

Modern Spirituality and Your Mind

Romans 12-16

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Bible Text: Romans 12:2

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As you open your Bibles to Romans 12:2, you'll notice that we haven't covered a lot of ground in this section of Romans, yet we have covered a lot of ground in this section of Romans. Last week, we looked at the first verse and we saw the foundation upon which Christian ethics are to be built, the foundation upon which we are to examine and by which we are to examine our actions and whether or not they are appropriate, whether or not they are right. This week, we move over into our very minds and our very thinking as it relates to the decisions that we make and this issue of walking in God's will. This is not just a question, this is the question of our day, this is the slippery slope of our culture, this is that area where even in the church it is difficult to find biblical thinking: it is difficult to find a biblical understanding of seeking, knowing and walking in the will of God and the overwhelming majority of the instances to which we point are absolutely pagan and not Christian in their origin.

Let me read for you, if I may, just from a book by Bruce Waltke. It's called "Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?" And he's asking that question: is that concept of finding the will of God actually a pagan concept? He starts by giving several examples that will be very common to his hearers as it relates to the way we talk in Christian circles about discerning God's will, making decisions. What do I do next? What do I do now? Where do I go next? Listen to this,

"Margaret is a successful career woman with a desire to please God. She worked her way up to a supervisor's position in the accounting division at First National Bank and married rather late in life. Now in her late 30's, she is struggling with the importance of her job. She would like to do something significant for Christ but feels that her job prevents her from making any changes.

Margaret's church recently held a missionary conference in which the speaker challenged Christians to become involved in world evangelism and encouraged everyone to justify why they are not 'serving the Lord overseas.' Those words stay with Margaret as she ponders spending the next 25 years at her desk doing the same old accounting tasks.

The next day she reads in the paper about a hurricane devastating the Marshall Islands. The accompanying photograph of two children crying over the death of their parents vividly captures the destruction and deprivation and Margaret prays for those poor souls left to fend for themselves. That very afternoon a co-worker making plans for his vacation leaves a brochure on the Marshall Islands and Margaret decides to pray that the Lord would make His will clear to her. That night her husband comes home complaining that the best lawyer in his office, a young man named Marshall, has just been transferred to their East Coast office. 'Honey,' Margaret says to her husband, 'I've been thinking about what the speaker said in church yesterday and the funniest set of circumstances occurred. Do you think God could be calling us to be missionaries in the Marshall Islands?'

Now here's what would happen if Margaret and her husband went to the Marshall Islands as missionaries. They would come back from time to time and they would go to churches and they would stand up before churches and tell that exact story and it would be the evidence that God called them to be where they are, and people with tear-stained eyes would applaud the way God used those circumstances to reveal his will.

Now let me first just give you the shocker and then I'll explain myself. That is paganism and not Christianity. That's paganism. That's reading tea leaves. That's not discerning the will of God. That's looking at the stars in the heavens trying to discern the story that they tell. That's horoscope reading. That is not biblical Christianity but it is absolutely the most common approach to finding, discerning and following God's will among Christians and some of you are incredibly uncomfortable right now because that story is absolutely fine with you theologically, and if someone told you that story, you'd just shake your head and marvel at the goodness of God in being so clear and so specific with his people.

That is why we need to know Romans 12:2. Romans 12:2 talks clearly about walking in the will of God but listen to what it says. Now the end of Romans 12:2 says, you know, by testing you may discern what is the will of God, that which is good and acceptable and perfect, and that's what we want to get to, right? I want to get to the will of God. Now the pagan way to get to the will of God is this and let me give you a definition and then I'll talk to you about some of the ways that the pagans do it. The pagan way to finding the will of God is this: you must somehow tap into the divine will; you must somehow transcend your human limitations and somehow access the mind of God so that you can know what the sovereign Lord of the universe has for you next. That's paganism. That's paganism.

How do pagans do this? Well, fortune-telling is one way. I will have someone to tell me what the will of the divine is. Transcendental meditation, the idea of emptying your mind because, again, you've got to get in touch with the divine, you've got to get out of your humanness and in touch with the divine so you empty your mind, you clear your mind and you wait upon the divine to influence your empty mind. Thirdly, pharmaceuticals. With the Indians, it was peyote, with others it's been LSD. You take a drug that allows

you to enter into an altered state of consciousness and in that altered state, you transcend the human and the physical and you tap into the divine to get guidance and direction and instruction. Or looking for and reading signs. It's like God is dropping bread crumbs to let you know where to go. Somebody talked about missions, a hurricane hit the Marshall Islands, somebody had a brochure about the Marshall Islands, a guy named Marshall left my husband's firm. "God, I see the signs. I am listening. I have transcended the human and I am now in touch with the Divine and You are obviously trying to let me in on what it is that You are doing. You've got me. I'm there. My bags are packed. Let's go."

