

Doing God's Will

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Together in this hour, we have declared the greatness, the elevation of the Lord, and by doing so here's what we've acknowledged: that infinitely more than we could ever imagine, he knows more, perceives more and understands more than we do. So what are the ramifications? In just a minute, you're about to open up not his suggestions, not his "if you feel like it," but his precepts and his commands and the same Lord who we just said, "Oh, you're so great," is about to communicate truth into our lives that sometimes we don't like to hear. So we've declared he is great, the challenge is to continue to declare his greatness even in the midst of discovering that we may not be so great.

Let's pray.

Lord, today we come acknowledging not just your presence but your greatness in our life and we confess, God, that we fall woefully short to your standard, your expectation and your desires for our life. So Lord, today we pray boldly and honestly that you would take your word and that you would shape us and mold us and make us into that which you desire us to be, not which we in our flesh wish to be. God, we've declared your greatness, now help us yield to that as we allow your word to shape us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Philippians 2. In the New Testament, the book of Philippians 2. If you're a guest or visitor with us, let me welcome you to a series here at First Baptist where we're just walking through, we're taking a journey together asking a very simple question with some serious ramifications. The question is this: what does a disciple of Jesus Christ actually look like? Now there is no shortage of opinions and no shortage of ideas and books and seminars that have been taking place to kind of communicate this, but rather than seeking all that, we're seeking what does the word of God say that a follower of Jesus Christ should look like? More specifically, what did Jesus say? In John 15:5, he made this audacious statement. He said, "I'm the vine and you're the branches. He that abides in me and I in him shall bear much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing."

So today as we turn to Philippians 2, we're going to address an issue that is one of the most frequently talked about and questioned ideas of our world. The question is this: what is God's will for my life? Or better yet: how can I know that I'm in the will of God in the life that I'm living? In Philippians 2, beginning in verse 12, it gives us several, if

you allow me to say it, litmus tests. How can we know that we are in the will of God? How can we know that what I'm doing, what I'm saying, even what I'm thinking is honoring to the Lord?

Beginning in verse 12, it says,

12 Wherefore, 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 which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 15 That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world; 16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

Now as we discuss today doing God's will, knowing, how do I know that what I'm participating in, what I'm involved in is honoring to the Lord, there are three very strategic words that we're going to address in this passage. They are the words of transparency, integrity and dependency. Now I'm going to walk through each one of these individually but let's begin with transparency. Notice what it says in verse 12, it says, "my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not just in my presence when I was with you, but even when I was apart from you." When we talk about obedience, when we talk about doing the things of God, let's talk about what those actions look like for just a moment because I think oftentimes we can get in our own dispute, our own dialog or discussion about what that may look like. So allow me to reference back again to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 in what we know as the Sermon on the Mount. The disciples have come to him and they've asked him, "Jesus, teach us how to pray. How do we do this thing called prayer? How do we communicate with the Lord?" Remember what Jesus said, he said, "When you pray, do so like this," and he gives a model. He says, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come," listen to this next part, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Now allow me to unpack what that means for just a moment. It says that when we do the things of God, when we obey, the lives we live, when that prayer is spoken, basically here's what it's saying: that our lives on earth ought to look like our lives would be in heaven. Let me repackage that. This may hurt. This may sting a little bit, but if you wouldn't do it in heaven, don't do it on earth. If you wouldn't do it in the presence of God, don't do it in solitude.

G. K. Chesterton, the late theologian, made this statement, "Character is who you are when the lights are turned off." And it says here that you have obeyed not just when I was with you but even when I was absent.

