

Doing God's Will by Obeying God's Word

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 November 2019

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Many of you will know the mantra, get the basics right and the rest will follow. Some of you might even live by that mantra. Get the basics right and the rest will follow.

And take for example, tennis. We know all about famous bad boy Nick Kyrgios. He's a fanboy and player. He knows all the fancy trick shots.

I've got a video here actually with sound on it, just to give you an example. He just can't resist it, can he?

That exhibition tennis again, which he did so often against Murray. Okay, that's it.

There were actually two more other trick shots that he did in that very match, which was in the video, but we're not here to watch tennis. We're here to read God's word, so I'm not playing it. But you can see he's really talented, isn't he?

[1 : 03] And yet, he's never won a Grand Slam. And I better not be too disparaging, but I don't think he ever will. And that's because I think he just doesn't get the basics right.

He doesn't keep his temper in check. He doesn't use good judgment. He doesn't play every ball consistently. High percentage tennis. Now, unlike him, Rafa and Federer, I'm sure they know the trick shots, all the trick shots as well, but they win many of the Grand Slams.

Why? Because they get the basics right. And I think that's the same with doing God's will. Often, when we think of finding and doing God's will, we perhaps have Paul's example in mind.

You remember him in Acts, where the Lord appears to him on the road to Damascus and revealed to him his mission in life. Now, we may not be looking for anything that spectacular, but we sort of want to hear that still small voice, don't we, in finding God's will?

Or maybe a confirmation from the Bible as a sign. Perhaps when we're making those big decisions in particular, like who we should marry, or if we're going to another country as a missionary, which country or which job to take?

[2 : 21] And I used to think like that as well. But actually, now I think about it, it's actually distracting us, I think, from the basics of doing God's will. And particularly when it comes to the Bible, that's not how we should be reading or discovering God's will from it.

Instead, if you want to get the basics right, doing God's will is about obeying God's word in the day-to-day activities of our life. So if you look in your outline today, there are three points in the middle on how God's word helps us to do God's will.

Last Sunday, we saw how God's word revealed God's big picture will of the universe. God's will for the universe is to bring all things under Christ. And that includes us.

God's will for our lives is for us to be in Christ and to align our lives to Him. Today, however, we want to look at how then we live it out as we awake to the alarm clock every day.

How do we go about doing God's will? And specifically, how does knowing and obeying God's word help us to do that? After all, if you look at the reading from Psalm 119, that's the promise from that reading, isn't it?

[3 : 40] Verse 9 says, How can a young person stay on the path of purity? Answer, by living according to your word. Now, I don't think it's only young people that can do that.

I mean, if you are young and you keep doing that, one day you get older, and you can do that while you're older as well. But the point is really that if you stay on that path, that's how you live.

If you live according to God's words, that's how you stay on the path. It goes on to say, verse 10, In other words, the commands in your word.

With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth, which I find in the word. I rejoice in following your statutes, as one rejoices in great riches.

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees. I will not neglect your word. So you notice there's no talk here of needing visions, no need for confirmations from the Lord in order to do his will, is there?

[4 : 59] The phrase path of purity is not just referring to things that relate to purity. Rather, it's about how we may keep all our lives pure, being right before God by obeying his word.

So Psalm 119, in fact all 119, all 176 verses of it, is all about reminding us that all we need is God's word.

We need God's word hidden in our hearts, embedded fully in it so that we can follow it all our lives. Well, how does this occur? Well, I've got those three points there.

Firstly, because God's word contains his specific instructions telling us what's right and wrong in life. So for example, we know that thou shalt not steal is one of the Ten Commandments.

So is it ever God's will for us to work for a company that scams people online? No. Yeah, it took a while.

[5 : 58] Yes, no. How about thou shalt not lie? Is it ever God's will to lie on your tax returns?

No. Even if you use the money that you save to give to missions, right? No. It's not God's will. God's specific instruction in his word tells us that to do his will is not to sin.

