

The Will of God: Your Sanctification
Hebrews 10:1-10
March 24, 2024

Many of us have asked, *maybe* at crucial junctures in our life, “What is the will of God?” “What is the will of God?” has become “What is the will of God for my life in *this* moment?” What should I pursue concerning career? What should I pursue regarding relationships? Which city, or which neighborhood *in* that city, should I make my dwelling?

As you’ve heard, I’m sure, the truth is that we probably spend an inordinate amount of time obsessing over *that* particular aspect of God’s will, that which is often called His *secret* will. Like some “choose your own adventure” book we fret, thinking a wrong choice made on page 43 will mean we won’t make it to the ending we desire.

So, what’s the counsel given to the person obsessing over that which they *can’t* know? It’s often this: focus less on God’s *secret* will and give yourself to living out His *revealed* will. He’s told us how to live. There’s more revealed for you to do than you have life left. As an example, 1 Thessalonians 5:17: **Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.** What is the will of God? *That.*

I think that’s solid, biblical counsel. I’ve given it. I continue to stand by it. Obsessing over God’s hidden will—overly romanticizing or overly spiritualizing your decisions—bestowing irrevocable power to what major you select is generally not helpful. What God has made clear in His word—do *that.*

But neither is that the complete answer to “What is the will of God?” Because beyond God’s will concerning *direction*, and even before that which describes God’s *desires* for His people, there is that which makes possible any of it: God’s will of *decree*.¹ Paul wrote in Ephesians—without a footnote qualification, without a hedge, without nuance—that God **works all things after the counsel of His will** (Eph. 1:11).

So, as we read Hebrews 10:1-10 now, we might shorten the question from “What is the will of God for my life in this moment?” *not* to, “What is the will of God for *my* life?” but instead to, “What is the will of God?” With that question in mind, let’s hear God’s word.

1. The Will of God: Perfection (vv. 1–4)

And by that, I don’t mean *His* perfection. Though we could make *that* case from chapter 2 or from chapter 5, the aspect of His will revealed *here* is that He desires the perfection of His *people*. This is found at the tail end of verse 1: **For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.**

Verse 1’s telling us that what the Lord aims at for His people—perfection—neither the Law nor the sacrifices could bring about. To make that conclusion more apparent, it might be worth being reminded what the book of Hebrews means by perfection. While it certainly means *more* than this, this perfection would include both full forgiveness and a cleansed conscience.²

It’s fairly easy to see how the Law and the sacrifices couldn’t bring *that* about. Verse 1 says that they can **never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.** Again, those sacrifices were, v. 1, **only a shadow of the good**

¹ These categories are Kevin DeYoung’s in *Just Do Something*.

² Tom Schreiner, *Hebrews*, EBTC, 216; 291. This perfection, with certainly forward-looking aspects, would include the transformation of believers as well as the restoration of the rule humanity lost when Adam sinned.

things to come. They were akin to a sanded-down model of a city sitting on a dining room table. They were akin to a sailboat that sits beside books on a shelf.³ They were *not the very form of things*, but a shadow of them, a copy. If you ran your fingers along the model of the city, observed turns and stop lights, you'd better know *how* to get to the local bookstore, but running your fingers along it wouldn't put you in front of any books. If you see a shadow, you're intended to turn around, or at least lift your eyes. Patterns, models, copies, intend to point you to something else.

In this case, they were intended to point you to the **very form of things**, referred to in verse 1, which is also described as **the good things to come**. We'll see that more in point three.

But first, why couldn't the *shadow* of those good things to come make perfect those that drew near? Verse 2 answers, with a question intended to be answered in the affirmative. Speaking of those sacrifices, if *they* made perfect those that drew near, **would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?**

It's a reasonable question. In essence, if one *had* been perfected by those sacrifices, why repeat them, repeatedly? "Again" is what your gas tank says. So does your stomach, your shampoo, your floss, your homework, your lawn mower, your washing machine, your email, your treadmill, your mortgage, your coffee pot, your bed. And they'll say "again," again. We could, of course, make a much longer list. We fill our weeks with tasks we've done countless times before. Call it entropy, call it whatever you think best describes it. But we'll get hungry, we'll get dirty, weeds will grow, and if we get the inbox to zero it won't stay there long.

