

## The Will of God

We all want to know the will of God, especially when it comes to the “big” decisions of life. Unfortunately, on a more consistent day-in and day-out kind of way, we are less concerned than we should be. There are more numerous small building-block decisions that add up to construct the fabric of our lives, giving rise to the opportunities we consider the “big” decisions. These mini-decisions are the everyday decisions of obedience to the will of God that put us in position for the “big” ones. The “big” decisions will be different, depending on the sum effect of the normal obedience we tend to overlook day-in and day-out. Is it possible that the “big” decisions might not be so big if we more consistently followed God’s will in more of the “little” things? Maybe they are not so little.

Romans 12:1-5 (NASB95<sup>1</sup>) helps us understand this thing we call “the will of God.” There is a difference in usage between what God’s word calls the “will of God” and contemporary terminology. God’s Word never addresses circumstantial decision making with this terminology. This is not what we expect or what we are looking for to get us through a crisis or give us confidence in making a “big” decision. However, Romans 12 will still help with these special decisions of life and, even more, it will help us experience more consistent peace and confidence in the will of God day in and day out.

How do we act faithfully in the everyday arena so the will of God is a normal and over-arching reality that we are more comfortable with? The above passage in Romans indicates there is something else more important that must happen first. We must be changed. We must become different people.

***Romans 12:1–5 (NASB95) — 1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.***

Of course, long messages have been developed on this passage but this will not be one of them. We will focus on the way we must think to be in the will of God.

Paul says, in verse two, that to understand and approve (“prove”) the will of God one must be changed. We certainly cannot appreciate anything about God and His will from our natural, purely human viewpoint. We are just not like He is.

“For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the NASB95, unless otherwise indicated.

And My thoughts than your thoughts.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul urges two things. The first is to “present (“offer,” NIV) your bodies . . . to God (verse one). There is much to be said about this. But here let it just be said that this “sacrifice” is a living one, the experience of allowing God access to our physical body. The body is good and special, that is, holy and pleasing to God. And this offering is a rational, logical way to serve our Lord. We must view our physical bodies in this light, a good light.

“And” in verse two indicates that what follows is the result or at least it is subsequent to the command just discussed in verse one.<sup>3</sup> This second thing that Paul urges is a two-part command, consisting of a negative and a positive, something not to do and something God wants us to do. First He wants us to consistently “not be conformed to this world,” not to fit in to our age or the times in which we live. We must become misfits. We must be different in character and practice than those around us. But we must not leave a spiritual/moral vacuum by simply *not* doing this.

Secondly, instead of conforming, we must also be consistently “transformed” or changed by a “renewal of the mind (lit.).” The purpose or result of this “presenting” and “transforming” is to understand and appreciate (“prove,” “test and approve,” NIV) God’s will. This relates to “sound judgment” (verse 3) and our relationship with fellow Christians (verse 5) that follow in the context. The process of presenting our bodies and being transformed is the path to knowing the will of God. This is a learning process that is always taking place, in both the “little” and “big” things of our lives.

The word “by<sup>4</sup>” (verse 2) indicates that the “renewal of the mind (lit.)” is the mechanism that drives the two-part process of transformation. This mental process, which is on-going by nature and general in scope because of the present tense commands given, can have a broad, general application but is usually understood to have largely to do with content, learning facts or knowledge with our mind. This is certainly crucial. There is more indicated in the context, though, because the text continues in verse three with the connecting word, “for,” indicating support for what precedes it, in verse 2. This support in verse 3 concerns the thinking or mind-set just mentioned in verse two, “the renewing of the mind.” Paul is concerned that any Roman Christian might “think more highly of himself than he ought to think,” that is, to deny the unity of the church, the body of Christ (verses 4-5). Instead, he is to think soundly, by faith (implied, by the Spirit<sup>5</sup>). A second “for” beginning verse four double stacks the support by including verses four and five in Paul’s reasoning. To think soundly, one must never forget that he is part of a multiple unity in the church or body of Christ. There are many parts and one body, even being so interconnected as to actually be part of one another. How profound is the unity God has created, not only between Himself and us but also between each of us and the other – individuals, yet one in Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Isa 55:9.

<sup>3</sup> Καί (kai) can have several functions. BDAG, 495, ζ. to introduce a result that comes fr. what precedes; possibly, also, Wallace, 673, Explanatory. The result usage is more prevalent than commonly recognized.

<sup>4</sup> Dative case, means.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:5-6.

Please, see the text of Romans 12:1-5 as a whole. It is the will of God that we see the beautiful creation of unity in the Church and strengthen it by renewing our thinking to include our proper place in the fellowship of the body of Christ. This unity is the reason for giving God access to our bodies and submitting to the process of change that leads to understanding and approving of the will of God. His will unfolds as we grow. The will of God always has to do with progress in character and Christ-likeness, resulting in better thinking and better relationships. This is a learning process that is always taking place, in both the “big” and “little” things of our lives. “Big” or special decisions arise out of all the “little” decisions that we make in following Christ every day. Those “little” decisions even bring us to the opportunities for the “big” ones. The big, special decisions find their place in Romans 12:1-2, as we present our bodies and are being transformed continuously by new thinking. They are made the same way as the “little” ones.

The presentation of the “will of God” is different in Scripture. The difference in usage between God’s word and contemporary terminology is indicated by a fresh look at Romans 12:1-2. God is more concerned about our being transformed by the renewing of the mind than He is about circumstantial decisions. The latter are not discussed in Scripture using the “will of God” terminology<sup>6</sup>. If one is being transformed, they will make the other, big decisions of life more easily, decisions the Lord is very concerned about. However, transformation is the key and priority.

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<sup>6</sup> Mark 3:35 is a possible exception to this.