

## Gospel Shaped Church (12) – God’s Will for Every Christian (Part2)

Why is it taking so long to find God’s will for my life? Or as it’s commonly put today; why is it taking so long for my destiny to be realised. I read the following in a blog during the week:

*“Someone recently disclosed how frustrated they were with the time it was taking to enter into their calling. In a moment of fierce discontent, they loudly exclaimed, “You’d think by now, I would have gotten somewhere in all of this. I honestly don’t understand why God is holding out on me?”*

The blog went off in a different direction than our text for today takes us but this quotation helps express how many Christian’s can feel. But is it that God is holding out on us or is that that we are holding out on him? Or could it be we have the wrong idea in our minds when we hear about the will of God? I want to suggest that one reason we may feel this way is because we may have been thinking about the will of God from the wrong angle or from only one angle. Paul writes in verse 3; **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification”** – meaning your holiness, your being set apart, your holy living, your living to please God more & more! This is the will of God for his holy people. In Paul’s mind this is the will of God for believers; not that we get to some moment of destiny or become something great but that we live holy in our present everyday life. This is God’s will for every Christian & every other aspect of God’s will flows out of this. We must not let finding some great destiny distract us from realising our daily calling to be holy.

It’s not so much that we find God’s will but that God’s will finds us & injects our everyday life with a deep sense of calling, purpose, significance & holy obligation in Christ. The word translated **“will”** here is a Greek word *thelema* & in its usage in the NT it mostly refers to the will of God. Its other usage is regarding the human will, especially in contrast to God’s will. The word refers to what one desires to happen as well as the act itself of desiring something. So when Paul says **“this is the will of God...”** he is saying this is who God has created you to be, this is how God desires you to live, this is what God wants to see in your life – more & more holiness & more & more love. As he highlights in verse 5 we are not to live like everybody else, we are not to be controlled by human will – either our own will or by the will of the culture around us. No we are to live as God desires us to live according to his will; for this we have been set apart.

In light of all we are in Christ & all God has done for us in the gospel Paul writes in Romans 12:1-2; **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers & sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, HOLY & acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is THE WILL OF GOD, what is good & acceptable & perfect.”** In Mark 3:34 he says; **“And looking about at those who sat around him, Jesus said, “Here are my mother & my brothers! For whoever does THE WILL OF GOD, he is my brother & sister & mother.”** (cf. Eph 6:6; Heb 10:36; 1 Pet 3:17; 1 Cor. 1:1; Rom 15: 32 & 1 Th. 5:18 for other uses of the terminology of God’s will in the NT.)

If you want to know what God's will is don't follow your heart, follow the Lord's solid instructions & promises recorded for us in Scripture. This is the solid path of God's will for your life. Commit your heart to following his instructions & he will direct your steps in the other aspects of his will.

### 1. It is God's Will That We Should Live Holy Lives (4:3)

It is God's will that you should be sanctified underline's the Christian's call to holiness. Sometimes when the idea of sanctification comes up in the NT it is talking about progressive growth as a believer. Other times it references our current status as being holy or set apart for God. Here I believe it refers to our character & conduct in connection with who we now are in the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified is another way of saying it is God's will that you should live holy lives. This is God's will for every Christian. This is why we've been chosen & set apart by grace.

Sometimes we make the will of God all about us becoming something we are not, finding our personal destiny, finding out what ministry or job God has for us etc. While such things can be aspects of God's will for us they are not what the Bible centres on regarding God's will for us. ***God's will is not firstly about us finding our place but about us giving God his place.*** There is a reason it is called the will of God, it is centred on him, not us. ***"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*** God's will not our will.

According to the Bible the will of God is not about becoming something we are not but being what we already are by his grace – starting where we currently are in life today while trusting God to direct our future as he sees fit. It is his will – God's will – not ours. Some spend their whole lives waiting for some moment when all of a sudden they step into God's will for them. Let me tell you something; the little dash between the date we were born (or born again) & the date you die is your moment. We can stop waiting. We spend our life waiting for some moment & we will miss our moment. This is your moment to live a life pleasing to God! ***"This is the will of God, your holiness."*** And when we commit to this we will make every micro-moment in our present life count.

The will of God is not some hidden secret to be found, the will of God is a way of holy way of living which has been revealed to God's holy people. It is a way of living everyday as a teacher, as an office worker, as a student, as a manager, as a chef, waiter, farmer, shop assistant or pastor. It is a way of living as a citizen, as a mother or father. It is something that connects with & effects where we are in our present everyday lives. Frustration arises when we focus on aspects of God's will that are completely in his hands & out of ours, progress happens when we focus on faithfully obeying what he has put in our hands – his commands. And yes as we commit to live holy lives, more & more pleasing to God in the Lord Jesus, breakthrough moments come, life changes happen, new opportunities may be presented to us as God calls us in new directions. BUT not because our moment has finally arrived but because we living to please God with every

moment & therefore his will is simply unfolding! Proverbs 3:6 NIV says; **“In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”** It is our role to submit to him in all our ways – he knows what is best – & it is his role to make our paths straight.