And it's not just the Ten Commandments, is it? All the other general instructions in the Bible as well. So another one, James 1, verse 19 in the New Testament, which I've got a slide for.

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to be angry. Or Ephesians 4, verse 32, Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

So it's clear. We are to forgive. We are to listen. We are to be slow to speak. And we're to be slow to get angry. If we do those things, then we are doing God's will.

[7 : 04] And most of them are obvious to us because God has given us consciences to know that that's the right thing to do. But often we don't think of these things as doing God's will, do we?

This is sort of so run of the mill. How can this be about doing God's will? It's not like the fancy trick shot, is it? But actually to God, they are very important, aren't they?

Imagine that you're a missionary, you're going out to Thailand, and your church back here is praying that you will be doing God's will. Now imagine that how you do it when you get over there is to win converts by using deceptive and pressure tactics.

Do you think you're obeying God's will in that, doing God's will in that situation? No. You may have thought, yeah, it was God's will for me to go to Thailand. But actually when you get there and you don't obey the Lord's instructions, then you're not really doing God's will.

King Saul, if you remember in 1 Samuel 15, verse 22, he was rebuked with these words on the slide. Does the Lord delight in burnt offering and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?

[8 : 14] To obey is better than sacrifices, and to heed is better than the fat rams. You see, whatever good we may think we're doing for God, if we neglect to obey God's word, we end up actually not doing God's will.

And the reason why these commands that God gives us is important is because they reflect who He is. So on the second point, His character defines what's right and good in this world, and conversely what's wrong and evil.

And so it helps us to do God's will, God's word does, because it reveals His character. When we see God in action in the Bible, we see how we are to follow after Him.

So again, after He rescued Israel, He tells them, doesn't He, in Exodus chapter 34, He says on the slide, The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, that's His character, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished. And in the very next book, in Leviticus, He says, Be holy, that is, be like me, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

[9 : 34] And so when we see what God is like, it's so that we can be like Him as well, doing His will. Again, that's what sort of good teachers are like, aren't they?

They don't just tell you what to do, but they model it by their behavior as well. So I remember that when I was in Ridley, I had a really good lecturer. He didn't just tell us what was the right thing to believe from the Word of God, but when He gave out His notes, He organized the notes so that it had, it set out the reasoning for why it was right.

So He would state where from the Bible He's got His evidence from, and then He would explain what other people's views on that passage might be, for other scholars or whatever. And those that He thought were wrong, He refuted, explaining why that's the wrong reasoning.

And then finally, He would give us His reason on that view. Now He was explaining it to us, but in the way He's modeled it through the way He set out His notes, He was also teaching us how we are to approach the way we interpret the Bible and to assess the views that we are reading.

And that's what God does in the Bible too. Whenever He acts, sometimes He explains why, but often it's the pattern of His actions again and again, consistently throughout the Old and the New Testament, that shows us God's character.

[10 : 59] And that's how we learn who He is, how He's like, and also what's wrong from right. And then of course, finally, when His Son Jesus comes, we see God's character made flesh, don't we?

We see God's character fully embodied in a human life. So when God says that He's full of grace and compassion in Exodus, well, we look at Jesus and we see that He's gracious to the woman at the well, even though she's sinned.

He does the same with hot-headed Peter, restoring Him after He had denied Jesus three times before Jesus went to the cross. Likewise, the Apostle Paul, chief persecutor of the church, but the Lord appears to him and forgives him, and He becomes the chief evangelist for the church.

Of course, God does this because, as we read in our second reading in Romans 8, which I put up on the slide again, Paul says, we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

Why? For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

[12 : 22] So often, when we read verse 28, and it's one of the most popular verses in the world, millions of bookmarks made out of it, but whenever we read verse 28, we don't really go on, do we, to find out what God's purpose is for us.

We think that, you know, the good that God wants to do is to solve our problems and give us a good and comfortable life. That's what we think the good is. But actually, if you look down, what God says the good is, is that He's seeking to conform us to Jesus.

God's will isn't just to bring us under Christ, that's justification, it's to conform us to His Son as well, that's sanctification, so that Christ may be the firstborn among brothers and sisters.

