

The Discovering and Delighting in God's Will

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of discovering and delighting in God's will by offering our bodies as living sacrifices and being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Duration: 39:59

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:1-3, Romans 12:8

Topics: "Will Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the response that is expected from believers to the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that responding to the Gospel involves a sacrificial beginning and an ongoing transformation in our hearts and lives. The speaker also highlights the importance of not allowing the fallen world to shape our thinking and living as Christians. Ultimately, the goal is to worship God and show Him how much we think He is worth by giving ourselves fully to Him.

Transcript

Will you kindly turn with me to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. I would like to read verses 1 to 8, Romans chapter 12, verses 1 to 8. Perhaps I should say at the very outset that I am going to be meditating with you this morning on the first two verses in this remarkable chapter. Rather than read the text a second time, let us notice it very carefully as we read it now, and then we'll go through to the end of verse 8. Therefore, I urge you, brethren, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship.

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. For by the grace given to me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

If it is serving, let him serve. If it is teaching, let him teach. If it is encouraging, let him encourage.

If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously. If it is leadership, let him govern diligently. If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

May the Lord graciously deign to bless this passage of his word to us today, and particularly verses 1 and 2 of this very remarkable chapter. May I remind you as we come to think of the subject of discovering and delighting in the will of God, may I remind you that at this stage the Apostle Paul has just completed his survey of the gospel in chapters 1 to 11. Chapters 1 to 11 of Romans present us with something which is quite unique.

There is no other place in the New Testament which gives us such a comprehensive view of the gospel of divine grace, all together with the interrelatedness of the parts. That is what Paul has been doing, and he ends up with a great peal of praise, you will remember, at the end of chapter 11. Now, with chapter 12, he comes to the ethical outworking of the gospel received and experienced by sinners.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is not simply a theology. It is that, but it is more than that. It is divine truth, and when we receive it and believe it savingly, it has a vital impact upon our lives, and we will, of necessity, live a different kind of life.

The old has passed away. The new has come. It is a new day.

It is a new life under new lordship. Now, in verses 1 and 2, the Apostle Paul has a short little section giving us the most comprehensive message within the compass of two verses that I think you will find anywhere in the New Testament. You see, he is applying the gospel now.

He has been expounding it up until now, and indirectly applying it, of course, but now it is all application in verses 1 and 2. He is kind of answering the question, all right, if that is the gospel, what do we do to respond to it? What are we expected to do? And in these two verses, he gives us a very, very remarkable picture. He tells us three things. One, response to the gospel of God in Jesus Christ, the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to Jew and Gentile alike, responding to the gospel involves a sacrificial beginning.

Then he goes on to tell us that it is not simply a sacrificial beginning, but as we step beyond the first, as it were, as we move beyond the first step and begin the habit of Christian living, there has to be going on in our hearts, in our lives, in our innermost being, an ongoing transformation. And then, he says, all this leads to something. And if you notice it in the New International Version, it is quite graphic, more so than in the King James.

If this is the proper translation and the best, well, it is really graphic. Then, he says, you will be able to test and approve what God's will really is. And what is it? It is good.

And it is pleasing. And it is perfect. Now, not because I like to differ from anybody else, but I want to start at the end this morning.

And I want to work the way backwards to the first verse. I want us to start at the end looking in the first place at the ultimate goal in view. What is it? Well, we've mentioned it.

Then, you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing, and perfect will. Christianity involves so much. It is so all-inclusive.

We generally concentrate upon the grace of God in Christ. Effecting our pardon. And that is wonderful, for there is no life without it.

But the God to whom we come through Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord of the universe. He is the living God. He is the creator of all things.

And He is the preserver. And He is the ultimate judge and the consummator. He is everything.

And part of the wonder of becoming a Christian is sooner or later to wake up to the fact that the God who brings me to the place where He pardons me and gives me the gift of eternal life is a God who has planned for my new life. A God who has a will and a purpose and a plan for every single one of His redeemed. I can well remember how in my late teens, I recognized this for the first time.