How do Christians find the will of God? Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your," let's say that word together, "mind." Here's the irony: the pagan concept of finding the will of God is to circumvent the mind, turn off the mind, alter the mind, not trust the mind. The biblical way goes directly through the mind, "be transformed by the renewal of your mind," and then what's the result of that? "That by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Now let me lay it out for you before we go back and exegete this text further. What do we find here as the process? The pagan process is get away from your mind, get away from the human realm into the transcendent realm. Either read the tea leaves, have your fortune told, have your palm read, or meditate until somehow you have an encounter with the divine that allows you to know with certain, and here's how we say it in Christian terms, we don't say transcendental meditation and Nirvana and achieving all this, the Christian word for this kind of meditation and the result of this kind of meditation, the Christian word for this kind of pagan mysticism is finding peace about it. Inner peace. Inner peace. It's paganism. "I know this is what I'm supposed to do." Why? "Because I have a peace about it," as though God would never lead you to do something about which you would not feel peace."

Has God ever led you to confront somebody about sin? Trust me, you don't feel a peace about that. Has God ever called you to witness to a hostile person? Trust me, you don't feel a peace about that. But that is the way we Christianize our pagan understanding of finding the will of God, "I have a peace about it." By the way, what that means is, "I'm doing something. It's not biblical and I know it's not biblical, but I don't want you to question me about it." So when you go opening up your Bible, I'd say, "Okay, but wait a minute. Alright, whatever, I know what that says but, hey, I prayed about this, I fasted, I have peace," therefore my decision trumps whatever you just found in that book because we all know that the ultimate example of finding the will of God is inner peace.

Here's how we get there as Christians: we search the Scriptures; we read our Bibles. "I want to know what to do. Pastor, can you help me know what to do in this situation?" Yeah, let's read your Bible. "Yeah, but the Bible's not gonna talk about this particular situation." Read your Bible.

Secondly, think biblically. Read your Bible, think biblically. "Yeah, but I want to know if I'm supposed to go to the Marshall Islands." Read your Bible. Read what your Bible has

to say about going places and preaching the Gospel and so on and so forth, okay? And then learn to think biblically about things like counting the cost and so on and so forth. Read your Bible, think biblically.

Thirdly, pray biblically. The pagan idea of prayer is, I'm emptying myself so that the divine can invade me. The biblical idea of prayer is, it is inseparable from the Scriptures. It is communing with the God who has revealed himself in the Bible. We ought to pray scripturally. We ought to pray biblically.

Four, seek wise counsel from people who read their Bible and pray. Amen. Seek wise counsel from people who actually read their Bible and pray.

Step five, when in doubt, repeat. Amen. Read your Bible. Think biblically. Pray biblically. Seek wise counsel from other people who read their Bible. Think biblically and pray biblically and when in doubt, repeat.

But don't take my word for it, let's get into this text, shall we? Romans 12. Look at the first verse, "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 service of worship." And so in light of what Christ has done, in light of what Christ has accomplished, the apostle says, "Give yourself, give your life, give your body, give all that you have and all that you are to God. You belong to God." So that's the ground of our ethics, it is Gospel-centered. We look at the indicatives, who God is, what God has done in us, what God has done for us, what God has done to us, and what God does through us, and then we move to the imperatives. The imperatives are what we are called and empowered to do in light of the indicatives. That's the way we determine what is ethical. Then we move to this next phase which is us understanding this idea of how we walk day to day in the will of God, and the first thing is a negative admonition. The first thing the apostle says is what you don't do. Here's what you don't do to find the will of God, "Do not be conformed to this world." Do not be conformed to this world. Literally, do not be pressed into the mold of this world. Do not adopt the thinking patterns of this world.

Listen to this quote from James Edwards, he writes, "Modern society beams a collage of intense images at believers and non-believers alike through the media, advertising, polls, style, social and materialistic pressure and ideologies. These images are often most effective when they are least recognized. The Christian life is an ongoing discipline of learning to be transformed by the Lordship of Christ rather than being conformed to social, moral and even spiritual images."