And that, brothers and sisters, is God's will for you. more important to God than your marital status or your achievements or your job or your children, God wants to make us like Jesus first and foremost.

And the thing is, God can do that without having you in a particular job or getting to the top of your organization, whether you're married or not.

[13 : 40] God can do it just as you are, wherever you are. God can make you like Jesus. We don't have to wait until we get somewhere before we become like Jesus.

But often, don't we, we think that God's will is all about what He wants us to do or where He wants us to go. You know, is it to make it to some national basketball team or to win that prestigious scholarship at that big name university?

But no, actually God's more concerned with the right here and now that we get the basics right, that we do His will now by obeying His word in our everyday lives.

And if you think about it, I mean, I think that that purpose of God for you and me is much better than all these other things about where we will head to and what our achievements will be in life.

Because, just think about it, God's will for us is to make us like Jesus. I mean, what can be better than that? We will have Jesus' character full of grace and truth.

[14 : 47] We will have Jesus' wisdom. We will have His endurance in suffering. We will have His kindness and generosity. When that's what God wants for you, how can all the other things be better?

It's not, is it? But, of course, the way God gives us that kind of character is through testing by fire sometimes, isn't it? It's like gold.

The more intense the fire, the purer it is. And so, sometimes, when we want to do God's will, we will be tested. We will go through difficult times. But, when we do that, that's when we learn to trust God, don't we?

That's when we build, we grow in faith towards Him. If you look now at the third outline, there is a third way, sorry, there's only one outline, third way in the outline.

God's word helps us to do God's will by imparting God's wisdom to help us make godly choices in life. If you read through the whole Bible, there's a whole genre, isn't there, of wisdom in the Bible.

[15:52] Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, many of the Psalms, James, even Jesus' own teaching in the Gospel, they're all full of wisdom, aren't they? Wisdom is interspersed throughout the Bible.

And, of course, God's commands and knowing God's character helps make us wise as well. But there is also wisdom that helps us to understand the world, to look at life the way God does.

There's wisdom that gives us insights into human behavior and relationships to handle complex situations when the right thing to do isn't so clear-cut.

And that makes sense, doesn't it? Because the Bible doesn't contain a solution for every situation you have in life. Sometimes we have to exercise wisdom to work out what is the right thing to do.

And for many of us, that's probably the thing that we're most interested in, right? How to make choices when it's not so clear-cut, when all appears to be reasonable.

[16:53] How do we choose? How do we know what God's will is like? Well, I'm going to leave that there, just there, as a teaser for next week.

So, sorry to disappoint. I know it feels like I'm stringing along from last week to this week, but we'll definitely answer that question next week because I think we need a whole talk, 20 minutes of that to work through that.

So, do come back next week if you want to know what God's word says on that. But let me end then today with two practical implications, two therefore's that comes out of today's passage.

If God's word helps us to obey his will, then I think two things flow from it. First, is the need to spend time meditating and studying God's word.

And by that, I don't mean the quick fix kind of way that we sometimes use God's word. You know, we have a problem and straight away we open the Bible and we want to get answers to that problem. Rather, I'm talking about the long term approach to studying and meditating on God's word.

[18:00] We've all heard that joke perhaps of that man who tried to determine God's will for his life and so he decided to use the Bible. He randomly opened his Bible and then closing his eyes he pointed to a verse.

He looked at it and he said, Judas went out and hung himself. So he was surprised and he wondered, oh, is that God speaking to me?

So he closed the Bible again and then he opened it again and he went to another verse and there Jesus said, you go and do likewise. And so at that point he was afraid and you know, really?

I need confirmation. So with trembling hands, he closed the Bible and did it once more and this time the verse he read was, what you are about to do, do quickly.

Now it's, you know, it's pretty absurd, isn't it, if you use the Bible like that? But often, we tend to think of the Bible as a reference guide, don't we? We want to have a problem, turn to page 205 and get the answer.

