

Lesson # 7 -- The Will of God and the Believer's Character

Introduction

- A. We have often been reminded in this study of how the will of God has to do with all the aspects of our life. We must keep in mind that God's will has been designed to enable us to be the best we can be and the most successful.
- B. The area that is most difficult to bring into harmony with God's will is our inner life. The Bible often speaks of our "heart" as the key to the rest of our life.
- C. It is helpful to realize that God is deeply concerned about our inner self. He wants us to know His joy and the full development of the fellowship into which He has called us. When we know the meaning of spirituality -- within -- then many of the other issues of our life will be more easily solved.

I. The Basis of Paul's Exhortation.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. Romans 12:1,2

A. The Apostolic responsibility.

I beseech you therefore, brethren

- 1. As the Apostle through whom God was giving His revelation, Paul could say "I beseech you," as the representative of God. We could paraphrase the statement "God is exhorting you through me."
- 2. We are here reminded that the Bible is more than religious advice. Because God has spoken to us and instructed us as to how we are to live -- we must obey Him.

B. The merciful provision of God.

. . . By the mercies of God

- 1. The words "therefore" and "mercies" points back to all the provision of redemption Paul has spoken of in Chapters 1-11.
- 2. The only Biblical response that we can make to such a loving provision -- is to surrender ourselves to God to live for His glory.

II. The Content of Paul's Exhortation.

. . . That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

A. What we are to do: Present our bodies a living sacrifice.

1. The word "present" points back to that which was familiar to the New Testament people -- the Old Testament sacrifices. There the animal was "presented" to the Lord as an offering (Lev. 1:3). From that moment on it was regarded as belonging totally to God.
2. We are to give our bodies to God as the O.T. offering -- with the recognition that we belong completely to Him. The reference to our bodies puts the emphasis on how we are to live -- as a living sacrifice.
 - a. When we realize that a sacrifice to God is sacred, then we can understand why we are to present our bodies.
 - b. To conduct ourselves as a "living sacrifice" is to use our bodies in a sacred way. It means, first of all, to keep from defiling ourselves by sin, and then being holy.
 - c. It may help us to realize that our bodies has to do with our functions: the mind, sight, hearing, speech, and the use of our bodily members.
 - d. We treat our mind, for example, as a sacred living sacrifice when we take charge of our thinking, reject sinful thoughts, and choose to think on that which corresponds with truth (Phil. 4:8). We must learn, if we are to obey God, to apply this principle to all of our functions.
3. We must keep in mind that living this way is not artificial. It is the normal Christian life. And, it will not be as difficult as it looks if we will be aggressive in following the leading of the Holy Spirit. He will work with us in one area and then another in a very gentle manner as we read the Bible and strive to put it into practice.
4. We must look upon this exhortation as an unusual privilege. Every believer would be thrilled to be selected by God for some unusual spiritual service. The truth is that we have been selected -- and can perform the spiritual service of being a living sacrifice.

B. How we are to do it: Holy and acceptable unto God.

1. The word "holy" not only tells us how to live, but how to respond to God in the act of "presenting our bodies." The thought has to do with the performance of a holy and sacred act -- by faith and love.
2. When the Old Testament saint presented his offering "before the Lord" he became the participant in a spiritual activity. God worked in his life and he became a different kind of a person. And so it is with us. When we obey God we become involved in a spiritual transaction that makes us more holy.
3. The word "acceptable" also fits the same pattern. Our response to God, when we present our bodies to Him, and the way we live out that sacred commital -- is acceptable to God. We often ask ourselves, "What can I do as an act of worship that would be acceptable to God?" This passage tells us.
4. When we understand that which is truly valuable, then we will see what an honor is conferred upon us to live a life that is characterized by that which is "holy" and "acceptable."

C. Why we are to do it: Which is your reasonable service.

1. The word "reasonable" means "rational" "that which is right" and in this setting is very close to "spiritual."
2. The thought here is that of a contrast. Instead of attempting to worship God by some external and formal act -- that which is right -- is to begin within, and give our bodies to Him in one of the most spiritual acts we could perform. As we continue in our life as a living sacrifice we then become characterized by what the Bible calls holy and acceptable.
3. If we have not obeyed this exhortation we must face the truth of how deeply we are engaged in disobedience. What would we say of the Old Testament Christian who refused to give the offering designated by God?

III. The Counsel in Paul's Exhortation.

And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

A. What we are not to do: Be not conformed to this world.

1. The word "conformed" means "to fashion one thing like another." When applied to the Christian life it describes what happens when we live according to the standards of the unsaved world.

