

God's Will Is Not Secret

Selected Scriptures

1276

I'd like us to have a word of prayer as we begin our study tonight. Father, with indeed a heart of anticipation I approach a needful subject. Thank You for the sensitivity of the staff who have asked me to speak to this particular theme because there are so many asking these questions. May Your Word become clear, Father. May it not be the word of men or a man but the Word of God: Sharp and powerful, life transforming. In that anticipation we pray. Amen.

The subject we want to speak about tonight is knowing the will of God. This has been a favorite study of mine for many years and I have had the privilege of writing a little book on the subject that's been out for quite a few years now, I think about six. But it's a question that comes up again and again, so the staff felt that I should speak to the subject on this particular Sunday night, taking a break from our series of Daniel Studies.

And I want to speak in a very practical vein so that we'll get a clear understanding of what it really means to know God's will for our lives. That is a major question. In fact, I would dare say that in my life that's probably the most commonly asked question. How do I know what God wants me to do?

In Psalm 143:10, David prayed a prayer that must be the desire of every Christian. David prayed this. "Lord, teach me to do Thy will." That's very basic, I think, to the life of a believer. Because being a Christian is the affirmation of the lordship of Christ. Being a Christian is an act of initial submission to the control and the leadership of Christ. And so doing His will certainly follows that kind of a submission.

Our blessed Lord Himself set the example. No other but Christ has the perfect servant's heart. No greater pattern or model for obedience to the will of God could ever be pointed to than Christ Himself. For from the very beginning in His incarnation He made it clear that He was come to do the will of Him that sent Him. And even when that took Him to the agony of the anticipation of the cross as He in the garden poured out in prayer to the Father the feeling of His own soul, even at that crisis moment He never wavered from the commitment, for it was there that He said, "Not My will but Thine be done."

The early church had a similar kind of commitment. For again, and again, and again, did they pray, "Thy will be done," it says in the book of Acts. This was the pattern of life for Christ, for the early church. The apostle Paul prayed that prayer in so many words, "Thy will be done." Peter, in so many words, "Thy will be done." It is a way of life for a believer.

And in case you have forgotten, think back a few weeks to Matthew 6:10. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come - " what? " - Thy will be done in earth as it is in

heaven.” That is one of the essential petitions in the life of every believer, for that prayer is the model of all praying. We are to pray consistently, “Thy will be done.” Doing the will of God from the heart, as Paul expresses in Ephesians 6:6 is basic then to the Christian’s life.

In fact, I would dare say that unless there is a desire in you to do the will of God, it is at least questionable whether you are a Christian at all. John 7 indicates that for one who is a believer there will be a desire to know the Father’s will. Paul operated by the will of God. In Romans, just to give you a couple of scriptures, 1:10 he says, “Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.”

In other words, everything in his life was framed within the context of the will of God. At the end of Romans, in 15:32, he said, “In order that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God.” It was a way of life to him. And then there is an expression, I think, that’s so very special at the end of the book of Colossians in 4:12, where “Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, greeteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers - ” and what is the objective of his prayer on behalf of the Colossians? “That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

The great heart of the apostle Paul expressed in the message of Romans chapter 12 was that, “We may know what is that good and perfect will of God.” Peter states that the distinguishing mark of a Christian is a preoccupation and a centering of his life on the will of God. First Peter 4:2. “That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lust of men, but to the will of God.”

It is the distinguishing mark, then, of a believer. Modeled for him by Christ, and if we say we abide in Christ, 1 John 2:6, we ought to walk as He walked. And He walked in submission to the will of God. Is that your desire? It should be if you call yourself a Christian.

Now at that point we interject a question. What is the will of God? Let’s assume that we’re committed to it. Let’s assume that as believers we desire to do the will of God. The next question that arises is can we know the will of God? And there are people who question this. Some people think that the will of God is a very elusive thing, it’s kind of like the brass ring on the merry-go-round. If you get it that’s kind of neat, but if you don’t you still get a ride. And you can live your Christian life without it.

Other people think the will of God is sort of a mystery. It’s sort of a foggy, hidden, secretive thing. God is sort of like the universal Easter bunny who stashes it somewhere and runs around saying, “You’re getting warmer,” as we frantically try to find it. Some people think the will of God is a trauma. It’s something like running down the road and falling and your nose lands on a map of India and you say, “Yes, Lord, India it is,” or whatever.

But people have strange ideas about the will of God. Some a rather mystical visionary dream orientation, others as if God needs to speak with them out of heaven, some feeling it’s a traumatic event and most, I think, who believe those kind of things ultimately winding up with the sense of frustration and feeling that maybe they never found God’s will at all and they’ll have to wait to get to heaven to know the fullness of the meaning of life.

But I believe we can know God’s will. Let me tell you why. I don’t think God wills things for us that he doesn’t make available to us. That’s, to me, a very basic thought. If God has a will for my life, then He will reveal it to me if I’m in the right place to receive it. God does not purposely frustrate Himself.

