in? I mean we're watching our watches and our calendars, and we're saying, "It's time to come and end the misery and end the sin and end the effrontery to your holiness. God, why don't you move? Time is going by needlessly." Is the Lord slow? Literally, is He loitering? Is He just wasting time? Is He just slack?

We're reminded in verse 8 that the divine Creator of the universe doesn't operate on time. "One day is a thousand years and a thousand years is one day." What seems like a long time to us is no time at all to Him. So He doesn't operate according to our timetable or our clocks and our calendars, so just keep that in mind. The fact that God hasn't fulfilled the promise of judgment, that fact that He hasn't come and destroyed the universe is because He is patient toward you, or as the other alternative text says, "Toward us," one in the same. That is, because He doesn't will any of His own to perish, but He waits until all that have been chosen come to – what? Repentance.

So the reason that God hasn't shut down the world, the reason that He hasn't come in destructive power is because not all of His own have yet been saved. God's will is that sinners be saved, and He who promised is faithful. He will fulfill His promise of judgment, but He waits patiently until the "any" who are His own, the "you and the "us" and the "all" come to repentance and can be saved. The delay is not because He's loitering. It's because He patiently waits for His own to be saved. It is God's will that you be saved. You can't even enter into the category of experiencing God's will if you're not saved. It only belongs to those that are saved.

Let me tell you very simply, if you're not a Christian, if you're not saved, if you haven't confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior, repented of your sins and embraced Him, there isn't any will of God for you, except one thing. God wills that you perish forever in eternal hell. That's it. The rest really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. So if you haven't been saved, don't ask the question, "What do you want for my life?" If you are not going to enter in to faith in Jesus Christ, you aren't even capable of knowing or experiencing the will that God has for those who are saved.

Now, look at 1 Timothy 2, 1 Timothy 2:4. Verse 3 introduces God as the Savior, God our Savior who

desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. This is all who are His, all whom He has chosen, all whom He has decreed or purposed to be saved. God desires them all to come to Him. As I said, there's no pleasure in God in the death of the wicked. He hates sin. He hates its consequence. He doesn't desire people to remain wicked forever in eternal hatred of Him and hell, but He allows that to happen. He endures, it says in Romans, "He endures vessels fitted for destruction." But He will wait to fulfill His desire that His own would come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved.

Only those people who are saved, only those people who embrace the Savior, only those people who do the will of the Father in the words of Matthew 12 and Mark chapter 3; only those who do the will of the Father by believing in the Son even have a capacity to know the will of God. Those who do the will of God by believing in the Son, embracing the Son, according to 1 John 2:17, have eternal life. So that's the first element of God's will. If you want to know God's will, then be saved, embrace Christ as Lord and Savior.

Second, turn to Ephesians 5, Ephesians 5, the second point in the will of God. We're showing you what the will of God is that is revealed, and then I'll show you how to know the part that's not revealed in Scripture, the part that applies specifically to you. You're going to love that when we get there. Ephesians 5, "So then do not be foolish," another word for stupid. "Do not be stupid, but understand what the will of the Lord is." So if you don't understand the will of the Lord, what are you? That's right, stupid. That's what it says. Paul doesn't mince any words does he?

Now, you say, "Well, what is it? What is it?" Here it is, verse 18. Here it is: "Don't get drunk with wine. That is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." Now let me give you a context for this. This is so ridiculous. Believers, coming out of pagan religion had experienced their worship in the Greek mystery religions. Within the framework of that worship was the idea that if you wanted to commune with the gods, you could commune with the gods through the means of drunkenness.

That was very much like the '60s deceptions of Timothy Leary and the drug culture that said that if you take drugs, you get a high, and that high is a religious high, a religious experience that elevates you to commune with the deities. That is something that was borrowed directly from the Greek mystery religions, where you would go to the temple Abacus. I have been there in the ruins way back east of Damascus, the great Bacchanalian feasts. What they would do is they would go in there, and they would get involved with priestesses in sexual orgies, and then they would eat in a gluttonous fashion. So that there was a massive hole in the middle of the hall where they would vomit in, and then go out and eat again. Then they would, at the same time, drink. All the columns there have vines and grapes celebrating Bacchus, the god of drunkenness.