I really felt like dancing. And the passage that really gripped me is the one that has come back to me again as I've been meditating on this passage for this morning's message. It's that word of Paul's in Ephesians chapter 2. You remember he says, We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works.

And then he goes on and he says, We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works. But now listen. Good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

My dear brother and sister, have you really got that? Put your arms around it. Put your mind around it. Grip it.

Before you were ever prepared for the work, God had prepared the work for you. It was so when you were born. Before you were born, there was a purpose for you.

When you were born again into the kingdom of God, that same purpose was brought up to date by Him. And there is something prepared beforehand for you to do. There's a work for Jesus, says the children's hymn.

There's a work for Jesus none but you can do. It's prepared for you. Now, as Paul comes to apply the gospel, which he has so painstakingly expounded, he is telling us then that in the Christian life, properly so called, we have come to the end of living a self-willed existence.

I hope that doesn't sound strange to anybody here this morning. If that, if becoming a Christian has not meant for you the cessation of living just as you pleased, going where you chose without any reference to God and His Word and His Spirit, then you have yet to begin the true Christian life. It is the end of self-will.

We are not called into the kingdom of God to run hither and thither just as we please. There is a work prepared beforehand for us to do. And at the end of this comprehensive little passage in verses 1 and 2, Paul tells us, look, he says, there is a point, there is a place, there is a provision that you may know, that you may prove and approve what God's will for you really is.

And this is what it is. And this is what you will be able to approve at the end of the journey of your growth and maturing. That it is good as God is good.

That it is pleasing as God's will must always be pleasing. And that it is perfect, it is complete. It brings everything to full bloom, to perfection.

Is that, my friend, the level on which you are living this morning as a believer? Are you satisfied with the life to which you have come this morning? This, brothers and sisters, is the will and the Word of God. And God expects us to come here spiritually. Now, that's the ultimate end in view.

Now, there is a proximate requirement here. It's not the end and it's not the beginning. In between the end and the beginning, in order to get to the end, in order to get to the ultimate, there is this proximate requirement.

Here it is. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, then, if I can underline that, then you will know. Now, there are two things here.

Discovering God's will and delighting in doing it is a learning process in which a twofold discipline is required of us. The first is the rejection of a forbidden pattern of behavior. Do not be conformed to this world.

One translator has, I think, very beautifully translated it, and you know it. You've heard J.B. Phillips' translation, I'm sure, quoted many times. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold.

We must not, Christian people, redeemed by the blood of Christ, indwelt by His Spirit, having His law written upon our hearts, we must not, we dare not, allow our thinking or our living be determined by this fallen world around us. It runs counter to everything in Scripture and everything in our own Christian experience, properly so called. Why? I can't go into the details of that this morning, but I'll tell you what I think Paul has in mind.

Paul began his great exposition of Romans by telling us in chapters 1-3, what's wrong with mankind under the judgment and wrath of God. What is wrong? And the first thing he does is to tell us this. He says, it isn't that men haven't got a knowledge of God, any kind of knowledge of God.

There is a knowledge of God to be gained from the things that He has made. For example, I'm not going into the details of it. But he says, what have they done with it? What they've done with it is this, they've suppressed it.

And that's the message of Romans chapter 1 from verse 18 to verse 32. Men and women have a knowledge of God, but they've suppressed it and they've pushed it down. And therefore, when they've wanted to do this or do that, go here, go there, they have lived without any reference to the knowledge of God that is given them.

They've suppressed it and they've lived in suppression of it. So that they end up, you remember that awesome list, I'm not going to read it to you this morning. They've moved from one perversion to another until they come down to the end of the chapter.

And even though they know that God's wrath and holy justice awaits the condemnation of those who do this kind of thing, they not only do it themselves, but they take delight in those who do it. Now, we are living in that world today. But Paul tells us, you are not to allow the world to squeeze you into its mold.

Why? Because you see, the world is moving in the wrong direction. The knowledge it has, it doesn't obey, it suppresses. And it goes on to do its sin irrespective of what it knows about God.