That reality is almost precisely the point of verses 1 and 2. The same sacrifices, **which they continually offer year by year** couldn't make anyone perfect. If they had, or if they *could*, then **would they not have ceased to be offered?**

The answer is yes, they would have. But, as it *is*, they were not the very form of things. So, how did those shadows function? Verse 3: **But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year.** The shadows in the old covenant—Law, sacrifices, etc.—*continually* reminded God's people that—yet again—they'd come up short. They *never* had a good year. And they never would. The repeated sacrifices reminded them, not *only* of the sin from their past year, but also of the fact that they'd have to do it again the next year.

And why would they have to repeat the sacrifices *then*? Verse 4: **For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.** Maybe you think, "I thought the priest would place his hands on the scapegoat, confess the people of God's sins, and then send that goat out into the wilderness never to be seen again." Didn't *that* picture God removing their sins *away* from them? Yes, it did. It *pictured* it. But it was *not* full nor final. It did *not* cleanse the conscience. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to accomplish *that*.

By the way, you think that goat knew what was coming? If so, do you think it would've signed up? Further, even if it *had*, would you trust an animal—unblemished or not—to remove your sins from *yesterday*?

Those sacrifices were absolutely God's purpose for His people in that time. We're not disparaging what God instructed them to do. But just like we saw with the Levitical priests in Hebrews 7, built into the entire framework was a certain obsolescence.⁴ Even while it was still functioning, it was *ultimately* ineffective. What it did, everything it did, had to be done again, and again.

³ To use Chris's illustration from last week.

⁴ Schreiner, 229.

As the end of verse 1 makes plain, it didn't make perfect those that kept drawing near. That treadmill of repetition is in the phrase immediately prior, **the same sacrifices which they continually offer year by year**. They *kept* coming. They were not perfected.

I don't think it's a leap to assert that we *too* can slip into trusting repeated religious acts for some semblance of atonement. Though some miss this, the Old Testament saints were to trust *God* to forgive them, not the goat's blood. They were *not* to hope in the sacrificial system *alone*, but to trust the One that instructed them, looking forward to what those shadows pointed to.

However, like us, they wrestled with the inclination to trust what *they* did to settle sin's score. So, in what sense might *we* do this? The low hanging fruit is to say good works. I blew it last week with my kids. So, I'll do better this afternoon. Maybe implicitly we think God will forget Thursday. Or at least my guilty conscience won't nag me so much. Or, maybe I'm still wrestling with something I did 30 years ago. So, I'll keep running, working it off. Those exercises, of course, might be good things, like serving, giving, or church attendance. However, if that's us, if that's how we approach good works, we need reminding: *today's* sin will not be forgiven because you read two chapters of the Bible *tomorrow*.

We might try and balance the scales in that way. I'll also mention another way—a more subversive path to self-justification—that I think *could* creep into the warp of woof of our world. It's the never-ending discussion on self-knowledge. To be clear, I'm *not* saying there aren't helpful tools out there to help us diagnose deeply rooted sins in the heart. There are. But I *am* saying that labeling yourself based on some category we haven't known about for 6000 years, and then seeking to improve oneself based on that category's strengths and weaknesses will *not* in the end be your salvation. It might help you identify sin in your life. But it will *never* perfect you.

What are you looking to, in order to fix you?

They kept coming and they kept *not* being perfected. Though God willed their perfection, the sacrifices just kept reminding them of their sin. The system itself could not fully and finally cleanse. But thankfully, verse 4 isn't the end of our passage. If God willed the perfection of His people, and the Old Covenant sacrifices didn't and *couldn't* bring it about, what might He do?

The **therefore** of verse 5 tells us: **Therefore, when He comes into the world.**

2. The Will of God: Incarnation (vv. 5–7)

I know incarnation is a big word. But, as a prof of mine used to say, “Mayonnaise is a big word too, and you know what that means.” To break “incarnation” apart in Latin: “in” means “in”; “carne” means “flesh.” We use the word incarnation to describe God putting on—coming in—the flesh.

Verse 5 is an underrated December text.⁵ We ought not downplay the language. It reveals to us those words that were upon Jesus's lips—an utterance He quoted to His Father—at the moment of His becoming flesh. God desired His people's perfection. He *knew* the sacrifices didn't and *couldn't* bring it about. So, according to His will, He prepared something. Verse 5: **Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.”**

Again, hear Jesus say *this* to the Father upon His coming into the world, **a body you have prepared for me**. As we've said before, the gospel isn't a ghost story;⁶ it's concerned with us in our totality. For a broken humanity—a flesh and *blood* humanity, He put on flesh. A body was prepared for Him. Truly God became truly man. Why? Athanasius says it well, “It was not non-existent

⁵ When He comes into the world refers to the incarnation. See Dana Harris, *Hebrews*, EGGNT, 255; Carson and Beale, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 977; Schreiner, 295.

