



Philippians 2:14-30 Responding to God's Will

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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Last week we talked about how God is at work in us today. He is speaking, through His Word and through His Spirit, leading us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. He is giving us right desires and He offers us the strength to fulfill them.

Philippians 2:[12](#) Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; [13](#) for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

So we also looked at four ways we can discern God's will. How to figure out what God wants you to do. But we also had a time to repent and get straight with God because, if we are honest, we will admit that *knowing* God's will isn't nearly as difficult most of the time as *accepting* it and many of us know what God wants to do in our lives – we just keep putting it off.

We don't always *want* to do what we know we *need* to do. This is a huge obstacle to seeing change in our lives. We know what we should do, or what we should stop doing, but we don't want to do it:

- because we're tired
- because we don't want to cause any conflict
- because it's going to take too long or too much
- because we're going to look stupid
- whatever your excuse is, we come up with a reason for why we shouldn't comply with what we *know* God is leading or commanding us to do. And to us, our reasons sound pretty good. After all, that's why we choose them. We go through plenty of excuses until we settle on the one that seems to fit just right.

Of course, this issue of knowing but not obeying is the perennial problem – think with me all the way back to the Garden of Eden and you will remember that Adam and Eve *knew* God's will. There was no question as to what was permissible (pretty much everything) and what was off limits (a single tree). They *knew* God's will, **but** they didn't *accept* it. They didn't act on it.

Fast forward a few thousand years and nothing has changed. We still know what we *should* be doing, but we come up with excuses for why we don't.

Which is why Paul tells us, here in vs [14](#) Do all things without complaining and disputing,

That's a pretty common verse to hear quoted or memorized. I've read parenting books that suggest that this should be one of the first verses you teach to your children. But they're taking the verse out of context.

In my Bible, I've drawn a little box around vs 13 and 14 to remind me that they go together.

Why should we do all things without grumbling or complaining? It's not so we make good little Victorian era British chaps who always keep a stiff upper lip. It's not because whining and complaining are annoying habits. It's because, according to verse 13, **GOD** is the one we are complaining against and questioning.

Different translations choose various English words to translate the original Greek here, they use: protesting, complaining, murmuring, grumbling, or reasoning, questioning, complaining, disputing, arguing.

It's not hard to get the gist: think of the kid asking his parents, "but why?" all the time. "Yes, I know what you've told me to do, *but why?*" It carries a sense of compliance, like, "I know I have to, but I don't really want to. I've got a better idea. I've got another way I would prefer to do it."

And that's why I need to make sure I keep verse 13 with verse 14. I need to remember that God is in control, and He is showing me what needs to be done. So, if He is who I say He is, then I need to submit to what He says. I need to let Him have His way in me and I need to trust that "Father knows best."

And that's kind of ironic to me, because there are those seasons in life when we think, "I just want to know God's will for this situation!" And we struggle and we strain – we pray for our selves and we ask others to pray for us, that God would just reveal His will for this situation – what are we supposed to do? And the assumption we have is that somehow knowing God's will is mysteriously fun and interesting, and easy to accept. That if you could just decode the clues and discover the answer, it would be easy to take the next step.

But that's not what we see here. Instead, we see Paul encouraging the Philippians, and us, to – well, the more crass and commonplace term we would use in conversation with friends is "shut up and color!" He's God, you're not; do what you're told. Now, it's not quite that rough, but you get the point, right? We should be submissive to all-powerful God.

Well, you ask, is there ever a legitimate time when it's OK to object or to question what God is showing you? Is it ever OK to ask, "do I really have to?" or "Is there another way?" or "Are you sure you want me?" Of course.

The Bible is full of examples of people who have questioned God's will – think of Moses when God called him to speak before Pharaoh. Think of Gideon when God called him to lead the army. Think of Mary when Gabriel announced she, a virgin, would conceive a child. It's very possible to question God's guidance or command, *as long as you do it with humility and respect.*

There's a world of difference between sharing your fears, concerns, and doubts with God and just plain ignoring, avoiding, or defying Him.

If you want to see the best possible example of this, turn with me to Matthew and let's look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This is after the Last Supper – Jesus knows that Judas has already left to betray Him, He knows that within about 12 hours or so He'll be executed on a Roman cross. While He waits for that to unfold, He goes and talks with the Father in prayer.

Matthew 26: [36](#) Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." [37](#) And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. [38](#) Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." [39](#) He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*."

Father, I know what needs to happen. But if there is any other way, let's go with that. But I trust You and Your will.

There is no grumbling here. No complaining here. There's honesty and humility. And this is how we should pray when we don't necessarily understand how it's all going to work out, or how we could possibly..., or what will happen if we...

[40](#) Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? [41](#) Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak."

[42](#) Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

[43](#) And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

[44](#) So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

[45](#) Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are *you* still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

[46](#) Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

There is acceptance, not avoidance.

