

# Proving the will of God

Notes for a sermon preached by Henry Dixon  
at Poplar Baptist Church, on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019

*“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)*

## Introduction

We have been considering how the apostle urges his readers to live differently in the light of what God has done for them. He urges his readers to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice to God, which is holy and pleasing to God. He calls upon them not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds.

We were thinking last time about the importance of renewing the mind, and how this is to be achieved. We saw that it is as we take God’s Word into our lives that our thinking is transformed. We thought together about the various ways in which we can and should receive the Word of God, and allow it to transform the way that we think.

We touched last time on the blessing which the apostle promised his readers if they would allow their minds to be transformed. He says at the end of verse 2, “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” I think it would be good for us to think about this a bit more this morning.

The literal translation of this sentence is, “that you may prove what is the good, pleasing and perfect will of God”. The apostle says that if our minds are transformed we will “prove” the will of God.

The word that is translated “prove” here is a word which means to test and to prove to be genuine. In the ancient world it was used to describe

how metals would be tested by fire to make sure that they were genuine. Here are two examples of it in the New Testament:

1 Corinthians 3.12 – 13: “If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will **test** the quality of each man's work.”

1 Peter 1:7: “These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be **proved** genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

These examples show us that the word is usually used in the sense of testing, and being proven to be genuine.

This raises the question, in what sense or senses does having a renewed mind prove the will of God?

I think that we can say that having a renewed mind proves the will of God in three senses:

1. Having a renewed mind causes us to “prove” God’s will, in that it gives us a clear understanding of the will of God for our lives.
2. Having a renewed mind leads to us living transformed lives that are a living demonstration of the will of God lived out. Our lives are “proof” of what the will of God lived out in practice looks like.
3. When we have renewed minds, and live in accordance with God’s will, we prove in our experience, that God’s will is “good, pleasing and perfect”.

Let us think together about these three ways in which having a renewed mind “proves” the will of God.

## **1. Having a renewed mind causes us to “prove” God’s will, in that it gives us a clear understanding of the will of God for our lives**

God has given us clear guidance in his Word about how we are to live. We are not in the dark. As we take his Word on board, and allow it to transform the way that we think, so we will know how we are to live.

Those who are without God in the world are desperately confused about the way that they should live. They follow the latest trends and fashions. One minute they regard something as wrong, the next they regard it as right. But we who believe have been given God's sure and unchanging Word, so that we know what is right from what is wrong. If we allow our minds to be transformed by God's Word, we will clearly know how to live.

Hear what the psalmist says in Psalm 19, verses 7 – 11, says,

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." God's law is perfect. There is nothing wrong with it at all. When we hear it, and allow it to convict us and bring us to Christ, it will revive the soul.

"The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple." You can fully depend upon the commandments of God. They give wisdom to the person who is foolish in his understanding.

"The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart." What God said in his word is right. It gives joy to the heart.

"The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes." In our natural state we are in the darkness, but God's laws shine the light upon us, so that we know how to live.

"The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring for ever." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, says the book of Proverbs, and this lasts for ever.

"The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous." God's laws are sure. They are totally dependable. They are utterly righteous.

"They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb." For the person who is saved, the law of God is more precious than gold. It is sweeter than honey.

"By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." God's law warns us away from danger. There is great reward in keeping it.

Psalm 119 is another great psalm full of wonderful things about the law of God. It teaches us that God's law, as it is received and allowed to change the way in which we think, gives us wisdom which enables us to know how we are to behave. Let me mention some verses to you:

Verse 98 to 100: "Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I

meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.”

Verse 105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

Verse 130: “The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”

The opening words of the book of Proverbs, chapter 1 verses 1 to 7, tell us how this book gives wisdom to those who receive it. What is said about Proverbs is true for the whole of Scripture:

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young — let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance — for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

So, as we receive and absorb God’s law, we are given wisdom to know how we are to live. We are no longer in the dark. In all the ways that matter, we are instructed about how we should live.

Living in the age of the New Covenant as we do, we have the additional benefit of having received the teaching of Christ, which gives us the correct interpretation of the law of God. We have in Christ the embodiment of what a perfect life looks like. We also have the teaching of the apostles, which brings out the moral implications of the Gospel.

Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 16 and 17, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Not only is this the case, but God has also given to true believer the Holy Spirit, so that we may properly understand his Word. The apostle Paul speaks about this in 1 Corinthians chapter 2. Let us read verses 12 to 16:

<sup>12</sup>We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. <sup>13</sup>This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. <sup>14</sup>The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand

them, because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>15</sup>The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: <sup>16</sup>"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

The apostle says in verse 12 that God has given us the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand what God has freely given us. The Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the blessings we have in Christ, and also understanding of God's Word. The apostle says in verse 14 that the man without the Spirit cannot accept the things that come from God. They are foolishness to him. He cannot understand them. But, he says in verse 15, the spiritual man makes judgements about all things. Because we have the Word of God to teach us God's will, and because we have the Holy Spirit to give us the correct understanding of God's Word, we are able to make right judgements. He then goes on to say in verse 16 a very remarkable thing: "We have the mind of Christ". The true believer who has God's word, and who has the Holy Spirit, has the mind of Christ. He thinks in the way that Christ thinks, with his values and priorities.

Some believers get very worried about certain questions to do with God's will for their lives. They ask questions like, "Is it God's will that I should I go to university?" "If so, what course does God want me to do?" "What career does God want me to pursue?" "Where does God want me to live?" "Does God want me to get married?" "If so, whom does God want me to marry?" and so on.

Some will do various things to try to find God's will. They will open their Bible at random and stick a finger in, and hope that the verse that the finger lands on will tell them in some way what to do. Or they will, as they call it, "put out a fleece". This is a reference to when Gideon put out a fleece before God, asking that God would confirm what he was telling him to do by making the fleece to be wet and the ground to be dry when the dew came down. The next night it was the other way round. Gideon asked God to make the fleece to be dry but the ground to be wet with dew. Some believers do something similar. They pray that God will give some sort of miraculous sign which will prove to them that what they are thinking of doing is his will.

But we have been seeing that what the Scriptures tell us is that if we receive God's Word, and if we have the Holy Spirit, and if our minds are renewed, we will have spiritual wisdom, and we will be enabled to make godly and wise decisions. We will be equipped to make right judgements about what we should do. The methods that I have

mentioned that some adopt to find God's will are really not much different from the pagan practice of looking for an omen. We who are believers do not need to descend to such immature practices, because as our minds are transformed by his Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, God gives us wisdom to make right choices.

In the vast majority of cases the way God leads us in the age of the New Covenant is through instructing us in his Word, as enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so that we have the wisdom to make good judgements. I would not rule out that in some exceptional cases God may strongly impress upon someone the importance of a certain course of action. But in the vast majority of decisions we have to take, it is as we think with a mind that has been renewed by God's Word that we make wise and godly decisions.

Part of that spiritual wisdom is to have the ability to discern where a decision does or does not have a moral dimension to it. Where a decision does not have a moral dimension, we are free to do whatever we think best. As long as a decision has no moral dimension to it – and vast numbers of decisions we make every day have no moral dimension to them – we will not be sinning, whatever decision we make. We only sin if we do something that God has clearly told us through his Word that we should not do, or if we do something that by inference from his word we can see is wrong, or if we do something that we have strong reason to believe that God has directed us in some other way not to do. Or we sin if we fail to do something which God has clearly directed us to do in his Word, or has clearly shown us in some other way that we should do. Otherwise, if what we are thinking of doing has no moral dimension to it, we are free to do whatever we believe is best.

So we see that the first way in which we having a renewed mind “proves” the will of God is that a renewed mind enables us to know God's will.

## **2. Having a renewed mind causes us to “prove” God's will in the sense that we are enabled to obey it in practice**

Having a renewed mind not only enables us to know what to do. It also enables us to do it.

When our minds are renewed, not only do we think according to God's will, but our minds are also transformed to think according to the truths revealed in the Gospel. This empowers us to obey God's Word, so that we put it into practice.

Peter tells us in his second letter, chapter 1 verses 3 and 4 that God has given us what we need to escape from sin through our knowledge of God's promises.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

As we believe the promises of God, meditate upon them and let them become part of the way that we think, so we are empowered to "participate in the divine nature", in other words to become like God in our behaviour, and are enabled to "escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires".