⁶ Phil Ryken, *Luke*, REC, 671.

things that needed salvation, so that a command alone would have sufficed, but the human being, already in existence, who was corrupted and perishing.”⁷

Why else did Jesus come in the flesh? If we want to listen in on more Trinitarian conversation, Jesus says *to* the Father in verse 5, quoting from Psalm 40: **Sacrifice and offering you have not desired.** Verse 6 expands this notion more broadly: **In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have taken no pleasure.**

We could read any number of passages—1 Samuel 15, Psalm 40, or elsewhere—to be reminded that God does *not* delight in rote sacrifices *apart* from heart obedience. Again, that doesn’t mean those offerings to the Lord were wrong—they *weren’t*—but they were to be done in a particular way. Saul couldn’t pay off his disobedience with *more* heart disobedience as he threw some blood on an altar. 1 Samuel 15 tells us that. Psalm 40 does as well. Jesus says as much in Matthew 15. And now in Hebrews Jesus tells us what the Father Himself thinks about it.

By the way, it’s *not* a stretch to say that Him not desiring those things, His taking no pleasure in those things, also prepares us for that which He *does* take pleasure in.

Which is not disconnected from what Jesus says next. God doesn’t desire or take pleasure in those things. *So*, He prepared a body. And the lips on that body expressed what was in that truly Man’s heart in verse 7: **Then I said, “Behold I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of me) to do Your will, O God.”**

He’s still quoting Psalm 40. David the Psalmist wrote that he’d do God’s will. Maybe we’ve said—or sung—words *like* that before. The choir sang of another instance earlier. When *the* image of God walked into a garden and said some of the most courageous words ever uttered, **Your will be done** (Matt. 26:42). And then, *unlike* David and you and me and every other human ever, He did it.

Him doing so wasn’t out of nowhere. All of history had pointed forward to Him—in shadows, types, and patterns. Verse 7’s **in the scroll of the book**—likely meaning, at this point, the entirety of the Old Testament⁸—of that Jesus says, **it is written of Me**. All of history pointed *forward*; and then, in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4–7) *when* He came—at the pinnacle of all things—He said, **I have come to do Your will.**

He came to accomplish the will of His Father. The animals didn’t realize *why* they were being slain. They certainly didn’t give their life *voluntarily* for the sake of sinners.⁹ But when He came into the world, He knew why. I’ve always loved the way John Flavel helps us consider this. It is an imagining, to be sure, but it makes sense of many passages, many theological truths. Flavel imagines the Father and the Son—in a conversation—purposing to justify the ungodly like this:

The Father says, “My Son, here is a company of poor miserable souls, that have utterly undone themselves, and now lie open to my justice! Justice demands satisfaction for them, or will satisfy itself in the eternal ruin of them: What shall be done for these souls?”

The Son replies: “O my Father, such is my love to, and pity for them, that rather than they shall perish eternally, I will be responsible for them as their Surety; bring in all Thy bills, that I may see what they owe Thee; Lord, bring them all in, that there may be no after reckonings with them; at my right hand shalt Thou require it. I will rather choose to suffer Thy wrath than they should suffer it; upon me, my Father, upon me be all their debt.”

The Father: “But, my Son, if thou undertake for them, thou must reckon to pay the last mite, expect no abatements; if I spare them, I will not spare thee.”

The Son: “Content, Father, let it be so; charge it all upon me, I am able to discharge it.”¹⁰

⁷ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 147.

⁸ Gareth Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, 438; Schreiner, 299.

⁹ Schreiner, 292.

¹⁰ *The Works of John Flavel*, Volume 1, 41.

At the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26). Though verses 5–7 reveal something the Son said to the Father when He came into the world, it was not something new. It wasn't an audible. He'd come for a people on whom He'd set His heart *long* before. It was the consummation of the ages. Or as Paul wrote, this was God's **purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. 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** (Eph. 1:10–11).

When He came into the world, Jesus came to do the will of His Father. That's what He says in verses 5–7. Verses 8–10 make clearer what that will would accomplish.

3. The Will of God: Salvation (vv. 8–10)

Verse 8: **After saying above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have not desired, nor have you taken pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the Law)**

Though this verse contains a decent amount of repetition, it's worth noting what it *doesn't* repeat. It compresses *two* verses—verses 5 and 6—into *one*. How? By eliminating the positive aspects mentioned earlier from Psalm 40.¹¹ The author takes them out for a purpose. By compressing the four kinds of sacrifices into this one verse, and *then* saying that God hasn't desired nor taken pleasure in *any* of them, the author *first* highlights the negative assessment of the sacrificial system he'd described back in verses 1–4.

