

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Exposition of Romans		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	161		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Romans 12:2		
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Knowing the Will of God

“If life is aimless, stagnant, fruitless, lacking in content, it is because we are not entering by experience into the richness of God’s will.”¹ This observation by John Murray corresponds to the text we looked at earlier in this series, Psalm 119:144. “Give me understanding and I shall live.” We saw how the Hebrew word for *life*, as captured in Jesus’ words in John 10:10, underscores this concept of a rich and meaningful life. Mind renewal, you see, has important practical consequences. It is not simply some type of academic exercise. It is a significant part of our sanctification which must extend to our whole nature. You will note how the *negative* aspect (separation from all that is unholy) is accented in Paul’s exhortation, “be not conformed to this world,” and the *positive* inward change follows with the words “but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Unless our minds are being renewed, we will fail to understand the will of God for our lives. Do you see the importance of this? The unrenewed mind corresponds to the mind of the flesh (Colossians 2:18) and, as such, is opposed to God (Romans 8:6-8). Calvin put it best when he said, “If the renewal of our mind is necessary for the purpose of proving what the will of the Most High is, it is clear from this how hostile the mind is to God.”² Every Christian should want to enjoy God’s best; by God’s *best*, I mean a personal experience of His approbation; a manifest enjoyment of His favour in grace, in providence, and in nature. “It is to enjoy,” wrote A.W. Pink, “the sense of His approval, and having Him showing Himself strong in our behalf... it does mean that he will be immune from those sore chastisements which disobedience and a course of backsliding necessarily entail.”³

I. THE WILL OF GOD CAN BE KNOWN

“Then you will be able to test and approve⁴ what God’s will is.” What is involved here is *spiritual discernment* and this is the result of the renewing of the mind, or as Sanday and Headlam note: “The result of this purification is to make the intellect, which is the seat of moral judgment, true and exact in judging on spiritual and moral questions.”⁵ God has a will for each of us. Most Christians stumble over understanding this. The thought of discovering God’s will is usually taken to mean seeking God in prayer in order to determine what direction they should take in areas of their lives such as, marriage, vocation, service, etc. To a very large extent, this is something that is highly subjective. Well, *that* is not what the Apostle Paul is addressing. On the contrary, if our minds are being renewed, we do not need to worry about “missing” the will of God and having to settle for second best. Rather, we will be free to make choices and decisions with the light and wisdom that comes from having the eyes of our understanding enlightened (cf. Ephesians 1:18). In the words of W.H. Griffith Thomas, “There is thus no surer mark of a growing, progressive, ripening Christian life than this faculty of spiritual discernment.”⁶

II. THE WILL OF GOD IS DONE

You will sometimes hear people say, “Knowing the will of God and doing the will of God are two entirely different things.” There is an element of truth in that statement – but not in the context of Romans 12:1-2, as Paul’s language makes plain, “for Paul is really saying not only that the Romans would find out that God’s will is good, but that having found out, they should put it into practice. He is arguing for the spiritual discernment that ascertains what God wants us to do and then sets itself to do it.”⁷

III. THE WILL OF GOD IS ENJOYED

Notice how the will of God is described, “good and well-pleasing and perfect.”⁸ We read elsewhere in Scripture that it is God’s will that we be holy and avoid sexual immorality (I Thessalonians 4:3). It is God’s will that we give thanks (I Thessalonians 5:17). In the final analysis, we discover the will of God to be good and good for us. The will of God is also pleasing and, as Boice writes, “If we determine to walk in God’s way, refusing to be conformed to the world and being transformed instead by the renewing of our minds, we will not have to fear that at the end of our lives we will look back and be dissatisfied or bitter, judging our lives to have been an utter waste.”⁹ Finally, note the last word “perfect.” It is the word TELEIOS and means *complete, to reach the end*. In this context it refers to wholeness. It means the will of God is completely fulfilling.

CONCLUSION: The renewal of our minds will enable us to have real discernment in order that we might do the will of God, and this will be something that we will delight to do. Because God is who He is, and because He has revealed Himself to us in His Word, we can know Him, and in knowing Him we can Love Him and know that He desires only the very best for us. This is why we so desperately need (in the real sense of felt need!) to have our minds renewed so that we can know the will of our gracious, merciful and good God. We read in Colossians 4:12 of Epaphras, a servant of Christ, who was “always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” The word translated “mature” is TELEIOS, the same word we find in our text. Would you, like this faithful servant of Christ, commit yourself to praying for the saints here at Redeemer that we all would be continually renewed in our minds so that we as a church would stand firm in the will of God?

ENDNOTES

¹ J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 119.

² *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* VIII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 265.

³ A.W. Pink, *Practical Christianity* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), p. 189.

⁴ The words of the NIV, “test and approve,” are an honest attempt at an admittedly difficult translation problem. There is only one Greek word here, DOKIMAZO, which actually means to test or prove, but in order that it may meet with approval.

⁵ W. Sanday and A.C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911), p. 354.

⁶ W.H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: A Devotional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 328.

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 436.

⁸ Paul is not talking about three aspects of God’s will, much less is he describing three different types of God’s will. It is best to see the three adjectives appositionally. The words indicate, as Hendricksen notes, “that what God wants his children to be and to do is to be and do what, in his sight, is good, well-pleasing, perfect.” W. Hendricksen, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 406.

⁹ J.M. Boice, *Mind Renewal in a Mindless Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 126.