Let me remind you of the Old Testament story of the Israelites. They've come out of Egypt. It's been 400 years. They're out of bondage. They go across the Red Sea, they get

into that famous wilderness experience, and as they're wandering in the wilderness, the Lord calls Moses up and he says, "I need you to come to the mount for 40 days and 40 nights." Now he's going to return with what we know as the Ten Commandments. Upon his return, he's just about to come back, and what does he hear in the distance? He hears shouting. He hears laughing. He hears music. He hears all kinds of noises and he says, "God, something's not right." The Lord says, "Go down and see for yourself." Do you know what he finds at the bottom of that mount? He finds led by his brother Aaron, he finds a golden calf that's being worshiped. He finds debauchery. He finds fornication. He finds all types of lewd behavior. Here's what's interesting about the story: when Moses shows up everybody goes, "Sorry. You didn't see that, did you? I don't think so." In other words, when the representative was gone, or shall I say in our terminology, when the cat is away, the mice do play.

I remember when I was in college. One of the courses I took because of my degree, I took Greek. I know you expect that of me. But at the university that I attended there were only two people or two types of people that took Greek, there were those who were preparing for some type of ministerial education, and the football players. You say, "Why did the football players take Greek?" Well, there are two reasons. 1. You didn't have to speak the language, per se, it only met three days a week versus five, and the professor who had been there since the days of Methuselah, he graded on a very strict curve so if all the football players failed, everybody made a C. I mean, that's how it worked. And I'm going to tell you, with that class, it was a mess but the professor that we had, I'll never forget him, he wore a size 14 shoe, he always wore hard-soled shoes and we were on the third floor of an old rickety building. I mean, those guys, those players, I mean, they were all up to all kinds of shenanigans all the time, they were always doing all kinds of things but when you heard the footsteps coming down the hall, the moment the professor opened the door, they were all upright in their seats just like they should be.

Amazing how good we are when "the professor is in the room." But what does he say? Our lives should be transparent. The actions of our life, yet we're not in heaven, on earth we ought to be living a life here just like we're going to live up there one day. It ought to be transparent, but not just in the things we do, the actions, but also our attitude. Notice what it says at the end of verse 12, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Now, I know this verse, people struggle with it. They say, "Whoa, whoa, time out. I thought salvation was not by works lest any man should boast?" Notice it says "work out your own salvation." You know your salvation is not yours, it's his, but the illustration that we've got to understand, it's just like Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." When a baby is born, when it comes into the world, over the course of its life it learns how to walk, it learns how to eat, it learns how to take care of itself. It works things out not so that it can be born, but because it is, and the attitude here is now that you're saved, now that you're a child of God, now that you're a child of the one true King, learn how to live like it and you ought to have an attitude with fear and trembling.

Now let me unpack that for just a moment. One of my favorite verses in Scripture is found in 1 Timothy 4:24-25. It goes a little something like this. It says, "Some men's sins go before them, others unto judgment. And some men's rewards go before them, and

others unto the judgment." You say, "Well, what does that mean?" Has it ever frustrated you, does it ever bother you or personally have you ever wiped the sweat off your brow when you got away with something? Have you ever looked and said, "I can't believe they got away with that. I can't believe they acted that way. No repercussions. No consequences. Nothing." I've got news for you: according to that verse, oh, there's a day coming. They may not have paid the price on earth but they'll face the Lord one day.

Now let's flip the script. Have you ever felt like, "God, why does no one recognize what I do for you? Why does no one recognize my sacrifice? Why does no one recognize the life I'm living for you? No one notices. In fact, maybe it's just me." We've become a world today where we reward the rebellious and we overlook the obedient. And he says, "Oh, don't worry, even if you're not honored here, even if you're not recognized here, the Lord does see." In other words, when we talk about a transparent life, not just the fact that we should live a life on earth that mimics what we one day shall live in heaven, but recognizing that the only one that we're ever accountable to for our life is not the person sitting next to us, behind us or in front of us, but the Lord himself. And oh, we can "get away" with something here, but not up there and we may never be recognized here but we shall one day be rewarded there.