So the first thing we do is we refuse to be conformed to the spirit of the age. We must know the difference between what is biblical and what is not. There is the first issue. We have to know the difference between what is biblical and what is not. News flash: you can't trust yourself. "Follow your heart." No, the heart is deceitfully wicked above all else, who can know it? Don't you dare follow your heart. Your heart is wicked. You have to know the difference between what is biblical and what is not. You have to have your senses trained. The fact of the matter is all of us when we come to faith in Christ, have

lived in this world and been conformed to the way this world thinks. This world has told us what is beautiful, what is true, what is valuable, what is right and what is wrong, and so now we come to Christ and it is not as though on day one when you come to Christ, all those things are gone. You still have that baggage with you and sanctification is the process whereby that weight of thinking is transformed into a biblical way of thinking.

So the first thing that you have to do is learn how to recognize the spirit of the age. Interestingly enough, the word used here in the Greek is not "cosmos" when he uses "world" here. He uses "aeon" or "age." The spirit of the age. The spirit of the age. The way we think. The things that we value.

What is the spirit of the age and how do we know? Listen to this in Psalm 1:1-2. Psalm 1 is like the Old Testament version of Romans 12:2. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but," do you see that? You start with the negative. You do not walk in their counsel, you do not stand in their way, you do not sit in their seats, "but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." Is that not Romans 12:2 in the Old Testament? It most assuredly is. The first thing you do is refuse to be pressed into the mold of this world. Why? You have been redeemed and you now belong to Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." Do you see the same pattern? The first one is the negative. There are ways that we refuse to think and then there are ways that we think.

Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." You see, there is a pattern in Scripture and over and over and over again we are told, "Do not think in accordance with the way the world thinks." That's the first piece of the puzzle.

So here's the first problem with the pagan method of seeking the will of God. Here I am as a believer living in this age. The spirit of this age has taught me what to value, what to cherish, what is good, what is true, what is beautiful, what is right and what is wrong. So as a believer, I am a believer and I have been redeemed but I still have the thinking of the spirit of the age, I'm bombarded by the thinking of the spirit of the age, and because I'm bombarded by the thinking of the spirit of the age, I don't have a right assessment of what is true, what is beautiful, what is right, what is praiseworthy. And so I empty myself, which you cannot do, and I try to feel my way through a decision using mainly the spirit of the age as my guide, and I can come to a decision that feels right, I can have real peace about a decision because of the influence of the spirit of the age.

Where do we see this influence in our culture? 1. Education. It is the greatest influence of the spirit of the age. From kindergarten through 12th grade, a child spends 14,000 instructional hours in school. Let me say that again: kindergarten through 12th grade, a child spends 14,000 instructional hours in school. I am an opponent of government

education. I don't know if y'all knew that or not. I think it is absolutely unacceptable for Christian parents to send their children to the government for their education. Our schools are anti-Christian by federal mandate and their job is to conform children to the spirit of the age. That's why they exist. That's why they're there. And most of us spent those 14,000 instructional hours in a government indoctrination center being conformed to the spirit of the age and you think you can just close your eyes and find the will of God that feels right?

You've got to escape your education first and most of us, unfortunately, don't know what we don't know. What do you hear from homeschool parents all the time? Career educating two generations at the same time. Why? Because as we're educating our children, it's only then that many things become known to us. I'll never forget there were days when I was just mad. You know, I'm sitting and I'm reading history and I'm going, "Wait a minute, this is the exact opposite of what I was taught. I've been hoodwinked!" You sit up and you read the Constitution, you actually read the Constitution, you're teaching your children the Constitution and you sit up there and you go, "Okay, so here's the Constitution. Let's read the Constitution and let's see what we can learn about our form of government by reading our Constitution," and it doesn't take long, the Preamble, and you're going, "Man, we're messed up." And you start reading Articles and all, you don't even have to get to the Bill of Rights, you know? Everybody's talking about the Amendments, the First Amendment, the Second Amendment, you don't have to get that far. You just go and read and it says, "Here's what the Executive Branch can do. That's all?" Yeah, that's all. "Okay, but wait a minute, there's like a thousand other things they do and two-thirds of these they don't." And you never had a problem with it before. Why? Because you've been conformed to the spirit of the age and you didn't even know it and you think all you've gotta do is close your eyes and feel your way.

