

Romans 12:2
“How Good and Pleasing and Perfect His Will Really Is”
Dave Dorst
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A pastor decided that it was time to go on a diet, but he had a real sweet tooth, especially for donuts. Every day he knew that he had to pass a donut store on the way to the church, so that first day he made a deal with God: “If there are no empty spaces in front of the donut store, then I’ll know that it’s your will to pass it up and not stop.” But sure enough, after seven times around the block, there was that empty space!

Sometimes God’s will is difficult to understand. Last week Pastor Crenshaw talked about how we “prove” the will of God- not in the sense that we have to test it to see if it’s right or wrong, but to discover and learn by prayer, Scripture, council and experience what His will is.

We’ve come to the end of our 10 week study of Romans 12:1-2, the pivotal verses in this great book that separate (if you’ll excuse my over-simplification) the theological and the practical sections. The very last phrase of verse two is translated a couple different ways: The New Living says, “and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect His will really is.” The New American Standard says, “...the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

So it’s a sermon about three adjectives. Before we see how they’re applied to God’s will, I wanted to look at how they’re used in God’s word.

Good-

2 most obvious uses:

-as an adjective used to indicate the positive (good health, good behavior).

-A noun- the opposite of evil.

-A noun that shows that God is concerned with our state of being.

Deuteronomy 10:13- “...observe the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?”

Romans 8:28- “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”

-A description of God- not evil; beneficial and positive for life-> hints at perfection.

Psalm 25:8- “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in His ways.”

Psalm 34:8- “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him.”

Mark 10:18- “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good-except God alone.”

Pleasing-

-*Worship pleases God*

Psalm 69:30-31- “I will praise God’s name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs.”

-*Faith pleases God*

Hebrews 11:6- “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”

-Fear and Hope please God

Psalm 147:10-11- “His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor His delight in the legs of a man; the Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love.”

-The way we live our lives pleases God

Proverbs 16:7- “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies live at peace with him.”

Colossians 1:10- “And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power...”

-Christ pleased God greatly, so being Christ-like pleases God

John 8:20- “The One who sent me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what pleases Him.”

Matthew 3:17- “This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well-pleased.”

Perfect-

Three meanings of perfect: 1) accurate or correct (very seldom used in the Bible to mean 100% right without any flaws or blemish), 2) well-fitted to a specific end/ fulfilling its function (My new car is perfect for me), and 3) complete/something that has attained its full destiny; a mature adult- almost all the times that the majority of translations use “mature,” the King James translates it “perfect.”

Noah, Asa and Job are all described as perfect men or men whose ways were perfect. It obviously does not mean that they didn’t sin (“All have sinned...”). It indicates a high level of morality; maturity.

Matthew 19:21- “Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’”

Colossians 1:28- “We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.”

Our hearts and emotions can be perfect/mature:

1 Chronicles 28:9- “And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve Him with a perfect heart (in NIV it’s whole-hearted devotion...)”

1 John 4:18- “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...”

Only when it is applied to God does it truly mean “flawless”:

Psalm 18:30a- “As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless.”

Great segue into our first point about God’s will.

GOD’S WILL AS COMMANDS OF SCRIPTURE ARE GOOD, PLEASING & PERFECT.

-Like a will telling what someone wants

-Reformed and most Evangelicals agree about the doctrine of inerrancy- that there are no errors in the original manuscripts of the Scriptures. So we have the perfect part down, but what about the good and pleasing?

We like the easy commands of Scripture:

-“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” –Matthew 11:30

-“Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.” –Matthew 18:5

But do we agree with the hard ones? Are they as pleasing to us?

-Sermon on the Mount- “Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment”

- “If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”
- “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”
- “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

God does not give us commands to take away our fun and make life unbearable. He gives us them for our long-term good. C.S. Lewis gave a picture of a child refusing a vacation on a tropical island because he just wanted to play in his sandbox- that is the way we are when we settle for the easy, unfulfilling things of the flesh when God is offering the wonderful things found when we are obedient.

-1 Thess. 4:3- “This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.”

GOD’S WILL AS SOVEREIGN ACTS THAT GOD PERFORMS ARE GOOD, PLEASING & PERFECT.

Why? Because He does them for His own purpose and pleasure.

-Daniel 4:35- “He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him, “What have you done?”

-From creation (God saw that it was good) to last judgment (the New Heavens and the New earth) God has actions that He has taken and actions that He will take. Every move of God is good, pleasing and perfect.

-Election and reprobation

I haven’t met anyone, whether they agree now or not, who didn’t first say about election- “That’s not fair, that’s not good.” And if God runs the universe to please man and glorify man, it’s not fair or good. But if God runs the universe to glorify Himself, and man is there to bring honor to God, then God is free to do as He wants. The question is: How God-centered is your theology?

-If you had asked the disciples, and especially Mary, whether Jesus’ being tortured and killed was a good thing, at the time I don’t think they would have said yes. But we know that God used it for the very best, and it’s ultimately why we call the celebration of His death “Good Friday.”

Isaiah 53:10- “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer...”

Matthew 26:39- “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.”

GOD’S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE IS GOOD, PLEASING & PERFECT

People often quote Jeremiah 29:11- “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” This is a word from the Lord to His people who had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon. God didn’t just allow them to be kidnapped from their homeland, He caused it! Nobody ever quotes the latter part of Jeremiah’s message- one chapter later (Jeremiah 30:11, 14, 17), God says, “I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished. I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel, because your guilt is so great and your sins so many... But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds.”

That doesn’t sound quite as nice- we don’t use that as the theme of our ministry conferences or print it on refrigerator magnets or bookmarks. But God just as often threatens discipline and rebuke for Israel as He does prosperity and hope. But we only pick out the nice stuff, because we hope that God only has pain-free things in store for us.

Back to Romans 8:28- do we really believe all things?

-It’s easy to accept the good things- I can thank God and say that my marriage is good, pleasing and perfect. My kids are good, pleasing and perfect. What about the car accident that almost took my mom’s life and left

her with long-term memory problems? What about the train wreck of a first job that I had teaching English that I hated and felt like an absolute failure right out of college?

What is there in your life that you can't see as good, pleasing and perfect?

Just Friday I heard two stories from people in our congregation- about a young boy burned over 80% of his body because he was standing near a fire when his brother kicked a can of lighter fluid into it; and a man who was moving heavy printing equipment, suffered a brain aneurism and lost his sight for good.

One of my good friends from High School got his license when he turned 16. He was driving on the 610 freeway in Houston when a tire from an 18-wheeler came off and flew across the median and landed on his roof, smashing it in and causing him to crash his car. He was paralyzed from the neck down at the age of 17.

-Joni Erickson Tada, who is almost totally paralyzed from a swimming accident, lifts her arms as high as she can in her braces and shouts, "This is the prison where God set me free." What she means is that the pain and limitation and frustration brought on by her disability threw her back on God in such a way that she discovered what true freedom in life is all about--and it is not about arms and legs and skiing and jogging. It's about forgiveness and hope and love and meaning and eternal life. It's about knowing that God is for you and not against you even in suffering.

1 Peter 4:19 says, "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." A painful trial might make you a more godly person, but that's not always our definition of good. We'd rather that good mean pain-free.

God places things in our lives that don't seem good, pleasing or perfect, but are used for God's purposes. Therefore, they are good, pleasing and perfect!