So when we talk about how do I live a life that's honoring of God? How do I know what God's will for my life is? It's real simple: it should be a life that's transparent; that is no different today than hopefully one day you would live in glory. But the second word is the word of integrity. Look at verse 14, "do all things without murmurings and disputings, that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom you shine as lights in the world." Interesting there because when we talk about integrity, that's something that has validity, that's something that has, what we might say, it's got meat on the bones, there's something real to it. And it says that your life shouldn't have murmurings or disputings, it should be blameless and harmless. In other words, you should be different and distinct and you should picture something completely drastically different than the world that is around you. After all, it says you are the light in a dark, crooked, perverse nation.

So what are the actions? Notice those qualifications: without disputing, without murmuring, harmless, blameless. I don't know about you, but oftentimes we find ourselves in a situation where somebody says, "Well, why are you so upset?" You say, "Well, I never said anything." They say, "Well, it was in your eyes." Or, "Why are you so bothered and what's going on?" You say, "I never said a word." They say, "Well, it's in your body language."

You know, some years ago, in fact, those years are getting longer, when I participated, when I played the great game of baseball, I had a coach that probably taught me more about the game than everybody else included, and as we, that team, as we traveled around, one of the things that he did at practice is at the end of practice, no matter how long practice had gone, no matter how intense it had been, we always had to run at the end of practice. Now, I don't know if you've noticed this but I do not have a runner's build. I don't know if you've noticed that. And I'll be honest with you, when it comes to

running, if you need somebody to run a real long distance, I'm not your guy. I mean, I'm really not. I mean, look at me. I'm a bowling ball with a head on top. I mean, that's who I am. So if you need somebody to run a long ways, not your guy. If you need somebody to run fast, have you seen the length of these legs? I'm not your guy either. But if you need somebody to run through a wall, give me a call. I've got that one covered. I can handle that.

But I don't enjoy running at all, alright? But our coach had this rule, as we would do this running exercises, and for those of you with somewhat of a baseball background, you know, we'd run through first base 10 times, we'd take a turn, we'd go to second, stretch it out to third a couple, all the way around. It didn't last that long but if you ever slacked off or if you ever showed a bad attitude, he would call you out and say, "Give me 2," which meant you had to run two complete laps around the entire complex, then you had to come back and finish what had not been completed. I don't like to run. I don't enjoy it at all and so when we would do running at the end, even though I was exhausted, even though I was tired, I gave it everything I had. Why? Because I did not want to be called out. I didn't want to have to run anymore than I had to.

One day we were going through the procedures and we were stretching it out to a double and I hit second base and I ran back to home plate. I mean, I'm ready to get this over with. I want to go home. All of a sudden the coach goes, "Hey, Meyers! Give me 2." I said, "What do you mean, coach?" I said, "I don't know if you know this, that's as fast as I can run. I did all I could." He says, "It has nothing to do with that." I said, "Well, what did I do?" He said, "2 laps for cussing me out." I said, "Coach, I never said a word." He said, "It was in your eyes. Give me 2!" He was right because I hated every aspect of it and inside my soul there was this disdain for him and what we were doing.

Notice what it says here, "in all things without murmuring, without disputing, being held blameless." You know, in Colossians 3, it makes this statement, we are to do all things "as unto the Lord." Whether that's running bases, doing a repetitive task at work, handling our children, whatever it may be, and the action of integrity is that we ought to be held in esteem, that our disposition as children of the Lord. It calls us the sons of God, that we ought to be seen as different, we ought to be seen as distinct, that we don't look like nor act like or even give the countenance that is contrary to the things of God. We are blameless in all things.

But what's the attitude that goes along with that? Notice what it says, you do this because you live "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, that you should shine as lights unto the world." And the attitude is when it comes to a life of integrity in the will of God for us, understand that our world that is around us, not just today but even 2,000 years ago, is messed up. I mean, when it says it's crooked, that means it's not going the way it should be. When it says it's perverse, that means it's twisted, it's upside down.

Allow me to illustrate how upside down at least our world has become in my recent exposure. This past month, something took place in our home. My wife has been begging for years, she has been pleading, she has been discussing, and finally it has occurred.

