

Romans 12:1-2 “How to Find the Will of God”[\[1\]](#)

Series: “Discerning the Will of God”—part 2[\[2\]](#)

How do you find the will of God? Here’s a key statement... *You need to know what you're looking for!* That may sound obvious, but it’s critical. You can’t find something if you don’t know what “it” is. And Romans 12:1-2 can help us know what we’re looking for.

**Main Idea: Romans 12:1-2 gives us some helpful principles to keep in mind when it comes to finding the will of God.**

To understand the Will of God, I must...

Principle #1: I must be in the place of Total Surrender to God.

Principle #2: I must be aware of the Conflict of Values.

- A. The Will of the World
- B. The Will of God

Principle #3: I must emphasize the importance of my Mind, and not my Feelings.

Principle #4: I must evaluate the alternatives with these questions:

- A. Is it Good?
- B. Is it Acceptable to God?
- C. Will it help me be more Mature in Christ?

Our Goal:

To learn how to discern God's Will in decision-making

Last Week: The Will of God is always consistent with the Word of God.

I. The God of the Bible is a Revealing God.

- A. We serve a God who does not change.
- B. We serve a God who has revealed His Character and His Will. (Heb 1:1-3)

II. The God of the Bible has revealed His Will in His Word.

- A. God revealed His Will to Adam in Genesis 1-2.

B. God revealed His Will to Israel in the Law.

1. Perpetually Binding Commands (The Ten Commands)
2. Temporary Binding Commands (Dietary & Ceremonial laws)

C. God revealed His Will to Disciples in the Sermon on the Mount.

D. God related His Will for the Church in the Epistles.

I can't underscore enough the importance of what we observed last week. God's Will will never contradict God's Word. What does that mean practically? I must saturate my mind with the Scriptures, day by day, if I want to discover the will of God in decision-making.

We left off last time with this question... How do we determine the will of God when there are no direct statements in Scripture? After all, there are lots of decisions we have to make every day that the Bible doesn't directly address.

E.g.--Does God want me to be a school teacher or a sales representative? Does He want me to marry this young man, or does He have someone else for me?

Let's look at a classic text, Romans 12:1-2. What can we learn about God's Will from Romans 12:1-2? Discuss: Share observations together...

I'd like to propose four principles from Romans 12:1-2. To understand the will of God, I must...

### **Principle #1: I must be in the place of Total Surrender to God.**

This is basic, yet so critical. Verse 1—"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to *offer your bodies as living sacrifices*, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." [AV "...present your bodies a living sacrifice to God"]

Allow me to remind you of the context of Romans...

In Romans 1-11: How God provided Righteousness for Unrighteous people

Rom 1:16-17 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel...for in it is the righteousness of God revealed..."

What's the right way to respond to what God has done? God deserves 2 things.

1. The Praise of our Lips (11:33-36)
2. The Praise of our Lives (12:1)

How do we praise God with our lives? Here's where it starts, with a new perspective on living expressed as follows: 12:1 "...present your body a living sacrifice to God..."

What does that mean? The verb "present" is in the aorist tense. That indicates Paul's talking about a decisive act. This isn't something you do over and over again, and then renege on your bargain with God. No. The picture is that of sacrifice.

God calls us to lay our lives on the altar. No strings attached. When I lay my life on God's altar, I am saying I

have died to living for myself. From this point on I am Yours Lord. I want to live for You.

The same word appears in Rom 6:13, rendered 'offer' [NIV; 'yield' in the AV].

Here's Paul's charge. Once you have tasted the mercy of God, and once you have experienced the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ, there's only one sensible thing to do. What is that? Be in the place of *total surrender to God*.

You say, "What does this have to do with the will of God?"

Everything! Let's be honest. Discovering the will of God is not always easy. Yet here's the key. It starts with total surrender to God.

Let me ask you, "Do you view your life as a living sacrifice to God? Are you totally surrendered to Him? If you're not, you're shortchanging yourself. You're short-circuiting yourself from His plan for your life.

Take inventory right now. Am I living as a *living sacrifice*?

## **Principle #2: I must be aware of the Conflict of Values.**

What do we mean by the conflict of values? We face a conflict of values all the time. For instance, every Saturday I have a conflict of values. Saturday is my "day off" from my occupational responsibilities. During the week how I use my time is a little more predictable because I have certain responsibilities that must be fulfilled (sermons to write, counseling appointments to keep, hospital visits to make, etc). But on Saturday, I have choices to make that expose my values.