And so people say, "I don't know what school I should go to." Or, "I don't know what job I should take. I'm in the midst of making a major decision." Or, "I don't know what girl to marry. I've got six that are in line and I'm cutting them down. I'm going to make a cut this week and we'll make another cut next week and see who's left. But I don't know which one, see?"

Or, "How do I know whether I ought to move to another house?" Or, "How do I know what I ought to do with this problem person in my family or what I ought to do to harmonize myself better with my wife or my husband? How do I know what God's will is?"

The answer to that question is that God does have a will and if He does have a will that He wants you to know, He'll make it available to you. I really believe that God is in the business of openly, overtly, and clearly manifesting His desires for us. You can know that. You go all the way back to Genesis 1:14. You will read in that very, very primitive account, the very first chapter in the Bible, right at the very beginning of creation, this statement. "And God said, Let there be light in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years."

Now the stars, and the moon, and the sun are not just for days and years. They're not just simply to identify calendars. They are for signs and for seasons. And the Hebrew word "seasons" doesn't mean winter, summer, spring, and fall. The Hebrew word for "season" there, the specific word means "an assembling of the people" or "a gathering of the congregation."

In other words, the stellar bodies were literally to be used by God to establish certain gatherings of the people. And if you study the Old Testament, you will find out that all of the festivals, and all of the feasts, and all of the holidays of Israel were identified by where the heavenly bodies were at a certain time. They were all in relation, for example, of the vernal equinox or the full moon. That's why in Colossians it tells us that now that we are in Christ and we are in the new covenant, there is no longer any need to keep a feast or a new moon. Our calendar for Easter and Christmas is established by the movement of the stellar bodies. God has established signs.

In Psalm 104:19, "He appointed the moon for gatherings of the people." From the very beginning God was making manifest certain things. And in coupling the stellar body movement with His revelation to His people, religious festivals were established. God revealed His will in a very, very clear place where all could see it. We think about how God revealed His will throughout the Old Testament and we know so many, many cases where He revealed it externally.

For example, there was the miracle of the sign of the covenant with Abraham, the birth of Isaac, a very outward, tangible indication that God was going to keep His promise. And then later on when it came time for Isaac to have a wife, the servant Eliezer was called. And Abraham said, "I want you to go and find a wife of his own people." And Eliezer, it says, placed his hand inside his thigh, he put it near the procreative area, and made a vow that he should find him a wife of his own people. And you remember what the sign was? Go to the well and wait there and as the maidens come at the close of the day the one that offers you water and water for your camels, she's the one to pick. A sign. Very outward. Very clear. Very specific.

And then as the children of Israel were led through the wilderness, it was a pillar of fire and a cloud. And then there was Gideon in Judges chapter 6 in the battle against the Midianites and there was a

sign. The fleece was wet and the ground was dry, and the ground was wet and the fleece was dry. And that was a sign, and God was showing His will.

And then there was fire on Mount Carmel. And then there were those acts of Isaiah and Jeremiah where they literally dramatized very visually what God was going to do. You see, God has always revealed Himself in a very clear way. And in the Old Testament commonly He did it through very visible outward, physical phenomena.

Now when you come to the New Testament you see this as well, don't you? We see signs in the New Testament. The gospel of John is a series of 8 great miracle signs. In fact, you might be interested to know that the word "miracle" is never mentioned in the gospel of John one time. Because they are signs pointing in a very physical way to Christ. And in John 20:30-31 it says in that specific text the things that Jesus did were signs. And He did many other signs in order that we might believe that He is who He claimed to be.

And then of course, with Peter, there was the sign of the sheet in Acts 10. And then there was Paul's conversion, an outward, dramatic, miraculous sign of blindness, the glory of God. And then in 2 Corinthians 12:12 the signs of an apostle. You see, in times prior to the completing of the Word of God, God demonstrated His will in a very outward, physical, dramatic way so that no one could miss it.

But as the miracle ages have passed how do we know God's will now? Well, we have in our hands the Word of God. The whole purpose of the miracles was to point to the Word of God, to the prophet of God as he spoke the word of God. Once the compilation of the divine revelation was finished, it then becomes the source of God's will. So, today I don't believe we look for miracles. I don't believe we find in the New Testament injunctions for us to seek, to find God's will in the stars, or to find God's will in some phenomena, or to find God's will by some providential arrangement of circumstances which we ascertain as a divine act. I believe we go at this point to the Word of God. And I think substantially we can find the will of God in the Scripture.

I want to suggest to you the things that are the will of God from Scripture, simplifying and reducing it down. Number one. God's will is that you be saved. God's will is that you be saved. That's where God's will begins. In 2 Peter 3:9 it says this. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise." Now the critics may say He is, and that's the thrust of this chapter.

The critics may say, "Oh, God isn't going to do anything. Where is the sign of His coming? All things continue as they were from the beginning. Everything's been going along the same way. All this stuff about judgment, all this stuff about doom that we've been hearing, all of this stuff that's going to supposedly come upon the false teachers, why we've never seen any of this. All things continue as they were from the beginning." Peter's reply is this. "It is not because the Lord is slack concerning His promise like men are. It is not because there is a gap between what He says and what He does. It is because He is long suffering toward us, not willing that any should - " what? " - perish, but that all should come to repentance."

