

Growing In The Christian Life

Understanding God's Will

Ephesians 5:1-20

¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person —such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them. ⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Every Christian should seek to understand the will of the Lord; or, to use a literal translation of Ephesians 5: 17, we should "not be foolish, but have discernment as to what is the will of the Lord." Some Christians are "foolish", for they have no discernment in the things of the Lord, and this disqualifies them from real usefulness in the service of God.

For example: (1) They do not understand the true nature of the Christian life - that it is imparted by a new birth (John 3: 3, 5, 7), and that it is experienced upon receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour (John 1: 11-13). (2) They do not know the secret of life more abundant (John 10: 10), of fruitfulness in service (John 15: 5), of deliverance from bondage to sin and self (Romans 6: 11; 7: 24-25; 8: 2), and

of a life of triumphant holiness (2 Corinthians 2: 14). (3) They do not understand the true nature and purpose of the Church, which is not primarily an outward organization but an invisible, living organism consisting of every true believer (1 Corinthians 12: 12-13).

(4) They do not realize that God's purpose in this dispensation is that of forming and completing the Church (Acts 15: 14); that the world will therefore not be converted; that the kingdom of God will not be built on earth in this age, and that the world will go on getting worse. (5) They know nothing about God's future program for the world, the Church and the Jew. We find a wonderful revelation of all these great truths in the Word of God, and if we would understand them we must - 2 Timothy 2: 15, with the prayer in our hearts - Psalm 119: 18!

Consider the following five progressive truths, and remember that God's will means God's wish and desire.

1. IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT ALL MEN SHOULD BE SAVED

God desires the salvation of everyone - look up 2 Peter 3: 9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.", and notice also Isaiah 45: 22; 53: 6; Ezekiel 33: 11; John 1: 29; 3: 16; Revelation 22: 17. In His great mercy He has provided salvation for everyone. This is not to say that everybody will accept God's provision. The Word of God never leads us to believe that all will be saved, but it does teach that all may be saved - look up Romans 10: 13 "for,"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

2. IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT THOSE WHOM HE SAVES SHOULD BE SANCTIFIED

Look up 1 Thessalonians 4:1-4 "As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ²For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. ³It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable," and 1 Peter 4: 1-5. God's will for His children is that they should be holy - look up Ephesians 1: 4; 2 Timothy 1: 9; 1 Peter 1: 15-16; 2 Peter 3: 11. If you are His child (John 1: 12-13), then God's will for you is that you should be holy; that is, *whole* (John 5:6); *clean* (1 John 1: 7 and 9), and constantly being filled with the *Holy Spirit* (Ephesians 5: 18).

3. IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT THOSE WHOM HE SAVES AND SANCTIFIES SHOULD SERVE HIM

We are saved to serve. But what is Christian service? The answer to this question is found in **Romans 12: 1** "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." The fundamental meaning of service for God is that we present ourselves wholly to God and place ourselves absolutely at His disposal for Him to do His work in and through us; this is His will for every one of His children. The sphere and the nature of our service may be varied, but the meaning of it is always the same - Romans 12: 1. In the light of this, are you His servant?

4. IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT THOSE WHOM HE SAVES AND SANCTIFIES AND WHO SERVE HIM SHOULD ALSO SUFFER FOR (AND WITH) HIM

Let this truth sink in, for many of God's children are not instructed in it! - look up **1 Peter 3: 17** "For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." We can suffer because it is the will of God for us to suffer - look up **1 Peter 4: 19** "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." and **Philippians 1: 29**, and see what **Acts 9: 16** says, and notice also the three characteristics of His will - **Romans 12: 2** "Do not conform 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."

5. IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT THOSE WHOM HE SAVES AND SANCTIFIES, AND WHO SERVE HIM AND SUFFER FOR HIM, SHOULD ALWAYS UNDERSTAND AND KNOW HIS WILL FOR THEM

The question of knowing God's will is with some of us a very real problem; but should this be so in the light of the following promises - **Psalm 25: 9** "He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way"; **Proverbs 3: 5-6**; **16: 3**; **Isaiah 58: 11**; **John 16: 13** and **James 1: 5-6**?

How may we know God's will? How does He reveal His will to us?

- **By His WORD, in response to our study - 2 Timothy 2: 15.** The more we study the Word of God the more we become acquainted with the things which are pleasing to Him and which He desires in the lives of His children (Acts 9: 6; John 2: 5).
- **By His PROVIDENCES, in response to our surrender - Romans 12: 1-2.** When we are seeking God's guidance on a certain matter we must take into account all the circumstances, and trust Him so to arrange these that we may understand His will (Psalm 37: 5).
- **By His HOLY SPIRIT, in response to our earnest prayer - Romans 8:26-7.** We can be sure of God's will when the clear teaching of the Word, the providences and the voice of the Holy Spirit all *harmonize* (1 John 5: 14/5).

Let us pray for each other the prayer which Paul and Epaphras prayed for the Colossians (Colossians 1: 9; 4: 12) - remembering 1 John 2: 17; Philippians 2: 13 and Acts 22: 14.