Do I "take it easy"? Do I watch a football game? Do I watch *two* football games? Do I do yard work or other needed projects around the house? Do I spend extra time in prayer for my family? Do I take Sherry shopping? Do we take the day and go see and spend time with our daughters?

Each of those options has value attached to it. Who determines the value? Me? No. My wife? No. Remember Jesus' command? *Seek first the kingdom of God*. God is the Judge. It's His assessment that matters. What value does He attribute to the various options.

Think of a scale, from 0 representing "no value" to 10 representing "highest value." None of the options is inherently sinful or wrong, but neither are all options equal in terms of value *in God's eyes*. Let's think our way through them...

1. Take it easy, relax, watch a football game. Is there value in this? Sure, according to God's Word, *rest* has some value. Athletic competition has some value.
2. Do yard work and projects around the house. Is there value in this?
3. Spend time in prayer. Any value in this? Yes.
4. Take my wife shopping? A "valuable" activity? Sure.
5. Visiting our daughters? Yes, this too has value.

So which option do I choose? Before making the decision I need to face the fact that there is an ever-present conflict of values in my life. I need to ask myself the question: Which option the greatest value on that particular Saturday?

The next sentence is key. *Our decisions reflect our values*. Day after day our decisions are reflecting and

revealing what our values are.

Here's the second principle. To understand the will of God, I must be aware of the conflict of values. Paul sums up the conflict of values in verse 2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Here's the conflict. The first competing value is...

### A. The Will of the World

Be not conformed to this world. Don't be squeezed into the mold of this world. The other competing value is...

### B. The Will of God

Paul says, "Be transformed." And, "Test and approve what God's will is."

Be not conformed to this world. What is the "world"? A better term might be the word "age." The Hebrew mentality thought in terms of two ages: This Age, and The Age to Come. This age is characterized by sinfulness. And rebellion against God. This age follows Cain's example, and tries to live life as though God didn't exist.

But in the Age to come that will all change. In that Age, every knee will bow and acknowledge the Lordship of God.

And here's the point. If you are a Christian, if you are identified with Jesus Christ, you are guaranteed a part in the Age to come. God has purchased you at a great price, the sacrifice of His Son. You belong to Him now, to His kingdom.

What's more, do you know what is true of your condition? You are actually living with a foot in both worlds. Your citizenship is in heaven, the Age to come. But right now you're living in this Age. As followers of Christ, we are IN the world, but we are not to be OF the world.

Here's where the battle lies. Every day, you and I make choices. Choices don't just happen. The choices we make are affected by our what? Our Values.

Did you ever hear anyone tell you (maybe your parents, or a coach, or a teacher, or a boss), "You need to get your priorities straight!" Your values are your priorities. A value is the worth you place on something or someone.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I've never really thought about this before. You mean I have values even if I didn't know it?" Sure you do! Since you are here in church tonight, you placed a higher value on worship and spiritual growth than you did on kicking back and watching television!

Challenge: Identify your values. Your values determine your decisions.

I can't tell you how important this is. Our humanistic society says that values are relative. James Grier comments, "American education, influenced by John Dewey, has divorced facts from values...According to Dewey, all values are relative and in process. Modern education suggests every child in the socialization process should be encouraged to choose his or her own values." (p 18)

As a Christian, what should be my highest value in life? Two passages are key...

Matt 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God ..."

1 Cor 10:31 "Whether therefore you eat...do all to the glory of God."

My greatest value in life is doing the will of God. *Period.* That never changes. Every decision I ever make must be with this goal in mind. The career I choose. The mate I choose. The house I choose. *God's will* must be my highest value.

All of us wrestle with competing values. Suppose I stood up tonight and said, "I don't have a message to preach. I didn't have time to prepare this week. I was too busy. I played a round of golf on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. I went to Cincinnati for a Reds game and was gone all day Friday."

If that had happened, you'd tell me my problem was not a lack of time, but a mix-up of what? My priorities and values.

Suppose you notice your friend only attends church once a month. You ask him/her about it. He says, "Well, I can't turn down the overtime. I need the money so I can make the payments on the RV I bought in the Spring."

What really was his problem? A conflict of values.

Principle #1: I must be in the place of Total Surrender to God.

Principle #2: I must be aware of the Conflict of Values.

**Principle #3: I must emphasize the importance of my Mind, and not my Feelings.**

Notice verse 2 carefully. "Be transformed by the renewing of your MIND." Paul emphasizes the important role the *mind* plays in the transformation process.

Think for a moment about how people often determine God's will...