It is the will of God that men be saved, redeemed, not perish. I call your attention to Matthew 18:11 and the words of our Lord there. "For the Son of man has come to save that which was lost. How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the

ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seek that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more over that *sheep*, than over the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so - "listen" - it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

Now the reference in the passage primarily deals with children, but it can be broadened because it is the heart of God who is not willing that any should perish. Peter broadens it for us. In 1 Timothy a word that speaks to the same matter in chapter 2. "For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God wills that men be saved.

Now, that's where the will of God begins. I mean, if you're looking for the will of God apart from salvation you have no basis on which to look for it. For the natural man understandeth not the things of God. Salvation is basic. To enter into the family, to acknowledge the lordship of Christ is when the will of God is first revealed.

In Mark chapter 3 - I just want to show you an illustration of this same thing - in Mark 3:31, Jesus was teaching in a particular house and it says, "There came then His brethren and His mother, and standing outside, they said unto Him, calling Him." Jesus was crowded and crushed in the house, as was often the case, and His mother and His brothers wanted Him.

Now it doesn't tell us why. It doesn't tell us whether they had a need, or whether they thought he was being overtaxed, or whether there was some particular family problem, or whether they were on the way to somewhere, but "the multitude sat around Him and they said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brethren outside seek for You.'" And He gave amazing response. "He said, 'Who is My mother and My brethren?'" And they might have looked at Him like He was a little bit off His rocker if He didn't know who they were. "He looked round about on those who sat about Him, and said, 'Behold My mother and My brethren.'" He identified the people around Him as His mother and brethren because He says in verse 35, "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, My sister, My mother."

And there He is saying you really come into My family when you do the will of God. And, of course, that initial step is salvation. God wills that men be saved. And when they respond to that and enter His family, they become the brothers and sisters and mothers of Christ. This is God's will. So much is it God's will that He came into the world to die. We have things we will but we don't will them to the extent that we would die for them. But God did. The incarnation, the crucifixion revealed the commitment of God to the expression of His will. God's will is that men be saved. That's where it begins.

And I don't make any assumption, really, in the church. I know that there are people who are not saved. I know there are people here tonight who have never opened their heart to Jesus Christ. I know that. And I say to you, the will of God for you is not that you perish. The will of God for you is not that you go astray forever. The will of God for you is not that you be cut off from eternal life. The will of God for you is not that you spend forever in hell. The will of God for you is that you be saved.

"God," says Paul, "who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sin, has made us alive together with Christ. By grace are you saved through faith, that

not of yourselves it is a gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.” The will of God expressing His love and His mercy is that you be saved. That’s where it begins.

You say, “I’m already saved and I still stumble.” Let me take you to a second point. Ephesians chapter 5. God’s will is not only that you be saved but according to Ephesians chapter 5 it is that you be Spirit filled. Spirit filled. In Ephesians 5:16 we find the statement, “Redeeming the time because the days are evil.” And the idea here is that we don’t have much time. There’s a pressure coming in these evil days, even in the time when Paul penned this. And we must redeem the time. And on that basis, he says, “Wherefore, be ye not unwise.”

Now “unwise” is just a nice word for stupid, without information or knowledge, uninformed, ignorant. “Be not stupid or uninformed, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” “Now, Paul,” you say, “How dare you? I’m searching. I’m banging on doors, and putting out fleeces, and I’m doing all kinds of stuff. But I don’t know the will of the Lord.” Well, you shouldn’t be stupid. You should know the will of the Lord. And if you just read the next verse you’d find out what it is. “Be not drunk with wine, in which is excess but be filled with the Spirit.”

Now God’s will is to be filled with the Spirit. Not drunk with wine, which is excess. You remember when we went through Ephesians 5, we talked about the fact that those people got drunk because they believed it induced communion with the gods. The pagans in Ephesus believed that the drunker they got, the more they ascended to a high that opened communion with the gods, much as drug addicts think they reach a higher level of spiritual consciousness, they believed the same thing. And the apostle Paul says, “If you really want to commune with God, don’t get drunk with wine, be filled with the Spirit.”

Now what does it mean? You say, “Does this mean I’ve got to get the Spirit?” I had a fellow come to me in Dallas and say, “You know? I read your book on the Charismatic movement. I read the chapter on spirituality.” And he said, “You know, I chased around for so long trying to get the Holy Spirit. Finally, somebody told me I already had Him.”

“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” Romans 8:9. What? Even the cruddy Corinthians, who committed every conceivable sin, are told by Paul, “Don’t you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?” We “have all been made to drink of one Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:13. So, all believers possess the Spirit of God. That’s not the issue. We don’t need to seek what we already have.