Not only education, the media. The media. The media. By the way, I have found one sure-fire way for people to learn not to trust the media and that is to be interviewed by the media and have them report on what you said. That's all you have to do to learn that you can't trust everything that you see in the media. The media. We're conformed to the spirit of the age because of what we see in the media over and over and over again, and I don't just mean in the news media but also in movies. Movies revise history for us. Movies. Listen, a movie-maker, a film-maker can introduce you in two hours to a person who is an adulterer and a thief and a murderer, and by the end of the film having you cheering when he gets away. And if all you do is sit there and mindlessly enjoy the entertainment, you don't even realize that it happened to you. I mean, think about movies like "Oceans 11." What is that? Some thieves are going to rob somebody and at the end of it you're gonna say, "Sweet, they go away!" They broke the eighth commandment but it was sweet how they did it. And, I mean, you know, they robbed a casino therefore, of course, it's okay. Do you see what I'm saying, folks? The spirit of the age. "Bridges of Madison County," we celebrate adultery.

Psychology. Psychotherapy. Most Christians believe that if you have a small problem, you can go to your pastor. If you have a real problem, you have to go to a licensed professional who is trained in a discipline that is antithetical to biblical Christianity.

Whereas the Bible says your greatest problem is on the inside of you and your solution is on the outside of you, but psychology says your greatest problems are on the outside of you and the solution is on the inside of you. The complete exact opposite and we think that when you've got real problems, you've gotta go to them. That's the spirit of the age. Most Christians, most Christians when they start evaluating their own problems, what do they start telling you? Where they were raised. How their parents treated them. What their socioeconomic status was. The spirit of the age.

Liberal worldly Christianity. That's another example of the spirit of the age. There are churches all around us who are absolutely and grossly unbiblical but they're common. They're common and so you have people who grow up in environments where the Gospel is absolutely perverted and they don't know any different and, hey, it's inside a church, right? Listen to this: when the church accommodates itself uncritically to this age, the Christian must resist that conformity as well not only out of obedience to Christ but for the purpose of reforming the church to its rightful calling. But we don't even know when the church has begun to capitulate to the spirit of the age if we ourselves don't know the difference between the spirit of the age and the word of God.

So where do we start? We start with knowing the difference. We start with identifying the spirit of the age and it's important that we identify the spirit of the age because we belong to Christ, we run to Christ, we're baptized into Christ, not the spirit of the age. We do not want to be an adulteress generation. We want to cling without wavering to the one who has purchased us for himself and so we learn to see the counterfeit so that we do not love and accept and embrace the counterfeit. That's where we start.

Then there is the affirmative command, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." I love that phrase because, again, modern American Christianity is extremely anti-intellectual. You know, United Negro College Fund, it has a great motto and their motto is "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." Modern American Christianity tweaks that a little bit, "The mind is a terrible thing." That's what most Christians believe. You are either intellectual or you're spiritual but you can't be both.

I have this picture in my mind I've talked to you about before, you know, two young men who walk up to each other, you know, "Hey man, how you doing?" "I'm doing great, how about yourself?" "Man, I'm doing better now but for a while there it was pretty messed up." Really? "Yeah." What happened? "I was getting some head knowledge." What? "Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's okay though. I went to church, they gave me a shot, I'm dumb and in love with Jesus. Everything's fine. I don't think about doctrine anymore. I don't think about theology anymore. Just close my eyes and love the Lord." The renewing of your mind. Listen, Christianity is the most intellectual religion the world has ever known. Christianity does not despise the mind, that's paganism.

Listen to this, we read this already earlier today but Ephesians 4:17-24, "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do," watch this, "in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart." How

many of you know when he's talking about heart there, he's not talking about the muscle in the center of your chest that pumps blood? Your heart doesn't know anything, you know? You don't want to miss heaven by 18 inches, the distance between the head and the heart. Your heart's a muscle that pumps blood. That's all it does. It doesn't know anything. It doesn't love anything. It doesn't yearn for anything. It doesn't seek after anything. It has no passions. It has nothing. It is a muscle that pumps blood and so when the Bible talks about your heart, it is speaking figuratively. But when it speaks about knowing something in your heart or loving something in your heart, it's speaking figuratively about what? An aspect of your mind which is the only knower, lover, feeler, yearner that you have. So ironically we run away from this whole idea of head knowledge because of what we read in the Scriptures about the heart, when in fact it's speaking figuratively about an aspect of our mind. Spirit of the age.

"They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you fell in love with Christ." That's not what the text says. Here's a beautiful turn of phrase, "But that is not the way you learned Christ!" Wow. "Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Do you see that? Same language. What's the first thing you do? You put off the old. You actively flee from and refuse to accept and embrace the old and then you put on the new. You are renewed in the spirit of your mind.