2. We conform ourselves to the world when we live according to the pleasures, methods, priorities, and goals of the non-Christian. The basic characteristic of worldliness which is found in this way of thinking and living is that of self-centeredness. This is brought out in John's statement --

Love not the world . . . for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.
I John 2:15,16

3. The seriousness of living according to the patterns of the world is reflected in the statement in James --

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. James 4:4

- a. To have a relationship with the world that is described as "friendship" would indicate that we approve of the world and seeks its companionship. It means to treat it as we would a friend.
- b. We must ask if we approve of the pleasures, methods, priorities, and goals of the world. Have we conformed ourselves to this way of self-centered living?
- c. James makes use of strong words to show the terrible effects of worldliness upon the believer. When we live that way we are like an adulterer or adulteress in our relationship with God, i.e., like one who has broken the marriage vow. He also states it brings one into "enmity" or conflict with God.

B. What we are to do: Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

1. The word "transformed" means to change into another form. The English word is "metamorphosis."
2. Paul's instruction here is encouraging in that it is an expression of the very heart of the gospel -- we can be changed, by the power of God, into a person that is holy and acceptable to God, whose life is a living sacrifice.
3. Many Christians, as they read this passage, cannot accept the truth that is here stated. They feel it is beyond them, they think of their past and present failures, and have a tendency to believe only a very few believers could ever live this way. We cannot allow ourselves to do this.

4. Our daily responsibility before this exhortation is to "renew our mind." The emphasis here is on what the Holy Spirit will do for and in us as we seek the will of God through the Bible.
 - a. God has not saved us and then left us to flounder around in our own strength and ignorance. He has given us His Word so we can learn how to live and He has given us the Holy Spirit to teach us and enable us to practice the Scripture.
 - b. The "renewing of our mind" refers to that continual act of mental and spiritual correction that we need as we live in a worldly society. As we read and study the Bible, and submit ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, we are not only cleansed (I John 1:7), but renewed (II cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:23).
5. We must remember that the work of the Holy Spirit in this transformation is a gradual one. We cannot go from where we are today to 100 percent immediately. It is the will of God, however, that we grow through continual transformation into the kind of a person that is a living sacrifice -- holy and acceptable to God.

IV. The Purpose in Paul's Exhortation.

That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

A. The promised result: Proving the will of God.

1. The word "prove" means "to test for the sake of approval." It indicates investigation, setting standards, and the application of criteria.
2. The thought here is that the believer, when he has learned to give his body to God, and to live as the sacred sacrifice that he is -- shall in his life -- show or prove the meaning of the will of God.
3. Paul's emphasis is very close to what Peter had in mind when he said --

. . . And he that believeth on Him (the Lord Jesus) shall not be confounded (ashamed or put to shame). I Peter 2:6

4. Both of these passages teach the importance, value, and the many beneficial effects of knowing and doing the will of God. The thought is that -- it will stand the test.

5. From our study of the will of God we have been led into an understanding of what Paul means by "prove." We have seen how God's will applies in every area of our life and brings God's grace and provision into our life. A few of the subjects we have discussed are as follows:

Prayer -- I John 5:14,15	Fellowship -- Mark 3:33-35
Equipment -- Heb. 13:20,21	Certainty -- John 6:39,40
Sanctification -- I Thess. 4:3	Fruitfulness -- Col. 1:10
Assurance -- Matt. 7:21	Knowledge -- Col. 1:10
Worldliness -- Gal. 1:4	Strength -- Col. 1:11
Identity -- Eph. 1:3-5	Thanksgiving -- Col. 1:12

B. The promised provision: Good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

1. The words "good," "acceptable," and "perfect" refer to how the will of God will be revealed in the life of the one who has learned how to live in His will.
2. There are not many things, or relationships, or plans, or events in our life can we can call good, acceptable, and perfect -- but this is true of the will of God.
3. This passage does not teach that, if we do the will of God, everything in our life will be good, acceptable, and perfect. But it does teach that in all the trials, suffering, tests, and failures of our life -- we can do the will of God and find it to produce that which is good, acceptable, and perfect.
4. An illustration of this truth is seen in the life of David. As a young man he was anointed by the prophet to be the King. However, Saul was on the throne. David refused to kill him or even to work against him. He waited, in the will of God, and through that was not only trained for the kingdom, but caused many to rally around him so that when Saul died -- the nation was not only ready for him -- he was ready for the nation. The will of God was good, acceptable, and perfect for David.
5. This passage comes to many of us as an embarrassment. We have all been anxious about a situation, tried to lay plans to get control, labored in our own strength and ignorance, and perhaps even did some scheming -- only to fail. We know now if we had only prayed, trusted God, and developed what it meant to apply the will of God -- we would have succeeded. We see this among our politicians almost weekly.

Conclusion: We must ask ourselves honestly -- Have I surrendered myself to God as a living sacrifice? Am I now living that way? Have I defiled myself as a sacrifice as well as the will of God by my laziness, grudges, bitterness, unconfessed sin, worldliness, gossip and lusts?