Bottom line – Jesus says to the Father, "I'm willing to lay myself down for Your glory and the benefit of others." And His one act of obedience atoned for all of our disobedience and opened up the door for us to have this relationship with God where we can hear from Him and respond to Him.

Which is why we should now exhibit the same attitude of humility and submission as our Savior. And if we do, there are three outcomes we see in Philippians this morning, turn back there with me now.

Outcome #1 **God is pleased,**

Vs 13 “it is God who works in you both to will and to do **for *His* good pleasure.**”

Our obedience is pleasing to God. The Bible says that there is nothing that God wants more than our obedience. Before Jesus came to be our perfect sacrifice, animals were sacrificed by the Jews to show the need for blood to cover our sins and yet, even at that time Samuel the prophet said:

“Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.” (1 Sam 15:22)

And King David, after his horrible sin with Bathsheba, wrote in Psalm 51:14
The sacrifices of God [are] a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart
--These, O God, You will not despise.

When you simply say, “Yes Lord – let’s do things your way, not mine” you bring God pleasure.

So, your obedience pleases God, but it also has an effect on others -

Outcome #2 **light is shines in the darkness:**

[15](#) that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, [16](#) holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

When you obey the things God is showing you or commanding you, and you do it without murmuring or second-guessing Him, without complaining about how hard it is, or what He’s putting you through – when you humbly submit to Him and let Him shape you into the man or woman He wants you to be, you shine as a light and a testimony to those around you. They see what life is supposed to look like.

Some people are only going to know as much about Jesus as they see lived out in your life. They aren’t going to read a Bible; they aren’t going to come to church. But they’ll see you live day to day. So, what are they going to think about the God you serve by watching you and your attitude toward Him? For you parents, what are your kids going to think? It is our privilege to show a little bit of Jesus to everyone in our lives, and the best way to do that, is to submit to Him joyfully believing that He knows best.

There's no doubt that everyone who knew and saw Paul, even if they disagreed with Him, understood a little more about the God he served.

Outcome #3 love is shown:

[17](#) Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. [18](#) For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Since Paul's life had been changed by Jesus pouring out His life for Paul, Paul accepted that it might be necessary to have his life poured out for others.

That attitude and understanding spread to those around him. As this chapter closes he is going to give the examples of two other men who were submitted to God's will and reflected His love by denying themselves and looking after others.

[19](#) But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. [20](#) For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. [21](#) For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.

Notice the dichotomy there – it's one or the other. Are you seeking your own good or are you seeking the things of Jesus. Are you praying "Thy will be done" or "My will be done?"

If you are seeking the things of Jesus, you will naturally seek to serve others and put them first. But if seek your own things, you will eventually get frustrated by others because at some point they are going to get in your way, they are going to inconvenience you, they are going to come between you and the ability to do what you want to do.

If you want to have better relationships with other people – spouses, family members, friends, your kids, your parents, your co-workers, whatever - focus on your relationship with God.

He will work in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure, which includes forgiving, loving, and serving others. And if you find yourself in a relationship with another Christian, you'll be falling over yourselves trying to out love one another because you know it's God's will and He gives you the strength, wisdom, and forgiveness to be able to do it.

[22](#) But you know his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel. [23](#) Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me.

[24](#) But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

So, Paul is saying, I hope to come to you myself. But I'm in prison right now and we've got to wait for the trial. As soon as that is over, I'll either come myself or send Timothy. Since neither of us can come right now though,

[25](#) Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; [26](#) since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. [27](#) For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. [28](#) Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. [29](#) Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; [30](#) because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

So, if you caught that, Epaphroditus nearly died in his effort to bless Paul, but God saved him. It just goes to show you that there has always been something difficult about missions trips, right?

Seriously though, think about what E-12 did – he did something hard, because it was going to be a blessing to others.

All of these men – Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, they all went through difficult times for the sake of serving other people. They put God first and were willing to follow Him and serve others without grumbling or complaining. And that had three outcomes – God was pleased, a light of testimony shined, and love was shown.

But it was hard, there was real suffering involved at times. It's not always easy to do God's will. It's not always easy to obey without grumbling or complaining. So how did these men do it, and how do we do it?

They did it because they were motivated by the knowledge of what Jesus had done for them. That even though He didn't have to, He came and He suffered on our behalf. He did something for us that we could never have done for ourselves and provided a way for us to be restored in our relationship with God.

So Paul didn't mind being poured out for the Philippians because Jesus had been poured out for him.

Timothy was able to think about the Philippians and their needs because he was thinking of them with the mind of Christ.

And Epaphroditus was able to come close to death while serving Christ and blessing Paul.

There's a common thread running through it all – because I know what God has done for me, I'm willing and able to do something for you. He initiates, I respond.

If you find yourself losing your joy, if you find selfishness rising up inside of you, come back to Jesus, come back to the cross – remember what He has done for you and ask Him, how would have me show this love to others? Help me oh God to know and to do Your will and to do it without murmuring or complaining because I trust in You.