So the first thing that we have to come to terms with is this, the non-conformity required here. Do not let the world squeeze you into its mold. Do you want to know God's will? Do you want to find it a pleasure and a delight and good? You've got to come via this place.

Non-conformity with this world, its philosophy, its politics, its theology, anything that virtually traces its roots and its beginnings and it's colored by the philosophy of this world, the thinking of unregenerate men and women. But that's only the negative side. The other, the positive side is very compelling.

If we are not to allow the world to squeeze us into its mold, then what? Well, here it is. But be transformed by the renewing of your minds, then you will know. Be transformed.

The Christian's response to the will of God must go well beyond simply obeying the commandments. Now, notice this for a moment. I can't dwell upon it, but it's important to notice.

Paul says, don't be conformed to this world. But he does not go on to say, but be conformed to the Scriptures. Ah, I can hear somebody breathing fast.

It doesn't even say be conformed to that which is true and right and inspired. Now, I believe that he includes that. But there is something far, far, far greater required of us Christians than mere conformity to the letter of the divinest law.

What is it? That we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds. That our minds believe it and receive it. And inwardly, we want it.

And inwardly, we delight in it and are capable of rejoicing in it. And if we go wrong of coming back to it, if we go off at a tangent, we confess our errors and come back to it. And this is what he's saying here.

Simply to obey the truth of God may at last simply make us into a kind of Christian Pharisees, keeping the letter of the law but with no heart, no spirit, no soul, our heart in the far country, but our lips knowing all the shibboleths of the church and our actions likewise. No, no, says Paul, I'm not asking you just to be conformed even to the divine revelation itself. That's included, but what I'm stressing to you is this.

You must be transformed by the renewing of your mind. This is a transformation that is radical. There are two illustrations of transfiguration or transformation that I'm thinking of.

One, and they illustrate what I believe is found here and what is not. Now, you remember that in a sense, Moses was transfigured when he saw the glory of God on Mount Horeb. He came down from the mountain and they wished not that his face was shining.

He didn't know, rather, that his face was shining. Something of the glory of God, though he saw but the hinder parts of God, we are told. But something of the glory of God had impinged upon him and when he came down, his countenance was different.

But that passed away. But when Jesus was transfigured, it was a different thing. Jesus was transfigured in this way.

The transfiguration began in the depth of his soul. And then it moved to his body. And you read the Gospels, the three of them.

Luke particularly. And you will find that that which took place within the depths of his soul first kind of ignited his physical being. He was incandescent.

He was like a lamp. He was like the light of the world. And from the physical incandescence and light, it even reflected his garments were like sheets of light all around him.

But the point I want you to notice is this. It was so radical. It started in the depths.

And this is what Paul has got here. Being transformed, an ongoing thing from day to day, when you come to read the Word of God, you must expect it to transform you. If it doesn't transform you, either you are not listening or God is not doing what he promised.

When you come to the house of God, you must always go out a different person from what you came in. If you are not brother and sister, there is something wrong. When you come to the table spread and the elements before you, and you drink of the cup and you eat of the bread, and you go out just as you came in, I tell you something, something, something is radically wrong.

Be ye being transformed. And the center of the transformation is in the mind. Man fell in the Garden of Eden by the dent of other unreasonable aspects of experience.

I won't go into them now. But man's redemption is via his mind. God addresses us intellectually.

Not that we have all got to be scholars. Not that we all need degrees. But your mind needs to understand what you are saying.

Whatever your skill on the intellectual ladder, you need to know that you are doing something that is rational. The renewing of the mind. Transformed by the renewing of the mind.

And what does all this do to us? Well, the reason is this, you see. By the transformation of the mind, we become gradually changed so that we want to do the will of God. So that like our blessed Savior, we learn increasingly to say, my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.

Or as we read in the Epistles to the Hebrews, at His birth He said to the Father, a body hast thou prepared for me. You don't want sacrifices and offerings and so forth, but you prepared for me a body. And I'm going to live in it.

That's the implication. And die in it for your glory. And He did.

