

Please open your Bible to Romans chapter 12, verse 1, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² 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 and acceptable and perfect.”

PRAY

This morning, as we spend our first time together, I want to explore what Paul refers to as the “will of God” in the second half of verse 2. Sometimes the Will of God can be a struggle to understand. We live in a world full of unrest, sin and evil. Can this be the Will of God? I hope this morning will begin to answer this question. Let me help you to see how these two verses, especially verse 2, demonstrate that only a transformed mind will be capable of understanding the will of God and the purpose of suffering. Once you understand the will of God you will be able to discern what God has called your life to be, as Paul wrote in verse 2 – “what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Knowing God’s will enables one to live life as “spiritual worship.” I will use these two verses to put these into perspective, that is, God’s perspective.

To build the foundation for how Romans 12:1-2 relates to God’s will and suffering, we must first understand that the intent of these verses is to view life as “spiritual worship.” Give your attention to verse 1, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” The purpose of all human life, in God’s eyes, is that Jesus be known as the Christ, God incarnate, who is rightly given honor and glory. Every aspect of one’s life is to express worship of Christ using our minds, hearts and bodies. Spending time in the study of the Bible,

prayer and serving others is an expression of our love of Christ and is the foundation for living a Christian life. However, it is only possible through a transformed life, one that is not bent on breaking God's will. Let me explain.

Verse 2 is Paul's answer to how we turn **all of life** into spiritual worship. **We must be transformed.** We must be transformed not just in our external behavior, but in the way we feel and think. **This must be a transformation of our minds.** Verse 2 clearly states, "**Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.**" This happens through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This happens through meditating on the Word of God. God desires His children become an expression of the of worship of Christ.

Those who believe in Christ Jesus are new creations, ready to be transformed. The Apostle Paul wrote, "**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**" (2 Corinthians 5:17) As a child of God your sin-riddled heart of stone has been removed and the Spirit of God has given you a heart of flesh, the flesh of Christ and a mind that is transformed by the Spirit. For the first time the heart and mind now work together to bring glory to Christ.

The Bible is the only true Word of God. Therefore, it is our duty to work diligently to conform our lives to the standard of the Bible. This is the process of sanctification. We must work at "**Cleansing out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.**" (1 Corinthians 5:7) Time studying the Bible every morning before starting the day helps one to "**put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.**" (Colossians 3:10) This is why Paul begins with "**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.**" **How?**

How does one renew their mind? Read with me the second half of verse 2, "**By**

testing you may discern what is the **will of God**, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” With the renewing of one’s mind by prayer and studying the Bible comes the ability to discern the “**will of God**.”

There are two clear and very different meanings for the term “**will of God**” in the Bible. One is God’s Sovereign Will and the other is His Will of Command. We need to understand what these two wills are in order to know which one is being referenced in Romans 12:2. In fact, knowing the difference between these two meanings of “**the will of God**” is crucial to understanding the most perplexing questions that come from the study of the Bible. How can God be sovereign over all things and yet allow things He disapproves of? How is it God forbids some of the things He brings about? To state it differently, God commands some of the things He thwarts. How can this be? Romans 12 verse 2 helps us to understand this. However, first we must have an understanding of what Paul means here in verse 2 and this takes some background.

Will of God - Sovereign Will

Consider passages that describe “**the will of God**” as His Sovereign Will. His Sovereign Will is guaranteed to come to pass. One of the clearest illustrations is the way Jesus spoke of the will of God in Gethsemane when He was praying. He said, “**My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.**” (Matthew 26:39) What does the will of God refer to in this verse? It refers to the sovereign plan of God that will happen in the coming hours; Christ will be crucified. Also, remember what Luke wrote, “**truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,** ²⁸ **to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.**” (Acts 4:27–28) It was the “**will of God**” that Jesus die. This was God the Father’s plan and it was His

Sovereign Will. Jesus bowed and said, “Father, here’s my request, but you do what is Your Sovereign Will.” The Sovereign Will of God is unchangeable and is assured to happen.