So this was the way you got yourself into a state by sexual orgies and gluttony and drunkenness in which you were elevated to commune with the deities. Paul comes and says, "Wrong! If you do that, you're not going up. You're going down. That's dissipation." What is dissipation? It's a synonym for disintegration. It's the very opposite of elevation. It's a destructive kind of thing. If you want to commune with God, if you want to go up, if you want fellowship with God, to know the heart and mind of God, then don't do that. Do this, "Be filled with the Spirit."

That's what produces communion with God. That's what produces intimacy with God. That's what produces the knowledge of the mind of God. All Christians possess the Holy Spirit, Romans 8:9. If you don't have the Spirit, you're not a Christian. If you are one, you do have the Holy Spirit. First

Corinthians 6:19-20, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." First Corinthians 12:12-13, "We have all been made to drink of that one Spirit." What we need then is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That is really indicating the idea of total control. The word "filling" is the word *plro*. Let me give you a little insight into what that word means. To be filled is not static. It's not the idea of filling up a glass, as such. It's best illustrated by looking at its use in several gospel illustrations. I think you'll see it very clearly.

For example, the word *plro* is used in Joh 16:6, "Sorrow filled the heart." Now, that's talking about sorrow dominating a person, sorrow taking control. Luke 6:11 says that, "They were filled with madness." Luke 4:28, "Filled with anger." Luke 5:26, "Filled with fear." In each case, the word is indicating a dominating emotion, literally the loss of any sense of balance and equilibrium. When you say somebody is filled with sorrow, you mean that that sorrow is not any longer able to be mixed with the joy that helps us maintain our balance emotionally.

When you say someone is filled with madness, you say they have gone off the deep end, boom! The scales are tipped completely on the one side. When you say someone is filled with anger, we say they lost it. They blew their stack, lost their temper. When we say someone is filled with fear, we say they're in a panic. There's no way to see any balance left in their emotional stability. Basically, we go through life and there are things in our lives that make us happy. There are things in our lives that make us sorrowful, and they're there all the time. We just sort of keep a balance. When you're going through life and you start to look at the sorrowful things, and you concentrate on those, the scale starts to tip. You try to cheer yourself up and think about all of the good things that are happening, and you basically balance your way through life.

The same is true with anger. There are plenty of things you could get upset about and mad about. Then you think of all the things you ought to be thankful for, and you maintain your balance. There are things that could frighten you if you think about earthquakes and fires and floods and drive-by shootings and car crashes and plane crashes and on and on and on, and cancer and heart disease. You could go through life in a total panic, but you don't do that. You think about your kids. You think about your grandchildren. You smell a flower. You have a good meal. You kiss the person you love.

You balance your life until the person you love dies, and you're filled with sorrow. Or until you walk in your house one day and there's a guy there with a gun, and you're staring down the barrel of the gun, and you can't balance your fear anymore. Or you're flying in an airplane and all of the engines go out, and you're saying, "These things don't glide." Your heart is in your throat. That's the word "filled." It's control. It's no longer to keep the balance. You live your Christian life, sad to say, most people do that way; there's a balance. All right, the Holy Spirit over here and me over here. We're just keeping this thing as level as we can. I went to church a couple of times last month. Sunday morning I stayed for the whole deal; I didn't leave early. Holy Spirit, you've got to be happy about that. I read the Bible twice in the last month, and I did a few good deeds. Over here, I've got a few things for myself. I've given you a few. I'll take a few.

Listen, to be filled with the Spirit means you're gone. You're gone. You don't have any will. You don't have any goals. You don't have any ambitions except those that belong to the Holy Spirit, right? That's to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It means to be dominated, controlled by the Holy Spirit. Total control, scale tipped completely in the favor of the Holy Spirit.

The idea is to be totally under the control of the Holy Spirit. It simply means you're dominated by the mind of the Spirit. Now, how can that be? Well, it's not just some ecstatic experience. It's not some supernatural cloud that comes into you and does certain things. To be dominated by the will of the Spirit, to be dominated by the mind of the Spirit is to be dominated by the Scriptures. I can't say it any more clearly than that. It's not ecstatic. It's not some emotional thing. It's not some transcendent thing. To be controlled by the Spirit simply means that you obey the Word of God because the Word of God is revealed by the Holy Spirit, isn't it? Who is the author of Scripture? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, by the breath of God, the Spirit of God. Holy men of old were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Of course, in Ephesians chapter 5 - you know this passage - it says, "Be filled with the Spirit," and then it tells you what happens. "You speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord." You start to praise and praise, and when you're filled with the Spirit you praise and praise and praise because you're dominated by the Holy Spirit. Then you give thanks. You give thanks for everything that's come to you through the Lord Jesus Christ. You give thanks to God the Father.