After years and years and years of desiring and wanting, her wishes have come true and we are now the proud caretakers of three chickens. Oh, yes. As if three boys, two dogs and a cat weren't enough, let's add some chickens to the mix. We now have these three ladies, we'll just call them that, that meander around our place. And they're cute, don't get me wrong, but I've learned that chickens want to do whatever chickens want to do but she has found a way, of course I know she read up on this, she found a way, do you know you can get a chicken to go anywhere you want them to? You can. It's called mealworms. I'm serious. If you put out mealworms, it's like putting M&M's out for me. I'll just follow the trail everywhere you go. I'm good. I mean, you put out mealworms, you want them in their coop, boom, they'll go in the coop. You want them to go over to this area, they'll go over to that area. Wherever you put mealworms, they'll follow.

You say, "Well, what does this have to do with the will of God?" Did you know this week, just this week, one of the largest international stores in the world that specializes in home products and furniture and has a cafeteria inside of it that specializes in meatballs, has decided they're going to offer up mealworm meatballs. What? Mealworms? That's what you give chickens. The same day I'm reading up on these chickens because I've got to figure out how to keep them alive because, well, never mind. That's a whole other story. You know, there's a guy who says one of the best things you can feed chickens in spaghetti. Now can I ask you a dumb question? Have we not lost our mind when chickens are eating spaghetti and humans are eating worms?

We're upside down. We're twisted. We've got everything backwards and that's a trite example so let me get serious for just a moment. It says we live "in a crooked and a perverse world." Do you know what Isaiah the prophet said 800 years before the time of Christ? He said, "Woe," by the way, when the Bible says "woe," pay attention. "Woe unto him who calls evil good, and good evil." We've become a world today that if it is of God, it is of the Bible, somehow its archaic, narrow-minded, bigoted and should be dismissed, but if its of the world, not only should it be accepted but it should be celebrated. It should receive an award and all of a sudden let's put it on the pedestal.

Guess what? We live in a crooked, perverse, messed up world and what does he say we're to do? Be a light. We are called to be different. We are called to be distinct. In fact, it reminds me of some of the great wisdom that a mentor of mine gave me years ago. He said if you wake up and you don't run into the devil every day face-to-face, you might be headed the same direction.

It says there that we are to be a light, we are to be distinct, we are to be different. Lives of transparency, lives of integrity, but last but not least, lives of dependency. Notice verse 16, "holding forth the word of life that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain, neither have I labored in vain." When I use the word "dependency" we talk about the will of God for our lives. Not only do we ask ourselves a question: does my life look like here what one day it will look like in the heavens? Not only do we ask ourselves this important question: does my life look like the world that is lost and dying and in darkness around me or is it distinct or different? But finally: am I doing it in my strength or in his?

Let me state John 15:5 again for the record. Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him shall bear much fruit, for apart from me," you can do a few things. No, he says, "for apart from me, you can do nothing." And when we talk about the actions that surround us, what our lives should look like, let me give you a good litmus test when it comes to doing God's will for your life. If it is satisfying to the flesh, if it is pleasing to the flesh, it's probably not the will of God. End of story. Why? Because we are trapped, we live inside of this wretched thing, according to the Apostle Paul, that knows nothing better or else than to do but rebel against God.

Now the Bible does say, "I've learned to be content in all states." The Bible does say that when I commit my life to the Lord, that I am pleasing him because my heart lines up with his heart, in Psalm 37. I understand that but what I'm getting at is this: if we look at something, an activity, a desire, a situation, whatever it may be, and our flesh just goes, "Oh, yeah! I cannot wait to do that!" You might want to take a step back because it says here we live in dependency on the word of life and the things of the Lord are so contrary to the things of the world and what we need to grasp and ask, well, is it the things of God? That doesn't mean that God won't bless our heart's intentions and our desires, but there is a difference between a heart that is lined up with God and a flesh that craves the satisfaction of this world.