But over and above that, it not only qualifies us to know the will of God, but it sensitizes us to it. The sensitivity is something very precious. You have seen it in the realm of art.

Somebody will come in and say, oh, look at that picture. It's something out of perspective. And somebody, an artist, is twitching and a little bit uncomfortable.

Doesn't worry me. It may not worry you. Because you are not artistically attuned to that kind of thing.

Or in the realm of music, some notes are struck and they're just a little bit off. And you will see somebody who's very musically astute. Oh! It's like having a tooth out for some people.

Others are not worried by it. Listen, my friend. There is a place, I say so reverently, in our knowledge of God.

Indeed, it's sometimes found between husband and wife. You don't need to say anything and your partner knows what you want or don't want. But oh, in the relationship of a child of God and His Heavenly Father, there is a growing sensitivity.

You sense that something is wrong or you sense that something is right and you know you have the liberty to go or not to go, to do or not to do, as you grow in maturity, as this transformation goes on. Now, I must come back to close. How does all this start? How do we get on to this road? You tell me, well, it goes to a beautiful destination.

I wish I could get there. And the proximate demand is so reasonable, really. If it works, this is it, surely.

But how do we start? Listen to the Apostle. The immediate and preliminary challenge is this. I urge you, brethren, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Where does it start, Paul? Well, it starts with sacrifice. And the sacrifice with which it starts is the sacrifice of your body to God. The sacrifice of your body to God.

I can't really convey to you in a few words, and I must not take many minutes. I can't really convey to you how these two verses are bathed in sacrificial terms. The language here comes from the book of Leviticus where Israel was offering its sacrifices.

The verb to offer and the noun sacrifice are the precise equivalents of what you find there in the book of Leviticus. We're back with the Jews. It's all sacrificial here.

And now Paul says this. You, he says, you begin this pilgrimage into the realities of the Christian life, you begin by sacrifice. And the sacrifice is this.

You offer your bodies a living sacrifice to God. Now what does that mean? Well, a sacrifice is something that's very real and very painful. It means this.

Go back to Leviticus. When a Jew was bringing, shall we say, a sheep or a lamb or whatever, he was bringing something for sacrifice. He was handing it over to God, exclusively to God.

No one else was to touch it. The priest, on behalf of God, took it from him and burnt it, did what God required of it. It was handed over to God exclusively, and that is what Paul means here when he says it must be wholly separated, separated exclusively for God.

Not only that, it must be completely His. When you hand over the sacrifice, it is irreversibly belonging to the one to whom it was given. You hand it over out of your powers.

It doesn't belong to you anymore. Before you sacrificed, it was yours. But when you handed it over to God, it belongs now to the God to whom you gave it.

And you can't call it back. You can only steal it back. And that's why some of the prophets in the Old Testament challenged the Israelites with stealing from God.

My friend, whose is that body that you brought to church today? As you look at your hands and look at your feet and think of your mind and your eyes, what you look at, and your ears, what you listen to, and your tongues, what you speak, and your imagination, the whole of the body, the feet, the whole body and

its parts. Who do they belong to? Who belong? To whom does your body belong? If you are a man or a woman of God, then your body doesn't belong to you anymore. It has been sacrificed to God.

And there is no way forward without it, only backward. But notice the sacrifice is a special one. The sacrifice is real, but it is a special sacrifice.

In the Old Testament, it was the sacrificing of a lamb or another beast or whatever, and then it was burned. It died. It was slaughtered.

You don't sacrifice your body with a view to slaughtering it or of getting anybody else to slaughter it, for that matter. You offer it as a living sacrifice. Now, that may mean many things.

One thing I can only mention now is this. You sacrifice the body to go on living for God. And that means that your hands are henceforth available for God, and your lips and your mouth are henceforth the Lord's, and your eyes from now on are the Lord's, and they will not look on anything unholy.

You will say with Job of old, I have covenanted with my eyes not to look after a maiden to lust after her. And the whole body and all its parts and all its functions now belongs to God. And the only issue is, what does God want with my hands? What does God want with my voice? What does God want with my ears? What does God want with my mouth? What does God want with my body? That's the only issue.