Then you submit to each other in the fear of Christ. If you're a wife, you submit to your husband. If you're a husband, you love your wife. If you're children, in verse 1 of chapter 6, you obey your parents. If you're parents, you don't provoke your children to anger, but you raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If you're an employee, you're obedient to your employer, in verse 5. If you're an employer, verse 9, you take care of your employees. All relationships are affected by it.

First of all, you praise God. You thank God. You submit to one another, what you ought to be as a wife, what you ought to be as husband, what you ought to be as a child, what you ought to be as a parent, and even outside the home in your social relationships you are what you should be. It affects every area of life. That's being filled with the Spirit, Ephesians 5.

Turn to Colossians 3. Let me show you a parallel here. Colossians 3:16. You're going to see the same things here: teaching, admonishing one another, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs.

Colossians 3:16, singing, thankfulness in your hearts to God; exactly what is said in Ephesians 5, exactly what is said. Verse 18, wives are going to be submissive to their husbands. Verse 19, husbands are going to love their wives. Verse 20, children are going to obey their parents. Verse 21, fathers including parents are not going to exasperate their children. Then employees in verse 22 and then employers in chapter 4, verse 1.

All of that very same category and the very same outcome, except one difference. Go back to verse 16. It doesn't say be filled with the Spirit and this will happen. It says, "Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you," and this will happen. Listen carefully, if the effects are the same, then the cause is the same, right? If the effects are the same, and they are in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, if the effects are the same, the cause is the same. In one place, it says, "Be filled with the Spirit." In another place it says, "Let the Word dwell in you richly." Conclusion: those are the same.

To be controlled by the Spirit, to literally be dominated by the Spirit is no different than being controlled by the mind of the Spirit, which is revealed in Scripture. So what is God's will for your life? God's will is that you be saved, and that you be Spirit-filled, which means under the constant control of the mind of the Spirit expressed in the Word.

Thirdly, turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. This is practical, very practical. First Thessalonians chapter 4. Now we've said God's will is that you be saved. God's will is that you be Spirit-controlled or Spirit-filled. Thirdly, look at chapter 4, 1 Thessalonians verse 3. Now listen to this, "For this is the will of God." How about that? Wasn't as hard to find as you thought, was it? Right there all the time. "This is the will of God, your sanctification." What does that mean? Holiness, purity, separateness from sin. That's God's will. That's God's will. What do you mean by that? What do you mean? That's a big category. I'll tell you what I mean. That is, verse 3, "that you abstain from sexual immorality." Whoo, principle number one: God's will is that you stay away from sexual sin. Did you get that? Stay away from sexual sin.

Somebody says, "How far away?" That's a fair question. Far enough away to be holy, far enough away to be unspotted, far enough away to be unstained, far enough away to have no illicit thought being fed in your mind. Stay away from it. That's a negative. Stay away from it. There's a positive in the next verse, verse 4. "Also, each of you should know how to possess his vessel or body in sanctification and honor."

Principle number one: stay away from sex sin. How far? Far enough away to be unstained by its influences at all, to be apart from any illicit thought. Secondly, handle your body so it honors God. That's the positive. The negative is stay away from sex sin. The positive is use your body to God's glory. Don't do what would dishonor Him and do what would honor Him. Third principle in verse 5, "Don't operative in lustful passion like the pagans who don't know God." Don't act like the world around you. Don't get sucked up into the kind of life the world around us lives. Don't act like Godless heathen people. Don't behave like they behave. That is not what God wants out of you. You cannot succumb to the culture.

How do they behave? How do the godless behave? They behave on the basis of lust. They want it, they take it, and then they justify it. You can't live that way. You cannot live based upon the way the godless live. They live according to their own lustful passion. It's what it says. You can't live that way. That's not God's will. Stay away from sex sin. Handle your body so it honors God. Don't act like the godless heathen. Fourth, don't cross a line – that's what transgress means – and "defraud your brother in the matter." Don't ever take advantage of another person sexually. Don't you cross that line. Don't take advantage of someone else. You are defrauding that person of their virtue, of their holiness, of their purity. Don't do that. That's God's will.