2 Timothy 2:15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The Scriptures, the Bible equips you for every good work so why do you need to close your Bible and turn off your mind if you're going to find the good work that God would have you to walk in? Answer: you don't. You don't. That's a lie from the pit of hell itself. What a coup. What a coup by the enemy. How do Christians find God's will? With an open Bible. How does Satan convince us that we need to find God's will? By closing our Bible and turning off our minds and feeling our way to peace. He's convinced us of the exact opposite of that which the Bible says is true.

2 Peter 1:3-4, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through our knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature," through what? His precious and great promises. Where do you find those? "So that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

So how do we do this, then? How do we achieve that one, this whole idea of affirmatively being transformed by the renewing of our minds? We know that negatively

we walk away from, refuse to embrace the spirit of the age, and that affirmatively we're transformed by the renewing of our minds but what is it that God has given us for the renewing of our minds? Well, he's given us these ordinary means. Listen to Richard Baxter, "If you will be converted and saved, attend upon the word of God which is the ordinary means. Read the Scriptures or hear it read and other holy writings that do apply. Constantly attend on public preaching of the word." Ordinary means have always been understood as public worship, the public reading of Scripture, the preaching of the word of God and the ordinances of God's church. Those are those ordinary means.

Folks, do you know why you desperately need a Gospel-centered, Gospel-preaching church? Because the renewal of your mind even by the tense of the verb here, is an ongoing, never-ending process. It's the Gospel. It's the Gospel. It's always the Gospel. By the way, let's go back to this other thing about our ethics and the way that we find our ethics. If they're not Gospel-centered and if we're not constantly hearing and being pointed back to the Gospel and the completed work of Christ and rooting everything that we do in the indicatives, if we're not constantly doing that, then what are we doing? Well, we're talking about five ways to have a happy life; 10 ways to reduce stress; six ways to raise healthy happy kids. Well, if I don't have a Gospel-centered understanding of ethics and I don't have a Gospel-centered understanding of the way that we pursue the will of God, and I'm influenced by the spirit of the age, I can sit under that kind of preaching and pursue works righteousness and legalism and think that I'm fine with God because I'm hearing it in church.

And it's all around us. It's all around us. That's why those ordinary means are important. That's why church membership, attendance in church, is so important. That's why. Biblical discipleship is important. We need to be taught specifically and intentionally how it is that we follow Christ. We need mature believers to help us examine our lives. Catechism is important not just for your children, for you. You need to be catechized. The overwhelming majority of us were not catechized. There are huge holes in your worldview, huge holes in your theology. You need to be catechized. You need to back-fill. Trust me, you do. I promise you, you do. You need to do this so that your mind can be renewed.

You need to read the Scriptures so that your mind can be renewed so that you learn to think biblically, so that you are constantly being washed and constantly being renewed by the word of God over and over and over and over again. Do you know why? Because the spirit of the age never stops, that's why. It gonna put out new movies for you every week, new video games for you every week, new news stories for your 15 minutes on a 24 hour cycle. He's gonna constantly tweak and change and require more and more education for you to be cast into this mold of the spirit of the age. Psychology and psychotherapy are going to continue to raise their heads. Here's what I want you to do, I want you to go to your Christian bookstore and I want you to go find the section for books on family and parenting and find how many of those people have theological credentials versus how many of them have psychological credentials. Overwhelmingly the books to which we turn in modern American Christianity when it comes to parenting, when it comes to marriage, Christian living, we are running to people who have been trained in this

antithetical worldview of psychology and not those who've been trained in Bible and theology. Overwhelmingly so. The spirit of the age does not rest.

So we constantly need to be conformed and transformed by the ongoing renewing of our minds. Then there's a byproduct. I love the way he does this. What's the byproduct? And notice that that's the way he puts it, that it's a byproduct. This walking in the will of God is a byproduct. So first we turn away from the spirit of the age. This is a picture of repentance, by the way. Repentance is turning away from and turning toward. Repentance is a change in attitude that leads to a change in behavior. So we turn away from the spirit of the age and we turn toward Christ and his finished work on our behalf. Our minds are renewed on an ongoing basis as we are constantly bathing ourselves in the truths of the Gospel, and then something happens. Look at what he says, "that," or in order that, "by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Now "by testing you may discern," that's all one Greek word. That by testing you may discern. The word there is used in other parts of the New Testament. In order to get a flavor for this Greek term and how rich with meaning it is, let's do a couple of places where it's used. In Luke 12:56 it's used twice, "You hypocrites! You know how to interpret," there's the word, "the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret," there it is again, "the present time?" And so by testing you may approve, interpret, that same word is translated here. In Romans 1:28 we see the word again, "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God," that word "see fit" is the same word in the Greek, "God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." In 1 Corinthians 11:28 we find that same word, "Let a person examine himself," we read this every week, "Let a person examine himself," this is the Lord's Supper, "Let a person examine himself then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." You are examining yourself.