The result is that the more we take in the truths of the Gospel into our thinking, the more like Christ we shall become, and the more that we shall "prove" in experience the will of God in our lives.

### **3. Having a renewed mind enables us to "prove" how good God's will is**

When our minds are transformed so that we know God's will and put it into practice, we prove in experience that God's will is good, pleasing and perfect. Obeying God's will does you good. It is the path of blessing.

When we have transformed minds, leading to transformed lives, then we prove to ourselves that God's will is good. Not only so, but we also "showcase" to the world the goodness of God's will.

This is something which the opening verses of Psalm 1 speak about:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Jeremiah says something similar, in chapter 17 verses 7 and 8, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Psalms 34 verses 12 – 14 says, "Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."

Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew chapter 7 verses 24 and 25, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."

If you have been attending this church for a while you will have heard many warnings against the so-called "Prosperity Gospel". But all errors have a grain of truth in them, and this error is no exception. The grain of truth is that if you do live according to God's will, there will be positive impacts for good upon personal finances and health.

The person who has a transformed mind and so lives according to God's Word will work hard, and will not waste his money on excessive alcohol, cigarettes, and extravagant and unnecessary purchases. This is bound to have a positive impact upon his personal finances.

The person who has a renewed mind leading to a transformed life will also be spared the negative impact on his health of excessive drinking, smoking, drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, over-eating and other negative effects on health caused by sinful behaviour.

This is not to say that those who are poor or sick have been disobedient or sinful. We may suffer poverty or ill-health for no other reason than that we live in a fallen world. Furthermore the person who obeys God may suffer fines, or become poor because he feels called to serve God in a way which results in a lower income, or because he feels called to give away a large proportion of his income. He may suffer in his health because of his service of Christ, or be injured or killed due to persecution. What I am saying is just that the believer who lives in a transformed way will be spared those negative impact effects upon finances and health that are directly caused by sin.



A believer who obeys God's law will also be spared many troubles from the authorities. A Christian may be persecuted for his right living, but he will be spared getting into trouble because of criminally wrong activity.

Much more importantly, when we live transformed lives we will know spiritual blessings. We are made for obedience to God. When we are living in obedience to God, we shall be the happiest people on earth.

We shall have the blessing of having a conscience that is not burdened by guilt. We shall experience answered prayer, because God promises to hear the prayers of a righteous man. We shall know the spiritual blessing of knowing God's love, peace, joy. We shall see fruit in terms of others being converted and being blessed through our prayers and service of the Lord. Most of all, we shall know the blessing of being in a close relationship with God.

This is summed up well in two songs.

For me to live is Christ to die is gain  
To hold his hand, and walk his narrow way.  
There is no peace no joy no thrill, like walking in his way  
For me to live, is Christ to die is gain.

And,

When we walk with the Lord, in the light of his will  
What glory he shines on the way.  
For in fellowship sweet, we will walk with him still  
If we only will trust and obey.

Trust and obey, trust and obey  
For there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus,  
But to trust and obey"

## **Conclusion**

What we have thought about today is the blessing that comes from having a renewed mind. When our minds are renewed, leading to a transformed life, then we will prove God's will. We will prove it in the sense that we will know what his will is. We will also prove it in the sense that we obey it. And we will prove it in the sense that we will prove it to be good.

What is the application for us?

First of all, let me address any who are not yet Christians. I hope that you will have seen from what we have learned today that the way of blessing is through knowing God, and living a life of obedience to him, by having your mind transformed. This is how to be truly happy. If you come to Christ, and trust in him, and, having done so, you allow your mind to be transformed by God's Word, you will know many wonderful blessings in this life, and, in the life to come, you will experience God's glory at the resurrection. Why continue any longer in a life of sin? Come to Christ. Be changed.

Let me now address those who are believers. Have you repented of your sin and trusted Christ for salvation? Then do not stop short at merely receiving Christ as your saviour. Be thoroughly transformed in your thinking and behaviour, so that you might prove God's will in your life.

*These are the notes that were prepared for a sermon that was preached on this verse, slightly edited prior to publication. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at*

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1131993547868>

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