Sometimes a couple comes in, and they want marital counseling. Typically, the first question we ask is, "Are you having a sexual relationship? Because if you are, how would you ever know whether God wanted you to marry each other? How would you know the part of God's will He hasn't revealed when you're not even obeying the part He has? God's under no obligation to show you His will on a personal level when you won't obey the will that He's revealed on the pages of His Word.

That's pretty serious, verse 6. "You should do this," verse 6, "because the Lord is the avenger in all these things." You want to have trouble in life, just get under the vengeance of God. He says, "We told you this before, and we solemnly warned you." This is one of those kind of things you can't say once. I told you. I told you. I solemnly told you, and I'm telling you again, "Don't live like this because God is the avenger." Why? Verse 7 repeats really what was back in verse 3, "Because God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification." Somebody is going to say, "Well, I don't have to take that from you." Fine, take it from God, verse 8, "He who rejects this is not

rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit.”

You see, the will of God: be saved. If you're saved, He gives you the Spirit. If He gives you the Spirit, then He expects you to be holy because you have the capacity by virtue of the strength of the Spirit to be holy when you're controlled by the Spirit through the controlling power of the truth in you. You're in this church; that's why we teach you the truth and teach you the truth and teach you the truth to give you the Mind of the Spirit so that the Spirit of God can control your life. The God who gave you the Holy Spirit to do just that expects you to be sanctified.

What is God's will? That you be saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified. You can start asking who I should marry, what job, what school, what this, what this? When you have begun to obey the will of God that has been revealed, then you can ask God for what part He hasn't revealed. But there's a fourth, and I'll just mention this because time is gone: submission, submission. First Peter 2. It's very clear again. It says in 1 Peter 2, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, to the king and the governor, those who punish evildoers and praise those who do right."

By the way, biblically, government has one dominating function. Government, as we know it in America and the rest of the world, is way beyond what God ever intended for government to do; but what government was instituted to do was to punish evildoers and reward people who do well. That's essentially what it was. It was for the sake of the protection of people so you weren't living in a society of the survival of the fittest. So he says you need to submit to government because it is ordained by God, as Romans 13 says. Verse 15, "Because this is the will of God, that by doing right you will silence the ignorance of foolish men."

If you are submissive to the society, we don't expect that it's a godly society. It's not a Christ-honoring society; neither was the society that Peter was addressing in his day. You submit to the institution of government and you silence those who criticize Christianity. It's a sad thing today so many Christians are caught up in all this lobbying and all this government stuff that they are a discredit to Jesus Christ because the world begins to view us as just another political party instead of those who have a redemptive message. So if we want to shut the mouths of the critics, then we need to live godly lives. Part of living a godly life is being submissive. That's part of why I wrote this book, *Why the Government Can't Save You*, to get Christians back on the right track. But it is God's will that we live godly lives in an ungodly society, and we submit to the authorities when they hold up the standards of right and wrong. In other words, we do right in our society.

So be saved, be Spirit-filled, be sanctified, and do what's right as a citizen in your society and submit to the authorities. There's a fifth "S" in my little outline: suffering. Here in 1 Peter, you can look at chapter 3, verse 17. "It is better if God should will it so that you suffer for doing what is right." Now, let me tell you, folks, this is really important. If you're going to do the will of God, being saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, and submissive, there is a collision at some point because if you're living this kind of life, you will collide with the people around you who aren't living that kind of life. What will happen is persecution will come. Some level of suffering will come. It could be a fiery ordeal, as it says in chapter 4, verse 12. I mean it could be something very, very serious.

So we could suffer. Down in chapter 5, verse 10, we may suffer for a little while here in this life, according to the will of God. And we know that God uses that suffering to perfect us and to shape us and to humble us, and to help us be more prayerful and more trusting in Him, and to also demonstrate His grace to us. But what it's really saying, folks, is don't compromise because the way

you can mitigate your suffering is by compromising, right? It's hard to live your Christian life in your family, so you compromise. It's hard to live your Christian life in your school, so you shut your mouth and you compromise. Hard to live your Christian life with your friends, so you compromise or at the job or whatever it is, and so you compromise. The will of God is that if you suffer, you suffer for doing what is right. Just keep doing what is right, believing what is right, proclaiming what is right, and if you have to suffer, you suffer. It's a hard message to get across today because the church has bailed on this.

