

Osaka International Church
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Title: What is God's Will for Us?

October 25th, 2020

Key verses:

Ephesians 5:17 (NKJV) – “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV) – “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Good morning, brothers and sisters. It has been seven months since the last time I stood at this pulpit to share God's Word with you. I did speak to you on our YouTube channel in April and May, but now I am pleased to be able to stand here and to see all of you again from this vantage point, facing you live and in person. For the past few months, we have been hearing from our new pastor, Hugh Brown, but right now he has returned to his home country to finalize the visa for his wife to come and join him here in Osaka and we are looking forward to seeing the both of them very soon. In the meantime, Pastor Brown asked me preach one Sunday while he is away, and so today I have the privilege of sharing God's Word with you.

I have entitled today's sermon “What is God's Will for Us?” I would like to share with you the main points of a book that was very impactful to me when I first read it many years ago. Oftentimes, we Christians desire to know and understand what God's will is for us, what God's will is for this or that decision that faces us. We ask questions like . . . “What is God's will for my career path?” . . . “Does God want me to go to this college or that college?” . . . “Is God leading me to marry this person or not?” We often ask about God's will in terms of deciding between specific choices facing us.

Well, God may indeed have a specific plan for you, and He will reveal that to you at the appropriate time. But, actually, I heard a wise old Christian once say that rather than look for some specific direction from God on a specific choice that is facing us (college or job or marriage partner), we should note that 95% of God's will for our life is already revealed right here in the Bible. I repeat: 95% of God's will for our life is already revealed right here in the Bible. So, that's the place where we should start in our search for God's will for our life.

And that is where the author of this book begins. The book that I want to share with you today is entitled “Found: God's Will,” written by John MacArthur. In this book, MacArthur highlights several key verses that specifically mentions God's will for us. So, let's dig into the Scripture and see what these verses tell us is God's will for our life.

1st Timothy 2:3-4 (KJV) — “³For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; ⁴who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”

Verse 4 again: *God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

It is God's will that every person would know the truth and **be saved**.

Principle #1 regarding God's will: **Be saved**.

Here's another verse. Let's look at 2nd Peter 3:9 (NASB) — “⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” (The King James Version of the Bible says God is “*not willing for any to perish*”)

God does not want anyone to perish. He wants all men to be saved, He wants all of us to come to repentance, to know the truth. And He is patient toward us. Although we have gone astray from our Creator, He wants us to repent of our waywardness and return to Him.

The starting point of understanding God's will is that we **be saved** and return to our Creator.

Let's move on to the second principle.

Ephesians 5:17-18 (NKJV) — “¹⁷Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”

Understand what the will of the Lord is. You don't do that by filling yourself with wine, but by being filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Principle #2: **Be Spirit-filled.**

Verse 17 says, “Do not be unwise...” Many English translations of the Bible render this verse as “Do not be foolish...” Paul was evidently writing to some foolish Christians who didn't understand God's will and who were still living lives incompatible with a God-honoring lifestyle. They were filling themselves with wine, leading to unsavory activity. They didn't know that they could, instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let's spend a few minutes talking about the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The first thing I want to point out is that all Christians have the Holy Spirit living within them. In John 14:16-17 (NASB), Jesus tells His disciples that He will send them a special helper after He leaves. Let's read the passage — “¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.”

Verse 16 says Jesus will send His disciples “another Helper.” Other English translations of the Bible render this as “another Comforter” or “another Advocate.” Verse 17 says this is “the Spirit of truth.” The Scripture uses a few different terms for this Spirit, including “Spirit of God” (in Genesis 1:2 and Matthew 12:28) and “Spirit of Christ” (in 1st Peter 1:11). These are all terms for the third person of the Trinity, who we generally call the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells His disciples that He will send the Spirit to them and that ... quote: “... you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.” The Spirit lives with us and will be in us. The Holy Spirit indwells Christian believers.