So interpret, see fit, examine, test, approve, that by testing you may approve. In other words, we turn away from the spirit of the age, we turn and we are renewed in the spirit of our minds and as a result of that, through a process of testing we are able to approve what God's will is. What does this process of testing look like? This process of testing, weighing and examination looks like this. Does this look like the spirit of the age or does this look like the spirit of Christ? I'm testing, I'm weighing, I'm approving, I'm discerning as I walk through my life, as I make decisions, I'm weighing. I'm not sitting back passively but I am moving and as I move, I'm testing, I'm discerning, I'm examining, I'm seeing if things are fit.

"By testing you may approve what the will of God is." That phrase "the will of God" is very interesting. It's used a number of times in the Scriptures. Three times here in the New Testament we find it and it doesn't mean what we usually try to mean. 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." Everybody searching trying to find the will of God, Paul says there it is right there. "I'm trying to find the will of God." Go to 1 Thessalonians 4. "This is the will of God, your sanctification." You don't like that one? Okay, how about 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "give thanks in all

circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." There it is. I don't know what y'all searching for, man, it's right there. You don't like that one? 1 Peter 2:15, "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." There it is, folks.

There are three basic meanings of that phrase, "the will of God," that concept in the New Testament, three types of God's will. 1. His sovereign decretive will. Now this is the will which God brings to pass whatever he decrees. This is hidden to us until it happens. So when we talk about God's secret will, his decretive will, we're talking about that will by which God brings to pass whatever he decrees and it's his business, not yours. And usually when we say, "I'm trying to seek the will of God for my life," what we're trying to seek is that one which is none of our business. But we want to know it because we don't want to make a mistake, we don't want to make the wrong choice, we don't want to suffer, so we want to tap into the divine will so that we know God's secret plan so that we can make the next step and not suffer when suffering might be exactly what his will is for you in the next step. Second, perceptive will. Perceptive will is God's revealed law or commandments which we have the power but not the right to break. Perceptive will. What is the will of God? Well, it's his law, the 10 Commandments. Honor your father and your mother. That's God's will that you honor your father and mother. Don't murder. That's God's will that you not commit murder. Don't commit adultery. That's God's will that you not commit adultery. You see, that's his perceptive will, the law of God as he reveals it to us so that we know how he wills for us to live. Finally, it's his will of disposition. This describes God's attitude or disposition. It reveals what is pleasing to him. This is good, this pleases God. That's the way we see the will of God in the Scriptures and that's it.

So usually when people say, "I want to find the will of God," what we're referring to is that decretive will of God, the secret will of God, and we want to get in on it. Listen to these. I'm gonna read you three quotes because I want you to grasp this. The first one is from John Piper preaching on this very passage and the question is, "Which will is Paul referring to in Romans 12:2?" and I'm arguing, he's arguing that it's the second one, that it's the perceptive will or the will of command, not the decretive will. "The answer surely is that Paul is referring to God's will of command, or his perceptive will. God does not intend for us to know most of his sovereign will ahead of time. If you want to know the future details of God's will of decree, you don't want a renewed mind, you want a crystal ball. This is not called transformation and obedience, it is called divination or soothsaying."

R. C. Sproul, "Many Christians become preoccupied or even obsessed with finding the will of God for their lives. If the will we are seeking is his secret, hidden or decretive will, then our quest is a fool's errand. The secret counsel of God is his secret. He has not been pleased to make it known to us. Far from being a mark of spirituality, the quest for God's secret will is an unwarranted invasion of God's privacy. God's secret counsel is none of our business. This is partly why the Bible takes such a negative view of fortune-telling, necromancy and other forms of prohibited practices." Do you see a pattern there?

The seeking of God's will that is common to us falls into the category of fortune-telling, soothsaying, necromancy. It's paganism.

Finally, Bruce Waltke, "When we seek to find God's will, we are attempting to discover hidden knowledge by supernatural activity. If we are going to find his will on one specific choice, we will have to penetrate the divine mind to get his decision. Finding, in this sense, is really a form of divination." It's paganism. It's paganism.