Considering what Luke wrote do not miss the very crucial point here. God’s sovereign plan is aided by the sins of men. Herod, Pilate, the soldiers, the Jewish leaders - they all sinned leading to the fulfillment of God’s will that His Son be crucified. As the Prophet Isaiah wrote of Christ, “**Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.**” (Isaiah 53:10) It is clear that God allows some things to come to pass that He hates, for they are necessary to fulfill His plan of redemption.

The Apostle Peter writes, “**For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.**” (1 Peter 3:17) In other words, it is God’s will that at times Christians suffer for doing good. Peter has in mind the persecution of Christians. He is speaking of Christians being sinned against. God sometimes wills events come about that include sin in order that His plan of redemption be fulfilled.

Paul gives a far-reaching summary statement of this truth in his letter to the Ephesians, “**In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.**” (Ephesians 1:11) The will of God is God’s sovereign governance of all that come to pass. Many other passages in the Bible teach that God’s providence over the universe extends to the smallest details of nature and human decisions. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus taught that not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from our Father in heaven. (Matthew 10:29) The writer of Proverbs said, “**The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.**” Proverbs 21:1 makes clear the king will do what the LORD wills.

In these passages we see the first meaning of the will of God. It is God's sovereign control of all things. This is God's "Sovereign Will." It cannot be broken. It always comes to pass. God "[does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'](#)" (Daniel 4:35) God's Sovereign Will cannot be directed or changed or questioned by man.

An example that man cannot direct or change God's Sovereign Will is found in the story of a bishop who a century ago pronounced from his pulpit and in the periodical he edited that "heavier-than-air flight" was both physically impossible and contrary to the will of God. Oh, the irony that Bishop Milton Wright had two sons, Orville and Wilbur! Bishop Wright was wrong. God "[does according to his will ... among the inhabitants of the earth.](#)" I absolutely love it when one can see it was not by man's power but by God's will that men do incredible things. Joyce and I observed this most clearly as missionaries overseas.

Will of God – Will of Command

"Will of Command" is the other meaning for the "will of God" in the Bible. I use this term "Will of Command" for what God commands us to do as His children. This is the will of God we are able to thwart when we disobey and fail to do as He commands. God's Sovereign Will is not governed by our belief or our obedience. However, God's Will of Command we can fail to do or even choose not to do. For example, Jesus said, "[Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.](#)" (Matthew 7:21) Not all people do the will of the Father, for fallen sinful people are disobedient. Clearly, "[Not everyone ... will enter the kingdom of heaven.](#)" Why? Simply put, it is because not everyone believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Paul wrote to the Christian brethren in Thessalonica, “[For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;](#)⁴ [that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,](#)⁵ [not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.](#)” (1 Thessalonians 4:3–5) Paul gave specific instruction of what God’s Will of Command is. Christians are to live holy lifestyles different from the Gentiles. Christians are to abstain from sexual immorality. The world, then and today, embraces sexual immorality, but Christians are to abstain from it. Unfortunately, many who call themselves Christian disobey God! They do not live holy but they live as the world does and their lives are not ones of spiritual worship.

Concerning God’s Will of Command, the Apostle John wrote, “[The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.](#)” (1 John 2:17) Only believers abide in God forever. Unbelievers don’t. God calls some people to salvation and to live His will and some He does not. Unlike God’s sovereign Will the Will of Command is not always fulfilled. People have free will to obey or disobey, God’s Will of Command.

Will of God – Living in Obedience

There are three steps of knowing and obeying God’s revealed Will of Command. All three require the renewed mind regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Discernment is gained from spending protracted time studying the Bible.

The First step, God’s Will of Command is revealed with final, decisive authority only in the Bible. We need the renewed mind to understand and embrace what God commands in the Scripture, enabling one to live a life of spiritual worship. Without the renewed mind, we will distort the Scriptures to avoid their commands for self-denial, love, purity, and supreme satisfaction in Christ alone. Paul says, “[All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for](#)

correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16–17) Not just some good works but “**every good work.**” Christians are to give their energy and time meditating on the written Word of God. Beginning one’s day in the Word renews the mind and equips one to live each day in spiritual worship. It is what Christians do out of obedience and what Christians do because of their love of God and His Word.