1st Corinthians 6:19-20 (NASB) tells us more. It says this — “¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

Wow. Our body is a “temple of the Holy Spirit,” who lives in us. Our body no longer belongs to us. It belongs to God, and we are to glorify Him with our bodies.

So, the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Our bodies are His home, His temple. Let’s move back to Ephesians 5:18 — “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”

Don’t be filled with wine. Don’t be filled with anything that would hinder the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. I told you in a message last year that I have sometimes spent too much time in front of the TV. Getting filled with TV. That can be a time-waster. It can also fill your mind with useless material. So, the command here is to stop filling yourself with useless things that leave little room for the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. We must let the Holy Spirit fill us.

So, what does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Firstly, throw out useless and damaging things, such as wine, TV, sinful attitudes and habits. Secondly, fill your mind with godly thoughts and godly material, starting with regular Bible reading.

Let me show you something. Right after Ephesians 5:18 tells us to be filled with the Spirit, we are told in verses 19 and 20 (NKJV) that we ought to be “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There is a parallel passage in Colossians 3 which says something similar, but begins a little differently. Colossians 3:16-17 (NKJV) — “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷ And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Here we see very similar phrases in the two passages, such as speaking to one another with “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” and “giving thanks.” But instead of beginning with being “filled with the Spirit,” here in Colossians Paul begins by saying, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” A crucial element of being filled with the Spirit is being filled with God’s Word. By being filled with God’s Word, we learn what is important to God and how we are to live.

So, what exactly does it mean to “be filled with the Holy Spirit”? It means to allow Him to guide your thoughts and actions. MacArthur says, “The Spirit-filled life is yielding every decision to the control of the Spirit ... The Spirit-filled life is nothing more than living in the conscious presence of the indwelling Christ ... To be Spirit-filled is to live a Christ-conscious life.”

Well, there is so much more I could say on this topic, but we must move on to the third principle of God’s will for our lives.

1st Thessalonians 4:3-4 (NASB) — “³For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.”

These verses give us one of the plainest, clearest statements in the New Testament about what God’s will is for us. We should not follow the non-Christian society and indulge the lustful passions of our flesh. God’s will for the Christians’s lifestyle is our sanctification. Again verse 3 - “For this is the will of God, your sanctification. . .”

Principle #3: **Be sanctified.**

The word “sanctify” means “to be set apart.” Firstly, to be set apart FROM sin, from our former sinful activities. Also, to be set apart FROM the world and its ungodly attitudes. Secondly, to “sanctify” means to be set apart TO God. We are now a part of His family and we should live a life that honors Him and that is active in service to Him and His church.

These verses tell us that we must not follow the non-Christian society around us and indulge the lustful passions of our flesh. We are told specifically to abstain from sexual immorality, abstain from any sexual activity that is outside marriage. Verse 4 says we should “possess our own vessel in sanctification and honor.” Here, Bible commentators tell us that the term “vessel” most likely refers to our physical “body.” What we do with our body should be clean and honorable. We Christians have dedicated ourselves and our bodies to the Lord, and we must honor Him and honor our body by being self-controlled and morally pure.

A few minutes ago, I quoted 1st Corinthians 6:19-20. Verse 19 tells us that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who indwells us. Verse 20 says that Christ purchased us with His shed blood on the cross (see 1st Peter 1:18-19 and Revelation 5:9-10 for more about that). We no longer belong to ourselves but belong to Him. Therefore, we should glorify God with our body.

Let’s move on to Principle #4.

1st Peter 2:13-15 (NASB) — “¹³Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

Principle #4: **Be submissive.**

It is God’s will that we submit to the government . . . to kings and governors. This is right-living, and by obeying the government, we silence our critics. Non-Christians would love to find faults in us so that they can criticize Christianity and criticize our God. We should silence such critics by being model citizens and obeying the law.