You say, “Well, if we all have the Holy Spirit, shouldn’t we have power in our lives? Shouldn’t we really move out in our lives?” That’s right, because Acts 1:8 says, “You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” The word “power” is *dunamis* or dynamite. You should be literal dynamite. Most of us look at our lives and say, “I think I’m a dud. I keep lighting the fuse and nothing happens. Why, if I have the Holy Spirit, don’t I go anywhere? Why, if I have all things that pertain to life and Godliness - ” 2 Peter 1:3 “ - Why, if I’m complete in Him - ” Colossians 2:10 “ - Why, if I have this power does nothing happen?” And the question is simply answered because you’re not filled.

It’s one thing to have the Spirit resident. It’s something else to have the Spirit dominant. Let me give you an illustration of it. The word “filled” is used in the gospels to speak of total control. For example, in John 16:6 it says, “Sorrow hath filled your heart.” In Luke 6:11 it says, “They were filled with

madness.” In Luke 4:28 they “were filled with wrath.” In Luke 5:26 they “were filled with fear.”

You see, mostly in our lives we can balance those things off. Like, for example, sorrow. We have a little sorrow and a little joy. And we have a little sorrow tipped this way, and a little joy tips this way and we try to balance it. If something real bad happens, we try to think happy thoughts and everybody tries to boost us up. But when something horrible, total disaster, a terrible injury, a death, or whatever, vroom goes the sorrow side and we're filled with sorrow. That's the meaning of the word. And in our lives basically, the Spirit of God is there, and there's a little for the Spirit and a little for us, and a little for the Spirit and a little for us, and we kind of balance things off with the flesh, but there comes a time when we yield all to the Spirit and we're filled with the Spirit, and the scale topples on His side.

According to Romans 6, it's a question of yielding yourself in obedience to the Spirit of God. We are to be yielded to the Spirit of God in order that He may fill us. I want to illustrate it with an illustration I've used many times in teaching this, but I think it will get it across to you. Peter is the classic illustration I want to use. Now, Peter basically knew one thing. If he didn't know anything else, he knew he wanted to be where Jesus was.

One time Jesus tried to send him away and he said, “Lord, to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life.” The Lord could never get rid of Peter. I know there were days when he walked down the road and stopped and Peter ran into the back of Him. Peter followed Him. He was always around. He was one of the inner three. I'm not sure he got elected. I just think maybe they couldn't get rid of him, whatever. But Peter wanted to be where Christ was, and there is a very, very obvious reason why. Because when he was with Christ, he found an incredible resource for his life.

For example, Matthew 14, the disciples are out on the water and a storm is kicking up in the sea of Galilee and they're getting a little panicky. All they're trying to do is just go a little ways from the hill where they had been over to the little village. It shouldn't have been a problem, but the storm came up, and the swirling wind that gets inside that little valley there between those cliffs on the east and the hills on the north and the west, really got the thing swirling. And I've experienced that in some of my trips there, and the boat was out in the middle, and they were really in a state of panic. And then all of a sudden as they looked off silhouetted against the moonlight, here came someone walking on the water.

Now that, if you weren't already pretty well done-in, that would tend to do it, to see someone walking on the water. And, of course, you remember what happened. They cried out, “Is it You, Lord?” That's the only possible explanation they could come up with. And He responded in the affirmative, and immediately without a thought of anything, Peter jumped out of the boat and started walking on the water.

Now he had been a fisherman all his life and had never done that. He knew he couldn't walk on water. Cognitively, he knew that. You say, “Well, why did he do something like that? Leap out of the boat, fire off across the whitecaps?” Well, I believe it was because he had this consuming desire to be where Jesus was. He got out there a little ways and got to feeling his oats, you know, like he was pretty good, and started checking out what he was doing, and then he began to sink. The Lord had to pick him up, and then they walked back together to the boat.

Now I can just imagine how Peter, you know, must have approached the boat. "Hi, guys." You know, just very cool and casual as he strolled across the water with the Lord. Peter learned a great lesson. He learned that when he was near Jesus Christ, he could do the miraculous.

Later on in Matthew chapter 16, the Lord was quizzing the disciples about who He was, and He said, "Who do men say that I am?" And they said, "Some say You are Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." And He said, "But who do you say that I am?" And all of a sudden Peter's mouth started moving independent of his brain, and he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And the Lord said to him, and He must have been smiling, "Flesh and blood didn't reveal that to you, Peter. My Father in heaven did." And Peter learned a second great lesson. When he was in the presence of Jesus Christ he could not only do the miraculous, he could say the miraculous, too.

The next time we see him in our little analogy he is in the garden. Jesus has been taken captive and that terrible thing that occurred in John 18, where the soldiers had taken Jesus to be tried in a mockery of a trial and then to be executed. And he was down in that initial phase of that situation in the house of Annas. Peter was outside and he was standing by the fire afar off. And you know what happened? When he was afar off, he was a coward. On three occasions what did he do? Denied Christ.