Sometimes as Christians we can live like God has been set apart for our purpose, instead of us being set apart for his purpose. Frustration happens at times because we want God’s ways to submit to ours so we can direct our own paths through life – that will never happen. He will never bend his will to ours. Where a path is straight we want to make a detour which is really a deviation from his loving commands & therefore his loving Lordship. This is why the verse before lays the context; **“Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”** The practical side of trust is obeying a good God. You want to help God make your paths straight then submit to him in all your ways by living a holy life of obedience as we are being instructed here. **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”**

## **2. It is God’s Will That We Live Lives of Sexual Purity (Read 4:3-8)**

After praying & introducing the idea of holiness generally Paul goes on to talk about one important aspect of our Lord’s instruction regarding holiness – sexual purity. This is one aspect of God’s will for every Christian. (Remember this is not how to become a Christian; this is how to live now that you are a Christian.) To choose another way is to go against God’s will for our lives which is in essence to distrust his goodness. It is also to live in contradiction to our new identity as God’s holy ones. Paul calls us to abstain from sexual immorality here. In 1 Cor. 6:18-20 he also writes; **“Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glory God in your body.”** The whole concept of what constitutes sexual immorality is derived from God’s unchanging moral law which Jesus upheld in his teaching & which is now being written on the hearts of Christians by the Holy Spirit. Jesus deepens our understanding of sexual immorality in the *Sermon on the Mount* when speaking of adultery... Sexual immorality includes any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage in thought, word or deed.

However on top of this bear in mind the following words by John Stott’s; *“The fact that marriage is the only God-given context for sexual intercourse does not mean that within marriage there is no need for restraint. We have all heard or read about, and some have experienced, the selfish sexual demands which are sometimes made by one married partner on the other, in terms of aggression, violence, cruelty & even rape. But marriage is not a form of legalised lust.”* In these verses we are not only talking about sexual immorality outside of marriage between a man & woman but also sexual conduct inside the marriage covenant. Godly sex has a God-given vibe & that vibe is honour. Where honour is absent sex is immoral – even within marriage. There is a huge difference between lust & love, between dishonourable sexual practices which

use another & true love making which honours the other, between the selfish desire to possess & the unselfish desire to love, cherish & respect. The Lord's holy people are to display sexual purity by abstaining & fleeing from any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage & by husbands & wives honouring one another with their sexual conduct within the marriage covenant – this means abstaining from any sexual behaviour which dishonours their partner & therefore God.

Bear in mind here that these believers are only three months saved & that they are living in a culture more sexually perverse than our own. They had a lot to take in yet Paul makes no concession, no he sets the bar very high regarding sexual ethics from the start because even new believers have God's good law written on their new hearts. The Lord Jesus will never lower the bar of discipleship to secure a disciple & neither must we. **“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”** This is such a challenge but surely we can see the goodness of our Lord's instructions – for our own lives, for others & for church & society – that we control our own bodies in holiness & honour. We also must not miss those eight words at the end of verse 8; **“God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”** This is such an important way to end this challenging & counter cultural section written to these new believers (& us) – God has not only given us commands he has also given us his Holy Spirit to enable us to live holy lives of radical obedience.

Paul also makes it clear here that we are to control our own body – we are responsible for our own sexual conduct. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit & therefore increasing self-control is evidence of his presence within. We are to live in a way that is holy & honourable before God & others regarding sexual purity. Our lives are set apart to be a reflection of God's will for sexual purity. We are set apart to reflect the holy standard of our holy God! We are not set apart to just go with the dishonouring flow of passionate lust around us like others, who do not know God, as Paul highlights in verse 5. To do so is a sign we don't really know the God we claim to because people who truly know God live differently from everyone else. We are called to swim against the tide with the energy of the Holy Spirit. We are called to live in light of God's holiness in the power of his Holy Spirit. We follow a different ethical standard, we live for different purpose & our hope is in a different place. We live not in view of changing cultural values but in view of the unchanging holiness of God & of the reality we are now his holy people because of his amazing grace.

Paul also touches on sexual exploitation, adultery & rape in verse 6. There is no room for such things among the people of God. Nor is there room for the milder things like flirting with another man's wife or with another woman's husband – that is dishonouring to others & to our own spouse if we are married. There is only room for what is holy & honourable regarding sexual conduct in the Christian community. Ephesians 3:5 NIV says; **“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.”** If the Holy Spirit is within us then there is no escape from God's holy calling upon us concerning sexual purity.

## **Open Arms**

Christ's arms are open to the sexually broken & without lowering our standard one bit so much ours be as his church. Our Lord Jesus can make the wayward paths of the sexually broken straight if they only submit to his redirection – just like he is doing with ours. I am not called to preach religious moral-ism, but the gospel of salvation – but this what the saved life increasingly looks like. This is what the gospel produces from our lives as the given Holy Spirit works within. This is not about heaping more shame & condemnation on people this is about freeing people from the things that bring shame, condemnation & brokenness into their lives. Holiness in the Lord Jesus is the way to true happiness it is the thief that convinces people otherwise.

If someone is not presently a believer this is not what you must do to be saved, this is a glimpse of how your life will radically change if you get saved – if you trust the Saviour & let his Spirit come & do what only God can do in your life. There is forgiveness in Christ, there is cleansing in Christ, there is transformation in Christ & there is a new start waiting for you in Christ – but he will make all things new & that means letting go of old ways of sin – for there is also an inescapable call to be holy in Christ!