It belongs to Him. Do you live like that? Do you wonder you don't know God's will from day to day? Are you puzzled that you make mistakes? Don't you now see how you go around in circles and you don't know where you are? And if you've got children in the home, they're following you and they too are going around in circles, and you can't teach them with any certainty, and you can't bring them up with any knowledge, firm and true of the will of God in a day such as this. And that is, says Paul, two things.

It is rational. It is your reasonable service. Do it, he says, because of the mercies of God.

What he means is this. All God's mercies spring from mercy. Behind the multitude of His mercies there lies God's mercy.

God's compassion. God's mercy and His grace belong to each other, but mercy stresses this. It is grace to us in our miseries.

It's a great word, mercy. It's grace in our miseries. I can't possibly take time to allude to them, but grace in our miseries.

In our miseries. Now, behind God's mercies, I want you to see God's mercy. What did He do in mercy and in grace for us in our misery? Well, He came Himself.

And what did He come for? He became incarnate in His only Son. And what did He come to do? Fundamentally, I'm separating this out from everything else that was related to it or comes from it. He came, He came, my friend, to sacrifice Himself for you.

How did the Almighty God take a physical body to Himself in Jesus of Nazareth? Was it coming on a trip to planet earth as if it were strange to Him? Did He not know us? Is He not omniscient? What did He want? What sent Him from home? What brought Him to earth? Listen, my friend. You were dead and lost and so was I. And He loved us in our lostness. And He took a body in order not simply to come alongside of us as Emmanuel, but to come under our burden of sin and guilt and curse and to die our death upon the cross.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Now, says Paul, with your eyes on that great mercy and the mercies that flow from it, I beseech you, I beg of you, I plead with you by the mercies of God that you present your bodies. Said Sittistad, If Christ be God and died for me, then there is no sacrifice too great for me to do for Him.

He was dead on, wasn't He? But some of us have been examining the death of God in Christ and we've still not come to that point where our bodies are wholly His. Two things. I'm closed.

I'm finished. Says Paul, It's your reasonable service. It's the only rational thing to do in the light of love so great, love so amazing, so divine, makes our logical, rational demand upon you.

And the other thing is this. You will wake up sooner or later to see that this is the first time in your life when you've really worshipped God, when you've given Him your body. How come? How come? For this reason, what is worship? Many things, but at the heart of it is this.

In worship, you tell God and you show Him how much you think He's worth. That's what we do. How much do you think God is worth? The God who became incarnate.

The God who died your death, who hung on the tree for you, creature, sinner, rebel like myself. How much do you think God is worth? You don't begin to worship Him until you give to Him who took a body to die in it, until you give to Him a body to live in by His Spirit. If you've not done that before, are you ready to do it today? God wants your body.

He wants your body because He wants to change your mind and metamorphose your whole inner being. And the end of the process that you may prove God's will for your life and then approve it and affirm here on earth and in heaven with the spirits of just men and admit perfect that it is good, acceptable and perfect and continue the worship of earth among the worshipful hosts. I beseech you with Paul.

I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a sacrifice to live for Him and then go on being transformed from day to day by the means of grace He has provided. And little by little, sooner and later, you will come to know that God's will is this, that and the other and you'll be able to approve it as the good thing and the pleasant thing and the perfect thing it is. Glory be to God.

What a privilege. I'm going to ask you to close your eyes for a few moments. And as we sit or stand together, I'm standing here, you're sitting there.

I'm going to ask you to utter a prayer of your personal response to this. It's not to the preacher. I believe this is the Lord's Word.

Will you respond to it quietly, sincerely, honestly? Let us pray. O Lord, our God, hear the language of our every heart and mind and spirit, the expressed purpose of our wills in relation to Your mercies and Your mercy. Lord, take our lives afresh today all for the first time.

Take these bodies of ours and make us the temples of Your living Spirit in which Your will is wrought. And take our bodies that they may be obedient to the Spirit within and that we may fulfill in life and finish what You gave each of us to do. Lord, hear our prayers.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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