Now what's amazing about that is if you just back him up just a few hours when the soldiers came to take Christ, he grabbed a sword and started wailing away at the first guy in line. The Bible says he chopped the ear of Malchus, but you know he didn't go up to Malchus and say, "I'm going to get your ear," and just do that. He wanted his head. Malchus reacted, ducked, he only got an ear. But in effect he was saying, "I'll take the whole Roman army." There may have been as many as 500 soldiers from Fort Antonius, and he was going to start with the first guy in line, and work his way through the troops.

You say, "Well, he's got to be nuts." No. Because he was standing next to Jesus Christ and I'm sure in the back of his mind was this, "Lord, when these guys came marching in here and You said Your name, they all fell over, like dominoes. Crash. Now, Lord, if I get into trouble, would You do that again?"

I mean, I know he felt that the Lord was there, and he had a miraculous courage. He could do and say the miraculous, and he had almost a sense of invincibility. But the next time you see him he's warming his hands by the fire and a little girl asks him if he knows Christ and he denies. Two other occasions he denies and he curses. You say, "It's inconceivable, Peter. This is inconceivable. You walked on water, controlling and overriding the elements of nature. You, who opened your mouth and God speaks. Peter, you with the sword going to fight the whole Roman army. What happened?" What happened was he got separated from Jesus and no sooner did he get separated than he lost it all. Well, Jesus died and rose, appeared to the disciples three times and one extra time to Peter, and after that ascended into heaven.

You say, "Oh, man. With the Lord in heaven we might as well throw Peter under six feet of dirt." I mean, if he bailed out at 75 feet what good is he going to be when the Lord is in heaven. And you know what happens? The next time we see Peter after the Lord is in heaven the first thing he does is this, he stands up in front of the whole population of Jerusalem that are gathered for the feast of Pentecost, and they had been attracted by the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and the cloven tongues of fire, and the speaking in languages, the languages of all those who were gathered. And

this mass of humanity is gathered in Jerusalem, and he stands up and he says, "You men of Israel and all you that dwell in Jerusalem, be this known unto you and hearken my words - " and he preaches the Messiahship of Jesus Christ and indicts the whole group for executing the Messiah.

And the whole speech was right out of the mouth of God. There he was, doing and saying the miraculous. He and John went over to the temple. There was a lame man there. He said, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give thee unto thee. Rise up and walk." The guy jumped up, and went leaping, and dancing, and shouting through the temple. It was the only legitimate praise going on in there.

He could say the miraculous. He could do the miraculous. And so the Sanhedrin got him and said, "You keep quiet. We don't want to hear any more out of you." And he said to them eye to eye, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. And you judge whether I ought to obey God or man."

Listen, he could say the miraculous, do the miraculous, and he had a miraculous boldness. But you say, "How?" If he's a coward when Christ is 75 or 100 feet away and he's outside the house, why has he got so much courage when the Lord is already gone to heaven? And the answer is very simple. Before anything happened in the book of Acts regarding preaching, or healing, or being bold, it says and they were all – 2:4 what? - filled with the Spirit.

Now let me tell you something, people. Being filled with the Spirit had the same result in Peter's life as standing in the presence of Christ. Did you get that? Being filled with the Spirit had the same result as standing in the presence of Jesus Christ. Do you know what it means to be filled with the Spirit? It means to live as if you're in the presence of Jesus Christ. It is nothing different than a consuming and constant Christ consciousness.

The mind that is centered on Him, the mind that gazes continually at His glory, 2 Corinthians 3:18, will be changed into His image. That is why in Colossians 3:16 it says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." You see? As the Word about Christ dwells in you richly, His presence becomes manifest in your conscious mind, and as His presence dominates your mind, the Spirit of God controls you.

You say, "Aren't you confusing the Spirit with Christ?" No. Because the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, Romans 8:9. And the Holy Spirit is another comforter, *allos paraklētos*, another of the same exact identical kind as myself. Being Spirit-filled is no mystical, strange, far out, ecstatic experience. It is simply Christ consciousness and, people, it comes from inputting the Word of God. It's not a mystery. It's not an emotion. It's not an ecstatic experience. It is the feeding of the Word.

Let me give you an illustration of this. Turn in your Bible to Acts chapter 4, and I want to point out just a couple of scriptures rather quickly, and we'll draw through the other points and be done. But in Acts 4:31, they were praying. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness." Notice the filling of the Spirit of God is connected with the Word of God.

Look at 6:3. The apostles are desirous of continuing their engagement in prayer and the Word of God, and so they want to appoint some men to care for meeting physical needs. And it says,

“Wherefore, brethren, look among you for seven men of honest report - ” now watch “ - Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.” On one end or the other, being filled with the Spirit of God is connected with the Word and the wisdom of God. The two are inseparable.

Acts 6:5. “And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” How did he get full of faith? He got full of faith by knowing the truth about God as revealed by God, which gave substance to his faith and is the key to the filling of the Spirit.

And then in verse 7, because of the power of the Holy Spirit filling them, the Word of God increased. Inseparable is the Word, and the wisdom, and the faith revealed in that Word from being filled with the Spirit. And so we find that when men are filled with the Spirit, there is an amazing connection to the Word of God.