We're in an avalanche of decline in the evangelical church today. There are three steps in that decline. I was preaching this week all week to the students every day of the week at the college or the seminary, and I was telling the seminary students there are three kinds of preaching that show the disintegration of the church and we're in the process now. Number one, there is biblical preaching, which is, listen, biblical doctrine in biblical dress. What that means is you preach the truth of Scripture by the Scripture. You understand that? That's Bible exposition. In other words, you give divine truth in its Bible dress, and God gave us divine truth and He dressed it in the Scripture, didn't He?

He put it in the prophets and in the law and in the holy writings of the Old Testament. He put it in the gospels, and He put it in the history of Acts, and He put it in the epistles, and He put it in the Revelation, but he dressed it in Scripture. So Bible dress covers divine truth. When the church is strong and when it's healthy, you will hear Bible doctrine preached in Bible dress because that's how God gave it. You will hear the Bible expounded. You won't hear that much today. You'll look long and hard to hear that.

The new wave says, "People don't like the Bible. They don't relate to the Bible. They can't connect to the Bible. It's an antiquated paradigm. They can't think that way. So we believe, and we're still evangelical, and we believe in the truth of the Bible, but we've got to get it out of that Bible dress. So we preach on the Chicago Bulls and we infuse into some message on Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls, something about divine truth. Or we preach on some parable that we have invented, some narrative story that we have invented or whatever it might be. Or we preach on the theological implications of Harry Potter or whatever it is." You just grab whatever is coming out of the air in the culture.

You say you're an evangelical. You hold to the evangelical truth, but you strip it of its Bible dress, and you redress it in the culture. You say, "That's how we're going to win the culture." Truth is, you have just moved away from the Word of God. God gave us Bible truth in Bible dress because that's the way He wanted it taught. The next step, you've already stripped that truth of its Bible dress. Next compromise, you jettison the truth. That's step three, and we're fast on the way to that. That's compromise.

So what does God want out of us? He wants biblical doctrine lived out in biblical dress without compromise, and that may lead to suffering.

So what is God's will for your life? That you be saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submissive, living righteously in the society, and that you be willing to suffer because you will not compromise the truth. That's God's will for your life. You say, "This is not helpful. I still don't know where I am here. You don't understand. I have to make a decision by tomorrow. What are you telling me?"

Well, I've got one more "S", saying thanks. First Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God concerning you." Is that one hard? That's not hard. So be saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submissive, uncompromising, willing to suffer, and say thanks for everything. No bitterness, no complaining, no ingratitude, no disappointment. Accept every single thing that comes into your life as that which God has brought for your good and His glory and have a thankful heart. That's it. That's what God says about His will. You say, "But, but, but, but, what about me?" Are you ready for this? If you're saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submissive, suffering, and saying thanks, do you know what God's will is? Whatever you want. Do you like that? Do whatever you want. Just go do whatever you want. You say, "You're kidding?" No, I'm not kidding.

You say, "What do you mean? I can't just go do what I want!" Yes you can, because if that's how you're living, guess who's in charge of your wants? Hmm. You see, that's Psalm 37:4, "Delight in the Lord." He's your delight. You're consumed with the light in Him. You want His will from the heart. You're doing all those things, and He will give you what? Why? Because He's in control of them, because the desires that you have are the desires that He has. So go do what you want. People say to me, "Why did you come to Grace Church?" I wanted to. I didn't hear a voice, except my wife. She said, "Go there." But I didn't hear any supernatural voice. I came because I wanted to come. I've never heard any voices. I just do what I feel I want to do, and I feel that the wants fit within the framework of living a godly life, and that God is planting the want. When it says, "He'll give you the desire of your heart," it doesn't mean that He will give you what you want. It means He will cause you to desire what He wants. So go do what you want if your heart is right. Is that good news? Is that freedom? But you've got to be obedient to the established pattern. Let's pray.

Father, thank you that when we start out, as it says in Genesis 24:27, "I being in the way the Lord led me," once we get rolling the direction that we desire, you will take over and lead us and bring us to that perfect place of your will. Help us to do what we know you've revealed in order that we might rejoice in being free to do that which is particular for our lives. As we move out to follow the desires that you've planted there, guide us into that perfect place of fulfillment. We'll praise you in Christ's name. Amen.

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