The second step is obedience to God’s Will of Command is discerning the right response to extra biblical choices. That is our submission to the biblical truths applied to new situations that may or may not be clearly addressed in the Bible. The Bible does not tell you which person to marry or which car to drive or where you take your vacation or what restaurant to go to or the hundreds of other choices you make everyday of your life.

What is necessary is that we have a renewed mind and that renewed mind is so shaped and so governed by the revealed will of God in the Bible, that we make wise choices that are consistent with the mind of Christ. We discern what God is calling us to do. People come into union with God’s commands by the transformation spoken of in Romans 12:2 “**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 and acceptable and perfect.**” God enables us to discern His will through His inspired Scripture. God’s Word is the standard against which all choices need to be discerned.

There is a world of difference between praying and laboring for a renewed mind that discerns how to apply God’s Word on the one hand and the habit of asking God to give you new revelation without the effort to study His Word, on the other hand. Divination does not require transformation of the mind. God’s aim is a new mind, a

new way of thinking and judging, not just new information. His aim is that we be transformed, sanctified, freed by the truth of His revealed Word. Jesus instructed, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31–32) Therefore the second step of obedience to God’s Will of Command is discerning application of the Scriptures to new situations in life by means of a renewed mind found in the meditation of God’s Word.

Finally, the third step of obedience to God’s Will of Command is made possible only by having the transformed mind. That is, the right response requires no conscious reflection before we act. I venture to say that a good 80 to 90 percent of behavior is not premeditated. Most of our thoughts, attitudes, and actions are spontaneous. They are just spillover from what is inside our minds. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” (Matthew 12:34–35)

Why is this right auto response to life a part of God’s Will of Command? Partly because God commands in the Scripture many things - do not be angry, do not be prideful, do not covet or be anxious, we are not to be jealous or envy others. None of these actions are premeditated. Anger, pride, covetousness, anxiety, jealousy and envy all rise up out of the heart with no conscious reflection. We are often guilty of sin because of these actions. They break the commandments of God and prevent one from being transformed to discern what is good and acceptable and perfect enabling one to live as spiritual worship.

Will of God - Precious Truths

When we are deeply hurt or experience great loss understanding these two wills of God’s becomes precious truths. On the one hand, we need the assurance that God

has sovereign control and therefore is able to work all of our pain and loss together for our good and the good of all who love Him. On the other hand, we need to know that God sympathizes with us and does not delight in our sins or our pain. These two needs correspond to God's Sovereign Will and Will of Command. Do you now see how Romans 12:2 applies? “**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 and acceptable and perfect.**”

For example, if you were badly abused as a child and someone asks you, “Do you think that was the will of God?” you now have a way to give an answer that does not contradict the Bible. You may say, “No it was not God’s will because He commands people to love and not abuse. The person’s abuse broke God’s commandment and violated God’s Will of Command. Therefore, it moved Jesus’ heart with anger towards the sinner and grief and compassion towards the one abused.”

This is seen in Jesus’ anger with the Pharisees when they said it was wrong for Him to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus asked the Pharisees, “**Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?**” But *they the Pharisees* were silent. ⁵ And *he Jesus* looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart” (Mark 3:4–5) It is the will of God, in one sense, because He allowed, one person to abuse another, He did have “*anger and is grieved at their hardness of heart.*” Could God have stopped one person from hurting another? Yes! Why did He choose not to? I do not fully understand why, but I know through the study of the Word of God that it is true He can but at times does not. When God acts or does not act it has a purpose for fulfilling His Sovereign Will. How we handle pain and suffering speaks loudly to those around us as to what we believe. Our pain and suffering can be used to relate to others who have suffered and help them see their need for Christ. Our actions demonstrate if we believe in God’s Sovereign Will and as Paul wrote, “**The**

Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

On the one hand, Christ is sovereign High King and nothing happens apart from His will. As our Lord said, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**”

(Matthew 28:18) On the other hand, Christ is a merciful High Priest and sympathizes with our weaknesses and pain. “**For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**”¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

(Hebrews 4:15–16) It is by God’s grace we can deal with the world’s pain. No one can thwart God’s Sovereign Will. However, His Will of Command can be grievously broken. **We need both these truths!** We need both of these understandings of the will of God in order to make sense of the Bible and to hold fast to God in our suffering.