Now, beloved, let me say this to you. If you’re looking for the will of God in your life, number one, make sure you’re saved. Number two, be sure you’re Spirit-filled. That means you’re receiving the input of the Word of God, living in Christ-consciousness so the Spirit of God is controlling your life.

Third, God’s will is that you be saved, Spirit-filled, and sanctified. Sanctified. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. I’m not going to spend a lot of time on this. I just want to touch it, so carefully watch. First Thessalonians 4:3. “For this is the will of God - ” Now when anybody ever asks me, “Oh, how can I know the will of God?” I always think of this verse. “This is the will of God - ” why don’t you start here? “ - *even* your sanctification.” That means being set apart. That means being pure, being holy, being righteous, being virtuous, being sinless. God’s will is that we be pure, undefiled, unspotted, blameless. That’s God’s will. That’s pretty clear, isn’t it?

You say, “Well, what does He mean by that?” Well, he gives four principles. Number one, verse 3, abstain from sex sin. Stay away from sex sin. Stay away from it. Abstain from *porneia*, any kind of pornography, any kind of sexual activity, and the word is broad enough it encompasses all sexual activity except that which is permitted by God in the confines of marriage between a husband and a wife, and that’s it. Stay away from it. That’s the will of God.

Every time a couple comes and they come in for counseling in the church and they say, “We believe it’s God’s will for us to get married,” we ask them a question. Are you engaged in sexual activity? If the answer is yes, then we say, “You don’t know the will of God. You don’t know whether God wants you to get married. You don’t know the part He hasn’t revealed because you haven’t even obeyed the part that He has. You’re not even in a position to know what God’s will is. You have defied His will at the point of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. Unless there is a life of righteousness, and holiness, and virtue. Unless you’re dealing with sin in your life and are abstaining from sexual sin, you are out of God’s will to start with.”

Principle number two. “That every one of you should know how to possess His vessel of sanctification and honor.” Now some believe the term “vessel” here refers to body, so that you are to control your body so it honors God. Some believe it refers to your wife. You are to make sure that you care for your wife in a way that is honoring to God. I guess I kind of lean toward the body concept because I think that fits the context better. In other words, handle your body so that it honors God. Have you beaten your body to bring it into submission or subjection as Paul says? Are you dealing with the flesh? That’s the will of God.

Thirdly. "Not in the lust of evil desire or concupiscence, or sensuality as the pagans who know not God." Principle number one: Stay away from sex sin. Number two: Handle your body so it honors God. And three: Don't act like the godless pagans. And how do they act? They're guided by their glands. That's how they act. They're guided by their impulses, their lusts, their baser drives. In other words, it's a very physical thing here with the will of God.

Stay away from sex sin and that which leads to it. Your body should honor God, and that means your body is always to be under control. "All things are lawful," says the apostle, "but all things are not expedient." All things are lawful, but I will not be brought under the control of any.

People say, "Ah, well, I'm always in control." You get to a place where you're not, where you're not. I remember the first time I ever kissed a girl. Out of control, immediately, it's a whole new world, a whole new experience. And I realized that there were impulses in me that were beyond my ability to control, except by the power of God.

Finally, the fourth point, verse 6, "Don't go beyond and defraud your brother in any matter." Don't take advantage of somebody else. Boy, you know, people physically and sexually just take advantage of each other, horribly. I read the most shocking article in the latest issue of *Psychology Today*. I couldn't believe it. It presents an entire psychological survey which advocates incest as a positive, affirming relationship in a family, if you can conceive of such a thing. Talk about taking advantage, it's going to come. That's the first article I've seen on it in a public place. It's going to come. And fathers will literally destroy their daughters when that becomes permissible. Don't use somebody. Don't use people to get your gratification.

God's will is that you be pure, set apart, undefiled. "No longer do you live - " 1 Peter 4:2, we read it earlier, " - in the flesh to the lust of man but in the will of God." I'm telling you, people, I get weary of the stuff that goes on in Christian circles. There's one Christian leader whose life is - well, two of them I found about this week, whose lives are - so debauched, and yet they carry on, their ministry, flourishing in a very public place. And some Christians are so disturbed they are thinking of writing major articles on their lives just to expose them.

And churches are filled with people who are engaged in illicit relationships physically. This is the will of God for you. Now you say, "Christ is my Lord, and I have come to Him and received at His hand the gracious salvation, and I submit to Him, and I love Him, and I adore Him," and then you go out and you flagrantly, and violently, and openly defy His will. God's will is that you be sanctified, set apart, pure.

Fourth. God's will is not only that you be saved, be Spirit filled, and sanctified, but submissive. Just a moment's thought on this. 1 Peter 2:13. "Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, a supreme; or governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God." And you can stop right there.

He says, "Wait a minute, submit yourselves to all the laws of man for the Lord's sake - " not for the government's sake, but for the Lord's sake. Why? Because people are evaluating the legitimacy of your faith on the basis of your citizenship. Amazing, amazing. What kind of a citizen are you? Do you

obey the ordinances of man? The king? The governors? Them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evil doers? That's the Police and sometimes the Army. The praise of them that do well.