Further, the two verses are compressed—with the negative aspects mentioned first—because the author of Hebrews wants to emphasize the order, the sequence.¹² What clues us in to this? In verse 8, Hebrews begins with “after,” that is, *after* Jesus said this. Then, in verse 9, Hebrews begins with “then,” that is, “after” Jesus said this, “then,” He said this. In emphasizing this *timing*, the sequence of the events, the author desires that we see that what Jesus said to the Father—and what He did—was to address something lacking, something inadequate. We might say that there *were* shadows and patterns. Those shadows were *not the very form of things*. Those shadows were *not the good things to come*.

But, those good things *were* to come. So, “after” Jesus points out the insufficiency of those shadowy sacrifices, He “then” says this in verse 9: **Behold, I have come to do your will.**

The verse goes on: **He takes away the first in order to establish the second.** Though this could refer *broadly* to the first covenant mentioned in chapter 8, or more specifically to the Levitical sacrificial system itself,¹³ either way, the first was the shadow. And He took it away to establish the second—the good things to come, **the very form of things**. The shadows and patterns pointed forward to *this*.¹⁴ *He* came to do God's will.

What is that will more specifically? And what did His doing of God's will accomplish? To answer the latter, we read verse 10: **By this will we have been sanctified.** In the first point we noted that the repeated sacrifices *couldn't* bring about a particular aim: the perfection of God's people. Has *this*? Verse 10 asserts that we've been “sanctified,” or “made holy.” He's speaking of *positional* sanctification, what we might call being “set apart.”¹⁵ So, in the context of this passage, a

¹¹ Harris, 258.

¹² Beale and Carson, 977.

¹³ Harris, 259.

¹⁴ It stands written in the scroll of the book concerning *Him*.

¹⁵ For more on this, see David Peterson, *Possessed by God*.

question might be: does this setting apart, this making holy, have *anything* to do with the perfection those sacrifices *couldn't* bring about? Though this is in *next* week's text, note verse 14: **For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.**

God brought this about, both sanctification *and* perfection. How? The shadows and patterns in the sacrificial system—priests carrying bloody offerings into the tabernacle—pointed forward to the **very form of things**, a better, superior offering. Verse 10: **By this will we have been sanctified** (how?) **through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.** Unlike the other priests, He had no sin to make atonement for. The one *making* the offering was Himself holy, innocent, and undefiled (Heb. 7).

Further, this better High Priest brought a better sacrifice, not *only* in its absolute—even inner—perfection, but *also* in His—its—intention. Those goats didn't go willingly. Yet He—knowing *fully* what was in the cup, knowing better than any human that ever lived what the wrath of God entailed—He *still* said, v. 9, **Behold, I have come to do Your will.**

He set His face toward Jerusalem. Nothing dissuaded Him.

Verse 10 is actually the *only* time in Hebrews we get the compound name, both Jesus and Christ.¹⁶ Generally, as in chapter 2, *Jesus* has been preferred when referring to His humanity. And generally, as in chapter 9, *Christ* has referred to His exaltation. But *here*, with a body prepared for Him, offered up by Him, so that He might enter into the greater and more perfect tabernacle—heaven itself—*both* name and title seem appropriate. Humanity has been exalted: **By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.**

And, of course, that's not where the verse ends. Hebrews 10 began by emphasizing the inadequacy of the continual offering up year by year of sacrifices that could *not* make perfect. But Hebrews 10:10 emphasizes something altogether different: **By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

In a world of again and again, there's good news. There's no again for atonement.

Conclusion

Because though God did not desire sacrifices and offerings *detached* from obedience, though that did not *please* Him, when His Son put on flesh He came as the exact representation of God's nature. The Father wasn't *just* pleased when He said so at His Son's baptism, but in every facet of Christ's character, in every detail of His day. Without fail, the Son of God embodied and did that which delighted the Father, always. Because He came for a stated purpose: to do His Father's will. And *then* He did it. So, the Father, who *never* cools off in His affections, took, and He took again—and He continues taking pleasure in His Son—who He was, and what He did.

And that includes what we'll consider this week. What else pleased Him? The prophet Isaiah foretold: **But the Lord was pleased to crush Him** (Is. 53:10). *This* was the will of God. That He might send His Son into the world for a people. And that by His perfect sacrifice—once for all, offered in the place of that people—we might be made holy.

¹⁶ Harris, 260.