Of course, I realize sometimes that when man’s law directly contradicts one of God’s mandates, we must then follow God rather than man. We see that in Acts chapter 4, for example, when the Apostles Peter and

John were arrested for preaching the gospel. They were ordered not to preach the message of Jesus any longer, but they affirmed that they must obey God rather than man.

At times, such a stand may be necessary. However, in general, it is God's will that we submit to the governing authorities.

1st Peter chapter 2 goes on to address servants. Verse 18 says — “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.” Wow. Submit even when your master is unreasonable. And be respectful no matter if your maser is good or bad. This may seem like a standard too high to live by, but this is the one that is God-honoring.

Let's go on to Principle #5...

1st Peter 4:19 (NASB) — “Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

“Those also who suffer according to the will of God.”

Principle #5: **Be willing to suffer as a Christian**, if necessary

Sometimes, suffering is a part of God's will for us. It certainly doesn't feel good to have to suffer, but sometimes our suffering will be a part of God's plan to bring about His purposes for the spread of the gospel. This might mean for you or for me that we may have to go through a season of suffering persecution from peers or from family or from the government. If that is God's will for a particular time in your life, then let us accept it and, as this verse says, “entrust our souls to” our faithful Creator. This is the right thing to do.

Let's look earlier in 1st Peter 4, at verses 14 to 16 (NASB) — “¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.”

Experiencing suffering due to our Christian witness may be part of God's will, but we shouldn't cry foul if we are guilty of theft or murder or even being a troublesome person. If we break the law, we deserve to be punished. But if we suffer due to a result of our Christian witness, then we may be confident that we are in God's will and are even blessed because of it.

So, here is the outline of the fundamental Biblical statements of what God's will is for us:

- 1. Be saved**
- 2. Be Spirit-filled**
- 3. Be sanctified**
- 4. Be submissive**
- 5. Be suffering** for Christ

As I read through the Bible, I sometimes discover nice verses that expand my understanding of what my teachers have taught me of the Christian life. And so it is that I have found an additional verse about God's will which I think I could add to MacArthur's outline.

Toward the end of 1st Thessalonians 5, the apostle Paul writes a series of really short admonitions. Here are some of them:

Verse 16 (NASB) - Rejoice always.

Verse 17 - Pray without ceasing.

Verse 18 - In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Verse 19 - Do not quench the Spirit...

Again verse 18: In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

This verse tells us that it is God's will for us that we give thanks. That we **be thankful**. *In everything!*

So, if I can be bold and add one more principle, here is Number 6: **Be thankful**.

I couldn't think of a similar word that begins with "s," so I have lost the nice symmetry of having each principle begin with the letter "s." That's too bad, but I thought it was important to add this sixth point.

Note in these verses that Paul admonishes us to: rejoice always ... always be praying ... give thanks in everything that happens to us ... and don't quench the Spirit.

Whenever I read that last phrase, some images come to my mind of how we might "quench the Spirit." One way might be if we fill ourselves with wine or TV or other useless things that squeeze out the Holy Spirit's work in our life. I didn't have a problem with wine, but I have now severely curbed my TV watching. Another way we might quench the Spirit is by grumbling if circumstances do not turn out the way we want them. I have found that I am especially prone to grumbling if things don't turn out the way I want, which for me can sometimes become quite severe and turn into despondency if I go through an experience which is especially disappointing.

After one such disappointing experience many years ago, I was speaking with a wise Christian elder and I said to him, "I can't see God. I want to see God." One of the things this elder shared with me was the last verse of Psalm 50. Here is Psalm 50, verse 23 (NASB)—

"He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me;

And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God."

One way to see God is to "order your way aright" (live according to God's standards). And to "offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving." This Christian elder showed me how important it was to be grateful/thankful for anything and everything that happens to us. And to express that thanksgiving to God. Since that time, I have cultivated a practice of giving thanks to God, of expressing gratitude, in whatever circumstances that happen. Sometimes I still grumble at first, but within a short time I am back to this attitude of thankfulness.