Listen, people say, "Oh, what should I do about the draft? What should I do about signing up?" Well, same thing about being a policeman. As long as those parts of our government, the police, and the armed forces, are protecting the innocent against godless, humanistic, atheistic, murderers, whether they are individuals or nations, I don't see any problem in being engaged in holding up what is righteous.

Now if I was a Russian citizen I'd have a little trouble. I couldn't serve in the armed forces because they are the encroacher, the aggressor, the murderer, but I could defend people. And I don't ever say anything very political, but when we didn't defend people properly in Southeast Asia the result was millions have been slaughtered, millions. We are to be submissive. The spirit of good citizenship. We are to abide by the principles in our government.

You say, "Well, now, wait a minute. How far do you take that?" Just to the point where the government violates a direct command of the word of God. Then you stand on the Acts 4, Acts 5 ground and you say, "At this point we will obey God and not man." And I think that's where we have to draw the line.

But we are to be good submitters. Do you realize that in Ephesians 6 that if you are an employee you are to submit to your employer as unto the Lord as if he were Christ? We have to learn to submit. In Ephesians 5 it tells us in a marriage we learn to submit, in a family we learn to submit, in a job we learn to submit, in a government we learn to submit. And by our sweet, submissive spirits, the spirit of cooperation, this is not a dictatorship. And so we submit by cooperating, not by saying, "Oh, well, if that's what they want to do, I'll roll over and let them do it to me."

We have recourse in our government. We can vote. We can petition. We can lobby. We can go to court about things when we have a just, virtuous cause, and that's cooperating with the system. But when we violate it, then we cease to be well spoken of and can't even qualify to be elders in the church. Except in those cases where the government violates a direct command of God, and then we must obey God and pay the consequences.

Can I give you a fifth thought? What is God's will? Saved, Spirit filled, sanctified, submissive, fifthly, suffering. And I just want to mention this because we've covered it in the past, I Peter 3:17. "For it is better if the will of God be so that you suffer for well doing than for evil doing." God's will is that when we confront the world and they react to our message and our life that we may suffer. And he says, "You shouldn't be so surprised, for Christ also hath once suffered." He suffered.

And over in 4:19, he says, "Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to *Him* in well doing, as unto a faithful creator." And in 5:10 he says, "After you've suffered for awhile the Lord will make you perfect." You see, part of the growing of a mature believer is suffering. It's the purging of John 15, where the Word of God, and trials and circumstances strip off the succor branches that retard our growth and dissipate our energy. God has called us to suffering. "All that will live godly in this present age will suffer persecution," 2 Timothy 3:12 says.

So, we have to face that. We don't look for that, we don't relish it, but we're willing to bear in our bodies the marks of Jesus Christ. We're willing to be bold and confrontive in the face of suffering. We're willing to say what has to be said no matter what happens. And sometimes that gets a little scary.

I remember when I spoke at Valley College over here a few years ago. They asked me to speak on Christianity and culture. But I don't know anything about that. So I decided to speak on why Jesus is the Messiah. Some of you may remember that. Well, that's a pretty interesting place to do that because there are a lot of Jewish people there. So I got up in the open forum for an hour and I spoke on why Jesus was the Messiah.

I remember one young man who was saved that day right there and went to seminary. I also remember that Christians were banned from the campus, all Christian book tables were closed down, and the JDL sent a letter to our church threatened to blow it up on a Sunday morning. We didn't tell the people because we wanted them to come. They didn't do that. We started getting obscene phone calls in the middle of the night. They harassed my wife, my family. We have had in our time here at Grace Church even a person at our door with a knife, threatening to kidnap our children. I have been put in jail for preaching the gospel in the United States of America, some years back. That isn't always the way it will be, but that might be.

I really believe that we must confront an evil age and, people, if I believe anything, I believe it in the day in which we live if we really are confrontive there will be greater consequences than there were in the past. Do you know what? Paul said, "I've suffered a lot, but I want to know Him and the fellowship of His - " what? " - sufferings." When you enter into suffering for the cause of Christ you enter into an intimate identification with Him who suffered. You see? That the one who doesn't suffer never really understands. Oh, the intimacy of the suffering for Christ, understanding that merciful high priest that He is. And a last S point.

God's will is that you be saved, Spirit filled, sanctified, submissive, suffering. How about this? Saying thanks. God's will is that you say thanks. First Thessalonians 5:18. "In everything give - " what? " - thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you."

Now, now just watch and listen for a minute. People say, "Oh, I don't know God's will. I'm trying to figure out God's will. What is His will?" All right, it is that you be saved. Have you given your heart to Christ? That you be Spirit filled. Are you receiving the Word of God regularly so that it creates in you a consciousness of Christ's presence, His Word dwelling in you richly, giving the Spirit of God that which is necessary to control your life so you're filled by Him?