Let me explore that a little bit further. If the world you're living in, all it tells you is how wonderful and great and fabulous you are, you might want to take a step back for just a moment because what does this say? The world is perverse. It is crooked. It is messed up. Now it's different, if you're harmless, without rebuke in displaying the love and life of Jesus everywhere you go and being honored for that, that's two different roads or two different paths to be on.

But it ends with this, "so that I do not run in vain." You know, when it comes to the things of life whether it be our occupation, our family, our finances, whatever it may be, how often that we do the things that we do to please those that are around us or to attain the things that surround us, all of which one day matter not. Matter not, for there is only one that we will stand before one day, the Lord God Almighty, whom we present our lives when we present ourselves, and that is why the Apostle Paul in his very last paragraph said, "I've run my race." He said, "Make sure that you do not run in vain."

You know, this thing called life, we don't get a do-over. For those of you that are golfers, we don't get a Mulligan. Baseball guys, we don't get any extra innings or overtime for basketball and football guys. We don't get any of those things. We don't get an opportunity to go, "Phew. Boy, we struggled the first four quarters. We've got a few extra minutes now." We don't have the opportunity to say, "Well, we had nine innings. Boy, that was rough. Let's get it together now in the extra ones." We don't have the opportunity to say, "Well, there's a playoff. 18 holes have been played, we've got a playoff." No, he says make sure your race was not run in vain. In other words, don't be waiting for the overtime. Don't be waiting for the extra innings. Whatever it is that needs to be settled, get it settled now.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Speaking of getting things settled, you know, maybe you're that person today that never settled matters, never has with the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you've never come to that place, that understanding in your life where you've confessed that you've messed up and sinned, repented of your sin and asked Jesus to forgive you and save you. Man, do I have some great news for you this morning. You don't have to sign up for a class, you don't have to jump through a bunch of hoops, you don't have to cross a bunch of t's or dot a bunch of i's. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe that's the position you find yourself in today.

Maybe that's where you are and maybe somewhere deep inside you're saying, "Yes, there's got to be a different way. There's got to be something else." That's why we call it the Gospel. We sang about that earlier, the simple Gospel, recognizing we're the problem and Jesus is the answer. Maybe today is the day that you have a conversation with the Lord, not a conversation that is had out loud or even verbatim of what I might say but with the heart and the intent thereof. Maybe your conversation with the Lord would go something like this. "God, today I just want to acknowledge and admit what you already know about me. I'm on the wrong path. I'm involved in the wrong stuff, going in the wrong direction, headed for the wrong destination. But I understand today that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he's willing to forgive me of my sin. He's willing to save me from that destiny and he's able to turn my life around. God, I believe it. So today I confess, I believe that Jesus loves me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loves me so much he was willing to pay the price of my sin on the cross and three days later raise from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. And God, today I come and I'm just going to be honest with you. I don't have all the answers to all the problems of life but I know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I'm admitting I messed up, I've sinned. I'm repenting of my sins and I'm asking you, Jesus, to forgive me and save me."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe today is the day you called on the Lord. We'd like to celebrate that with you. We'd love to have a conversation with you in just a few moments. Or maybe today you realized you called on the Lord years ago, maybe even decades ago, but you take a step back and look at your life and you realize there are some areas that aren't transparent, full of integrity or dependent on the things of God. Maybe today is not about coming forward in a minute and having a conversation with someone, maybe today is about in a few minutes walking off this campus and depending on the Lord for every step of the way, to live for him rather than anything else.

Lord, as we come to this time, thank you that you're a God of second chances. God, I thank you that you're a God of third chances. In fact, there may be some of us in the room saying, "Man, I've lost count of how many times that you've called upon me." Lord, we thank you for grace and for mercy and your compassion and your love and I just pray today that whatever it is that your Holy Spirit has spoken to our lives through your word,

*that we would just respond appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray.
Amen.*

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Any and all decisions, I'll be here at the front.