

The Biblical Formula for Knowing the Will of God

Romans 12:1-2

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Background Notes

Most of you are aware that many of the apostle Paul's epistles have a two-fold structure: the first part of the letter is **doctrine**, and the second part of the letter is **practical application**. This is the case with the epistle to the Romans: chapters 1-11 are doctrinal, and chapters 12-16 are practical. So in chapter 12 we begin the "practical living" part of the letter to the Romans.

Notice the "therefore" in verse 1: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God..."* In other words, what practical steps should we take in view of the doctrine of the mercies of God contained in chapters 1 through 11? How shall we then live?

The great doctrine of the book of Romans is the doctrine of justification by faith. Talk about the mercies of God! In Romans 1-11, in a systematic way, the apostle Paul explained and taught how a righteous God can justify unrighteous sinners like you and like me. These chapters teach us how God (who is righteous) can justify (or declare righteous) **sinners** -- like you and me. How is He able to do this? Answer: Because the Lord Jesus became our substitute! He took the penalty for our sins and died in our place on the cross. This great truth is proclaimed and taught systematically in the book of Romans. That's what the book of Romans is all about.

Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23 are two verses that summarize this great doctrine. Those are two verses that you should memorize, if you don't already know them! Romans 3:23: *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."* And Romans 6:23: *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Now -- in view of all this wonderful truth that is summarized by the apostle Paul in verse 1 as "the mercies of God" -- how should we then live? That is what Romans 12-16, the practical part of Romans, is all about.

Doctrinal Point

The godly believer practices the biblical method of knowing God's will.

How many of you want to know God's will for your lives? I think all of us would agree that we want to know God's will for our lives. Now another question: how many of us **do** know God's will for our lives? Not as many of us would say Yes to that question! Well listen, God **does** have a will for our lives. It's bigger than what job we should have, or if we should marry, or who we should marry, or where we should live, etc. -- although it certainly includes those things. If, as our Lord said, God who knows every sparrow that falls, and knows the number of every hair on every head in the world, He certainly knows what is best in life for each one of us -- including where you should go to college, what job you should take, where you should live, who you should marry, and so forth. God certainly knows all these things --He is omniscient and He is sovereign! He certainly knows all these things.

Romans 12:1-2 tells us how to know God's will for our lives. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, **that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"** (emphasis added).*

There are three steps. And what is the result? The result of following these three steps is that you will prove, that is, you will come to know for sure, and approve of, what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. So it's pretty straightforward. These three steps are what you have to do if you want to know the will of God for your life -- but it's easier said than done, isn't it?

Step #1 - Present your body a living sacrifice to God.

The idea here is that the believer must totally dedicate of his or her entire self to the Lord. This is not only holy and acceptable to God, but it's reasonable. In view of what **the Lord has done for us**, it makes perfect sense, and it is logical and spiritually intelligent.

A number of years ago I shared this passage with a group of teenagers as we stood around a campfire. I explained to them what it meant to "present your body a living sacrifice to God." One of the teen girls became dizzy and actually stumbled into the fire, and we had to act quickly rescue her. I told the teens that this is not what Paul meant by "present your body a living sacrifice"! Clearly the apostle Paul was using figurative language, language meant to represent **total dedication** of ourselves to the Lord. That's the idea in "present your body a living sacrifice." In the Old Testament, nothing was held back when a sacrifice was offered to God. A sacrifice was totally dedicated -- given entirely to the Lord.

Step #2 - Don't be conformed to this world.

The values and attitudes and views of this world system are contrary to God's value system and the Christian worldview. Are you conformed to this world system and its values and attitudes?

For example, the world says if you want to be great, you've got to get ahead! You've got to move up the ladder, even if it means stepping on other people. Is that what the Lord says? Is that what the Bible says? Jesus said if you want to be great, you must **serve** one another. Let me ask you: are you conformed to this world in your attitude about success? How do you look at people? Who is really important and successful in your eyes? How do you live your life? Are you still trying to get ahead, to seek success in this world -- or do you seek to serve others? Don't think that you'll come to know God's perfect will for your life if you haven't taken Step #2, if you're still conformed to this world.

Here's an example of being conformed to this world in our thinking. The world says that humans came about through time and chance and the process of evolution. That's what the world says. In the Bible, God says that He created people as male and female human beings right from the beginning. Jesus said, "*But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female*" (Mark 10:6). Now that doesn't sound like evolution (or even theistic evolution or progressive creationism) to me. No way! Does it to you? "...*from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female.*" As far as the Lord Jesus was concerned, no evolution or long "geologic ages" were involved! Man was created, according to the Bible, on the sixth day of creation week -- right? Did God say six geologic ages or six days? As far as the Lord Jesus was concerned, it was the sixth day of creation week. Are you still conformed to this world's way of thinking? Are you trying to harmonize this world's Godless theory of evolution with what God Himself says in His Word? Don't expect to know what is the will of God for your life if you're still conformed to this world in your thinking.

Step #3 - Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Now how do you do that? Notice it is not "transform yourself," but "be transformed." We don't transform ourselves -- **God transforms us!** How? God transforms us by the **renewing of our minds.**

God starts with our minds. It's primarily as we read Scripture and fill our minds with the Word of God that the Holy Spirit is able to change our whole way of thinking. And before long, our whole lives will be transformed!

A young man who lives near us recently became a Christian. He told me that he had started reading the Gospel of Matthew. A few days later I gave him some of my recorded "Talks" on the Gospel of Mark, and I said to him, "When you finish Matthew, here are some "Talks" to help you along in the Gospel of Mark." He said, "I've already finished Matthew. I'm into Mark already!" Well, praise the Lord! That young man is going to find his mind renewed and his life transformed as he devours the word of God! That's the way it works. And furthermore, he's going to know and approve of what God's will is for his life.

Notice also that the will of God is **good** and **acceptable** and **perfect**. Don't ever get the idea that God's will for you is less than the best! God knows you, inside and out. His will for you is good and acceptable. It is pleasing in His sight and it is **perfect**. It is just right for the process of your growth and maturing and becoming more like Christ.

If you're not happy with your life right now, you either don't know God's will for your life, or you're not following the steps that are outlined for us here in Romans 12:1-2. If you follow these steps, you will not only come to know what God's will is, but you will accept it and approve of it! That's what is involved in this last phrase "*that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*"

Well, there it is! These three steps are the sure-fire method for knowing God's will. The godly believer practices the biblical method of knowing God's will.

Practical Application

Let's not crawl off the altar of sacrifice.

Many Christians dedicate themselves to the service of the Lord after a challenging sermon about presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, or during an emotional altar call. They may truly mean it at the moment, but where are they a few days later? Where are they when the going gets tough? Sometimes they have "crawled off the altar."

It's easy to climb up on the altar of sacrifice, because it takes only a few words to do so. "OK, I'll present my body as a living sacrifice." However, **staying on the altar** is another matter! Total dedication to the Lord in all the circumstances of life is not so easy! It's a lot more than just a few words. It's hard, because there are no ropes holding us on the altar. It's all too easy to crawl off the altar when the fire starts.

Well, where are you? Are you on the altar or off the altar of sacrifice? Have you taken the first step and presented your bodies as a living sacrifice? Are you still on the altar, or have you crawled off the altar when you realized the cost of total commitment? Let's not crawl off the altar of sacrifice.