And the word "filled" is used of a wind in a sail that blows the ship along. Are you being blown along across the water by the energy of the Spirit of God who fills your life because you have Christ-conscious thoughts?

Are you sanctified? Have you checked your life at that point? Are you living a virtuous and righteous life? And submissive, are you the kind of a model of submission that the Word of God lays out? Are you one who submits to the authorities of the government, the authorities around you so that the people say of you that you are well spoken of?

What about suffering? Are you confronting a society that is godless? And what about saying thanks? Is your heart filled with thanksgiving for every trial, every tribulation, every difficulty, everything that goes wrong as well as right? Or are you gripey, grouchy, bitter, angry? What is God's will, do you know? It's these things, people.

You say, "Well, MacArthur, you're a big help. I mean I drove down here in the rain to hear this stuff. All you're telling me is a bunch of Bible stuff. You don't tell me which one of those 6 girls I'm supposed to pick. You didn't tell me where I'm supposed to move, or go to school, or change my job, or how I solve my problem. I feel cheated. I didn't get a straight answer."

I got one for you. You're going to like this. You know, if you're saved, Spirit filled, sanctified, submissive, suffering and saying thanks you know what God's will is for you? Whatever you want. You like that? Does that sound good? Do it. Whatever you want. You say, "What are you saying? That's self will. See? I can't do what I want. I have to knock on a door and put out a fleece and -"

Wait a minute. If you're saved, Spirit filled, sanctified, submissive, and suffering, and saying thanks, who do you think is controlling your desires? Take a wild guess. God is. And that's why Psalm 37:4 says "Delight in the Lord -" and that's the composite of all 6 of those " - and He will give you -" what? " - The desires of your heart." And it doesn't mean He'll fulfill the ones that you've generated, it means He'll put them there.

People say to me "Why did you go to Grace Church?" And, you know, for many years, I've said, "I wanted to." And some people say, "Oh, you wanted to? Don't you know the will of God? It's something we just do because we have to do it. See." Wait a minute. I don't live in that kind of misery. I get letters every once in a while from a church or an organization. They'll say, "You know, we feel that we have been led of the Lord to ask you to come be our pastor." And it's usually in Pearblossom, or Death Valley or somewhere.

But anyway, sometimes it's better than that or sometimes, I don't know, lots of things like that happen, and they say, "Would you please pray about this?" You know what my first thought is? I don't want to go there. And if I don't want to go there, I have an awful hard time praying about it. Or I could just say, "Dear Lord, I don't want to go there, I'm just checking in with You to let You know that I don't want to go there." I don't know a better way for God to lead my life than through my desires. But there's a trap there, and that is if your desires are not His desires, and they cannot be His desires unless they are on these terms.

There's a second thought here. Once you begin to follow that desire in your heart, and if it isn't clear yet, wait, it will be. I found that always true in my life. I came to Grace Church because I wanted to. And I still want to be here. And I don't want to go anywhere else. And I think God's running the "wannas" in me. See? But there's another thought. When we want to do something, and we follow that desire, then we have to allow God to apply circumstances to that desire that may alter it. But at least it gets us moving. You can't steer a truck that's standing still. Right? It's very difficult. Once it gets rolling, it's easy.

And so we move out on the basis of the desire of our heart and let God shape that. The apostle Paul, Acts 16, he gets going and he says, "Well, we decided we'd go into Asia Minor." And the Holy Spirit said, "Nope." "So we said, 'Plan Bible. We're going to Bithynia.'" And the Holy Spirit said, "Nope."

That's south and north. We've just been east." What is he going to do? He never stopped. The desire, he kept moving, and moving, and moving. Finally got to the Hellespont and stood on the edge of the water and said, "Well, Lord, what do You want me to do?" That night he went to sleep and had a vision to go to Macedonia. And the gospel went to Europe.

And if he hadn't have done that and followed the desire of his heart to keep pursuing the will of God even though the Lord was directing him along the way by closing a few doors, if he hadn't have done that, just maybe the gospel would have gone the other way and the Chinese would be the Christians evangelizing us. But you see, to follow the desire of your heart you have to be open to the circumstances.

I saw Marty Wolf come in. I use the illustration of him in my book. Marty and I used to drive to school all the time when I was going to seminary, and Marty said, "You know," he said, "I want to be a missionary to the Jews." And he had the desire to go to Paris and speak to the French-speaking Jews about Christ, and so we talked a lot about that. We just checked out his life, saved, Spirit filled, went through the whole deal and said, "Marty, good-bye, have a nice trip. You know, just take off." That's the desire of your heart.

And so I remember we put up a plaque in our church, "Marty Wolfe goes to France." And you know where he went? To Canada. That's where he went. But he went to Montreal to work with French-speaking Jews. God fulfilled the desire of his heart, he just didn't have the right town.

You see, that's how God works. Nothing mystical. Is you keep moving on the desire of your heart, God will open the right thing. I love this verse, Genesis 24:27, "I, *being* in the way, the Lord led me." Let's bow.

Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and glory forever and ever. Amen.

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