What's the difference? Here's the difference, because we've all got decisions to make, right? Every last one of us has decisions to make. Let's take marriage. So there's a marriage decision to make. "Should I marry this person or should I not marry this person?" Let's go with the peering into the secret will of God pagan version. "I want to know the mind of God. I want God to reveal to me his secret decreative will because I'm afraid that I'm going to make a mistake." By the way, if you're afraid that you're going to make a mistake and overturn God's decreative will, then you do not believe in a sovereign God. There's your first problem, that somehow you can make a choice and God's gonna be in heaven going, "Man, where is he? He's supposed to be married to her right here. I can't find him. I gotta go rewrite some stuff, man." That is not the God whom we serve and he has not let you in on his secret will.

But let's go with the first one. So I'm trying to find his secret will and the exact right person, and so I close my mind, I shut everything off and I try to wait for that inner peace, or I try to wait for circumstances, I try to wait for a news story to come across television that uses the name of this person so that I know that God's trying to drop spiritual bread crumbs to let me know that this is the right person, okay? Or whatever, I open my Bible and I stick my finger in the Bible, okay? Did you hear about the smoker who did that? He opened the Bible and stuck his finger in there and there it was, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." He closed his Bible, he opens it again, "and the temple was filled with smoke." We laugh but what many of us do in seeking the will of God is not much different than that and so we go through this pagan ritual and we find inner peace. "I'm going to get married because I have a peace about it. This is the one, one, one, one." And a year later, things are hard. There's a new baby. There's infertility. There's financial difficulty, the midst of an economy gone awry. There's personality clashes. There's in-law drama. And this person who thought that they had found this secret will of God and the one, now sits there and you and I both know what they do, "Did I make the wrong choice? It just doesn't seem like... you know, if I actually got on, you know, into the secret will of God and found the right one, that a year later I'd be sitting here with all this going on."

Here's the other alternative, Romans 12:2. "Should I get married to this individual?" First here's what I need to recognize, the spirit of the age has influenced me greatly when it comes to marriage and finding the right mate and knowing the one and all this sort of, you know, you know, just is your mouth dry? Are your hands sweaty? Is your heart pounding? Do you have a problem sleeping and eating? You'll know. You'll know. Okay, spirit of the age, alright? Spirit of the age has influenced me. I must reject the spirit of the age. I must go to the word of God. When I go to the word of God, the word of God is

clear on all of this. It gives me some things that I am to look for in a mate. And so I look for those things and I learn to think biblically about this issue of marriage. Not spirit of the age, learn to think biblically and I pray, and when I pray, I pray biblically about this, and I have people around me who are also people who read the Scriptures, think biblically, and pray biblically, and who according to the Scriptures, ought to be influencing such a decision. And when I do these things, I come out of it recognizing, "Yes, according to God's perceptive will, I can move forward here and I'm not gonna be in sin."

And you move forward and you get married and a year later all those same circumstances exist, what's the difference? Well, here's the difference: I don't have to wonder if I married the wrong one because I believe in the sovereignty of God and he doesn't hold me accountability for his secret will. I know I married the right one because we got married. Amen. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. I know I married the right one because we got married and I entered into a covenant relationship with this one and we're here, and I weighed the Scriptures on this and we did what we did because we were led by the Scriptures to move in this direction. Not because we believed that if we divined things properly, everything would go well, but because we trust God and we trusted him then so we'll trust him now.

This job or that job? "Ohm." No. Open your Bible. What are the gifts, talents, abilities and desires that God has given you? How well do they fit here? How well do they fit there? Think biblically about it. Pray biblically about it. Surround yourself with some people who read the Scriptures, think biblically and pray biblically. Get wise counsel on it and then trust the sovereign Lord of the universe. Make a choice. Go with it. Enjoy.

This house, that house? Count the cost. Do you know why we don't like this way? Because it doesn't sound spiritual enough. Nobody wants the missionary to come and stand and say, "Do you know what? We had a desire to serve the Lord and so we just started looking around at places and options and opportunities that we had to serve the Lord, and as a result of that, we began to pray, read the Scriptures, we had some people around us who love us, knew us, prayed, read the Scriptures with us. They helped us think through this thing biblically. We counted the cost. We made a decision and now here we are serving in this place. Praise God." No, no, no, no, no. Here's what we want. "A mission speaker came to our church and this mission speaker challenged us and right then I knew it was the voice of God challenging me. Next day, hurricane in the Marshall Islands. Never heard of the Marshall Islands before. Then later on, brochure from a coworker, Marshall Islands. At that point, I'm going, 'Okay, Lord, I hear you.' Come home that night, my husband's all upset because some guy in his law firm names," you guessed it, "Marshall had left the firm. We didn't need any more evidence. We packed our bags right then. We went to the Marshall Islands." You see, that person we listen to, who by the way just gave a pagan testimony that is the opposite of Romans 12:2, and we go, "Look at God."