God does not intend for us to know most of His Sovereign Will ahead of time. Moses wrote, “**The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.**” (Deuteronomy 29:29) If you want to know the future details of God’s Sovereign Will, you do not want a renewed mind, what you really want is a crystal ball. This is not called transformation of mind and obedience to God, but would rather it is soothsaying.

The will of God in Romans 12:2 is God’s Will of Command because it is “**by testing you may discern**” which implies we should understand the will of God and then obediently do it. God’s Sovereign Will, as we have seen, may include people’s sin as with the Jewish and Roman leaders putting Jesus to death. As God’s children we are not to approve of sin or do it, even though it can aid God’s Sovereign Will.

Paul's meaning in Romans 12:2 is echoed in Hebrews 5:14, which says, "Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." Or as Paul wrote, "It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:9–11) So, we understand that the goal of Romans 12:2 is not ferreting out the secret of God's Sovereign Will and His plans for the future, but discerning the revealed will of God's commands that we ought to obey in order for our lives to be spiritual worship.

The great task of Christians is that of the renewing of their minds by the Word of God transforming their lives into spiritual worship. Is this not the goal of what we call sanctification? Without sanctification one cannot know the will of God or what God calls us to be. We cannot do it on your own. We need Christ, who died for your sins. We need the Holy Spirit to lead us into Christ exalting truth and to work His truth in us and for us to embrace humility. Paul calls for us, in Romans, to immerse ourselves in the written Word of God and saturate our mind with it. Pray that the Spirit of Christ will make us spiritually new that our lives would be good, acceptable, and the perfect will of God.

This deals with the goal of the Christian life. We have also briefly dealt with why suffering is in the world. As we have seen there is God's Sovereign Will that no one can change and everyone must comply. God's Sovereign Will may allow sin to bring about His plan. But there is also God's Will of Command and because God chose not to have puppets, He allowed people to have free will of choice, unlike angels and demons whose choice was made long ago and who no longer have free will. Man's free will allows evil to be in the world because man's natural state is fallen and corrupted by sin. Evil shows mankind their desperate need for God. It is

Christians that stem the tide of evil in the world. Now do you see the importance for Christians to be transformed by the renewing of the mind enabling them to discern the will of God in order to live as spiritual worship? Do you see the importance of holding fast to the Word of God and not making changes to it in an effort to be more acceptable to the world? We are to be changers of people and of the world for good and not allow the world to change the church and who and what Christian's are called to be. Christians possess God's Word and through the study and meditation of His Word it enables “[that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.](#)”

God chose to allow sin to show people their desperate need for Him without forcing people to believe. If you want to see evil lessen in this world then you need to be obedient to God, live as He has commanded, transforming our minds. We are to share the saving gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone who will listen. God has called every Christian, you and me, to be agents of change for “[what is good and acceptable and perfect.](#)” The only way we will be up to this task is by the renewing of our minds through studying, mediating and praying over the written Word of God “[that by testing you may discern what is the will of God.](#)” It is this that will ready you for battle, for God calls us to battle evil and show people their need for His salvation by living holy before a sinful and evil world. Prepare for battle for the victory is the Lord’s!

Hearing what you have heard, I hope it is clear your only hope is in Jesus Christ. For only Christ will make you a new creation. Christ through God’s Word will renew your mind. If you have come to the point you want Christ in your life, come forward and let Pastor Jerry and me pray with you and rejoice in your new birth!