The ancients often used to try to discover the will of the gods by "divination." What's that? During a divination ritual, a pagan priest would kill an animal. While the animal was still warm, he would cut out the liver. Then he would look at the way the organ moved, the quiver of the liver, to discover the mind of his god. (H. Robinson, 16)

You say, "Sounds absurd! Why in the world would anyone ever try to discover God's will in so foolish a manner?"

How do you do it? I know a lot of Christians who don't look at an organ out of an animal to make decisions, yet they depend on the quiver of the liver just the same! Their own liver! They make their decisions but their gut reaction, by their feelings.

Is that how we should make our decisions, by our *feelings*? Do we discover the will of God by our feelings? Paul says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your MIND."

I'm amazed when I read Paul's letters. Finding God's will was NOT a mystical experience for Paul. He makes it clear that it involved an aggressive exercise of the mind. For instance...

Col 1:9 "...pray that you would be filled with the knowledge..."

Phil 1:9 "I pray that your love may abound...in knowledge"

Challenge: If I want to be in tune with the will of God, I must have a renewed mind. Don't miss this. Giving my life to God as a living sacrifice is a one time act (1). Renewing my mind is a day by day task (2).

Learn to think biblically. Make it a goal to saturate your mind with the Scriptures. Don't make decisions based on feelings. Feelings change.

You may wonder, "Well how specifically do I use my mind in decision-making?"

#### **Principle #4: I must evaluate the alternatives with these questions:**

By asking these questions: Is it good? Is it acceptable to God? Will it make me more mature in Christ?

Why those questions? Notice what the end of verse 2 says about God's will: "that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

What does Paul mean? There are two common interpretations. One approach is to say these are 3 levels in God's will (like a bull's-eye). Another is to say these are 3 parallel adjectives, telling us that God's will is good, is acceptable, and perfect.

I think the latter is right. In fact, suppose you're wondering whether something is God's will for you. If that's the case, ask yourself these questions:

##### A. Is it Good?

God's will is always good. That means at least 2 things. God's will is always going to be good for me. It's always in my best interest to do God's will.

E.g.—

And secondly, God's will is always morally good. It will never be God's will for me to do something shady, or something unethical. God is good. His will is good.

##### B. Is it Acceptable to God?

God's will is always acceptable. When we do God's will, we are pleasing God. So I must ask myself, "If I make this decision, will it be acceptable to God? Will it please God?"

##### C. Will it help me be more Mature in Christ?

The word "perfect" is an interesting word--"telos." It means complete. It signifies purpose or goal. It has the idea of being fully developed. Mature.

This is important to know. God has a goal for us. He wants us to grow up in Christ so we resemble His beloved Son (Rom 8:29). That means if something is His will, it will help us become more complete, more mature in

Christ.

So I must ask myself, "If I choose this alternative, will it help me be more mature in Christ?"

So think about my "Saturday illustration" I shared earlier. I need to evaluate the options by asking these questions (and it's probably wise to include my wife Sherry in the evaluation process since my sinful heart is prone to wrongly assess the proper value to the options!). The questions: Is it Good? Is it Acceptable to God? Will it help me be more Mature in Christ?

Here again were the options...

1. Take it easy, relax, watch a football game.
2. Do yard work and projects around the house.
3. Spend time in prayer.
4. Take my wife shopping?
5. Visiting our daughters?

My goal in the evaluation process is to determine which option has the *greatest value* in God's eyes. That will help me *use my mind* to discern what *His will* is for me on that Saturday.

You say, "Well, then, the answer would always be "spend time in prayer," wouldn't it, since prayer has the highest kingdom value? No. Actually spending time in prayer *could be* a way to avoid other God-honoring responsibilities. 1 Peter 3:7 indicates that my prayers will be hindered if I fail to know and honor my wife.

"But I could never choose the football game, could I?" Sure you could. Consider 1 Timothy 6:17, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with *everything for our enjoyment.*" Is Sports a gift from God? Yes. Can it be enjoyed to His honor? Yes. How? For starters, by putting it in its proper place.

**Review:** So let's summarize what we've seen in this study. To understand the will of God, according to Romans 12:1-2, I must implement four principles:

Principle #1: I must be in the place of Total Surrender to God.

Principle #2: I must be aware of the Conflict of Values.

- A. The Will of the World
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Principle #3: I must emphasize the importance of my Mind, and not my Feelings.

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Perhaps you're wondering, "Why plan if God has a will?" We'll seek to address that important question next time.

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[1] These unedited teaching notes are provided for your reading and edification. Pastor Brad Brandt

[2] This series is adapted from a similar series taught at WBC in 1993.