Is that not amazing? No discernment. No prayer. No Scripture. No engaging of the mind. Bread crumbs. Closed eyes. Inner peace. That, we say, is spiritual. No, that is the spirit of

the age and unfortunately it is right now the most common approach among the Christians whom we know when it comes to discerning that secret will of God that is none of our business and so as I said earlier, there are some of you who are very uncomfortable right now because I'm messing with your worldview. You're welcome because I promise you, that was my most significant prayer this week, "Lord, I know that there are people in our church who are absolutely bound up in this pagan mumbo-gumbo and think it's Christian. In fact, don't just think it's Christian, but they think it's actually more Christian than what you find in Romans 12:2. They think it's more spiritual."

How do I know that? I'm a Christian in this culture too, folks. I've been in those services. I've listened to those testimonies, stood up and been part of the standing ovation, you know, after you hear the pagan, tea leaf, bread crumb, ta-da here we go. I've seen the influence on myself. Isn't it interesting how your testimonies about things change over time? Because, you see, it'll start off something like this. I was at the airport and I'm sitting at the airport and, you know, there's this guy who sits across from me and, you know, kind of the regular airport nod goes on or whatever, but obviously this guy was, something was going on, he was struggling, I could tell he was struggling with something and, you know, I just, I said something to him. Next thing you know, we're having a conversation, we're talking about the Gospel. We end up on the same plane. Before we land, the guy comes to faith in Christ. God is good. Praise the Lord. That same testimony five years later starts sounding like this. I'm sitting down in the airport and I look at this guy and God says to me, "You need to witness to him. I'm gonna save him." And I say, "What, Lord? I don't know this guy." "You need to witness to him. I'm gonna save him." And so I walk up and I just start talking to him. Next thing you know, I'm sharing the Gospel with him. He comes to faith in Christ.

Do you see the subtle difference between those two testimonies? And here's what's wrong with it: young Christian sitting in the audience listens to the first testimony and says, "I need to share the Gospel," young Christian sitting in the audience listening to the second testimony, "I need to be more spiritual so that God tells me who I need to witness to." That's what's wrong with this. And there are a lot of you out there today who either have struggled with this or you struggle with it right now and you've got friends who use all this "God told me" language and this high and mighty form of spirituality where they walk around and don't have to make decisions or pray about anything because their life is just this series of God going, "That way. That way. That way. That way." And you sit there and go, "What's wrong with me? What do I have to do to get there?"

What's sad is not just the fact that that person's not telling the truth and that you're desiring something that even if it does exist is pagan and demonic and not Christian, but what's worse is you have been bought with a price, the precious blood of Christ, you have been taken from darkness to light, from death to life, you have been utterly transformed and are being conformed to the image of the Son of the living God and yet you're not satisfied. You may have even come to question whether or not you're really saved because your experience doesn't look like those people. It's bondage and it's pagan and it's the spirit of the age and it's to be rejected. God is in control. His secret will is his business.

Trust me, you and I have enough to worry about with his perceptive will, amen? I mean, forget trying to figure out, you know, where you need to be five years from now in order to be in God's will, and what decision you may need to make today so that you can be in that place that God wants you to be five years from now. Forget all that. By the way, sovereign God gonna get you there, remember that part? So forget all that. How about this, how about this: how do I apply the 5th commandment to the way that I treat my supervisor at work tomorrow? How about you take care of that one before you go delving into the secret will of God? How about you worry about how your thought life and the way you take in media and entertainment interacts with the commandment not to commit adultery? How about you spend a little while wrestling with that one before you go trying to figure out how you can position yourself to help God accomplish what he's going to accomplish five years from now? Because the fact of the matter is there have been times in your life already that you never would have chosen and that you would have absolutely run away from had you seen them on the horizon but they're precisely what God used to conform you to Christ.

You can't handle the secret will of God but God can so you don't have to worry about the secret will of God. You just refuse to be conformed to this world, to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, and then by testing you may approve what the will of God is, that which is good, that which is acceptable and that which is perfect. After all, he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. He who began a good work in you is able to see it through to its completion. That's what you trust in. That's what you hold to. We walk by faith and not by sight.