[19:06] But that's not the way we are to study the Bible because the way God's written his word is meant to shape and inform us and form us through our lives as we sit under it and allow it to saturate our minds and our lives.

It shapes the way we are and it forms our character and it's from there that we then learn to do God's will by making those choices. And often, you know, as we go through our day, we actually don't have a lot of time to, you know, stop and ask whether it's God's will or not, is it?

You know, if someone just shouted at you, okay, and you're feeling angry, you don't go stop, I mean, just check the Bible to see what God's will for me is. No, we just respond, don't we? And so, in that pressure, you want to be so saturated with God's word and so transformed by that in your character that you actually instinctively, naturally even, do God's will.

That's how we do God's will. It's not in the stopping and asking God what's in the Bible. Of course, we have to read God's word, but at that point in time, we really ought to have already been prepared to do the right thing.

And so, it doesn't happen overnight, but we have to keep doing it faithfully and consistently. And if you go back to that passage in Psalm 119, that's exactly how they envision it.

[20 : 37] We begin to obey God's word out of habit because we're hiding it in our hearts. We're responding to it even as we meditate on it. Now, of course, there will be times when we do have a fork in the road.

You know, if you're in year 12, you know, what are you going to do next? Or if you want to have a job and you're not quite happy, whether you should change or not. And as I said, some of that we'll look at from next week.

But one implication from today is that when this happens, the second implication, that is, it's good to make these decisions in light of God's word.

Not by picking a verse here and there as a confirmation, but prayerfully in light of God's whole word, working out how we are to make those choices. And this applies to us not just as individuals, but as a family, but as a church.

That whenever we have to make decisions like that, it's important that we ask the Lord to show us and give us wisdom from his word. We need to think God's thoughts after him as best as we can instead of allowing society's views and standards, which a lot of times is just about self-promotion and preservation, to help inform those choices.

[21 : 55] No, we should actually go to the word of God and ask, what would the Lord have us do in this situation? But let me conclude by going back to where we started, and that is, doing God's will is all about getting the basics right.

And often, we are not sure as we step along if this is God's path for us. And in those situations, our temptation is to ask for certainty, aren't we?

Lord, if you can just lay out the next two or three years, just tell me what you want me to do, I'll be able to do it for you. But actually, that's not the best way, is it?

Because I know that if God showed me the next two or three years, my temptation is to say to the Lord, thank you, Lord, I don't need to trust you anymore, I'm just going to trust this plan. No, often God doesn't show us the whole plan so that we can actually live by faith.

We can say, look, I'm going to keep trusting the Lord each time I'm meant to step forward, even though I don't know the destination, because I want to grow in faith.

[23 : 05] Because more important than knowing our future is actually to put our faith and trust in God day by day for the rest of our lives. And that's something we will never outgrow as Christians, no matter how mature we are.

In fact, the more mature we are, the more we should be trusting in God, shouldn't we? And the wonderful thing is that, you know, I'm not only enough to be able to look back that many times, but on the two or three times that, and I'm not saying I'm that great, but on the two or three times that I do look back, I give thanks to the Lord.

Because even though I did not know where I was headed when I started, but because God has given me the strength to trust in Him, when I get to the mid or further down the road, I can look back and actually say, wow, that was God's will for me.

He did guide me. I am doing what He wants me to do. And when you do that and you trust in Him and obey Him each step of the way, there is such great joy in living that life for Him.

And I know many of you have done that, and that's why you're still here, trusting in the Lord.

Because you know that the Lord's will will be done if we keep following Him, obeying His Word, and trusting and having faith with Him.

[24 : 17] So let me pray, and then we'll sing a song, Trust and Obey, which is a song from way back in my childhood, but it's a great song. Father, teach us to do Your will by obeying Your Word.

Thank You that Your desire and purpose for us is that we become like Your Son, Jesus. That having died to save us, You now desire to make us like Him in character and conduct.

Strengthen us by Your Spirit to be faithful to doing this. give us a desire for Your Word to hide it deeply in our hearts that it might shape our character and help us to live by it.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.