I have sometimes heard Christian preachers tell us how important it is to "Have an attitude of gratitude."

An attitude of gratitude.

And so 1st Thessalonians 5:16-18 really resonates with me. Rejoice always ... always be praying ... give thanks in everything that happens to us. *Giving thanks in everything*, even the unpleasant experiences. I have had some pretty crushing disappointments in my life, but I now look back on them as learning experiences rather than something to be despondent about. I can be thankful for all these experiences, for they have helped shape me into the person I am today.

I told you that I discovered this verse many years ago and I thought that I ought to add it to the five principles that MacArthur outlined in his wonderful little book. However, as I re-read the book this month in preparation for today's sermon, I discovered that MacArthur did not overlook this verse at all. In fact, he closes his book with it.

The very last paragraph of the book says this: "And whatever happens in your life, along the way give thanks, for "this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thes. 5:18). He's using it to shape you into His will."

Well, before MacArthur closes the book with that statement, he spends one final chapter telling us what comes next after you have followed God's will on the five principles he has outlined.

Be saved and in a right standing with your Creator.
Be Spirit-filled, not filled with useless material.
Be sanctified, living a clean life that honors your body.
Be submissive to the governing authorities.
Be willing to suffer for Christ.
And of course, **be thankful** too.

So, what about those decisions that are facing you? Decisions concerning job or schooling or marriage or something else. MacArthur says first you must get the above principles set in your life. Then, the next step is ...

Well, the next step may surprise you. It surprised me when I first read it, but it does make sense. If you understand and are living by the above Biblically outlined principles of God's will, then the next step is: *Do whatever you want*. MacArthur says this: "You see, the will of God is not primarily a place. The will of God is not, first of all, for you to go *there* or work *here*. The will of God concerns *you as a person*. If you are the right you, you can follow your desires and you will fulfill His will."

If you are saved and living by the Spirit and following a God-honoring lifestyle, then you have the mind of Christ and can make sound decisions on those matters that are facing you. When particular options come your way, sometimes it is obvious which path NOT to take. For example, if one option involves breaking the law somehow, then you choose not to do it.

But, usually, we have to choose between options that are morally neutral. Should I choose option A or option B? Or maybe choose either Yes or No on a particular matter. Oftentimes, serious-minded Christians struggle with which one of the two or more options is "God's will for me." It is my experience that sometimes either option would be a God-honoring choice and the decision is really up to you. So, I really appreciate that closing chapter of MacArthur's book.

Which reminds me ... there is another excellent book that I would highly recommend reading. It is longer and more detailed than MacArthur's book, and it goes through the various ways people have sought God's guidance in Scripture and in Christian practice. The book is entitled "Knowing God's Will," by M. Blaine Smith. This is a great book, but it took me three readings before its lessons finally sank into me. Too often, we think of "God's will" as being only one correct answer among the options open to us. No, that is not necessarily the case — sometimes it might be, but not necessarily. Mr. Smith says that

especially on the two most important decisions in life, career, and marriage partner, the decision really is up to you. Of course, it has to be a God-honoring decision. While I was reading this book for the third time, one of the ladies in my Bible Study showed me a great book she was reading: it was a Japanese translation of this very book. So, it is available in Japanese and I would like to recommend it to you.

Well, back to MacArthur. He points out that we can follow our heart's desire when those five principles of God's will are operating in our life. And there is one more crucial element: Get moving. It is difficult to steer a parked car, but it becomes easy to steer once the car is moving. If you think God might be leading you somewhere, get moving and see where He steers you.

In closing, I would like to quote one more verse mentioning God's will. Romans 12:1-2 (ESV) —
“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Verse 1 - Present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

Verse 2 - Do not be conformed to this world. Instead, be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

By following the principles I have outlined in today's message, you will have a transformed mind. And you will be able to discern God's will.