

Obeying His Will

Main Point:

Believers obey the will of Jesus when they love Him above all other earthly attachments.

Good morning! For the next few weeks, we will take a break from our regular expositional preaching of the Bible to focus on the progress the elder board has made in summarizing and fleshing out the many listening discussions we've had with all of you over the last several months. If you weren't here last week, I would encourage you to go to the website and listen to the message, as our vision and mission and core values were introduced by a few of the elders.

As a reminder, here is the vision/mission.

Vision

That Christ would be seen by all

Mission

To bring pleasure and glory to Christ Jesus by expressing his life, obeying his will, and advancing his kingdom.

Last week, we focused on the first part of our mission statement: expressing His life. We discovered that foundational to everything is our union with Christ; that living the Christian life – and pursuing our vision that all may see Christ - is not based on own self-effort, but is an expression of the life of Christ within us. The key principle we explored about following Christ can be summarized as, “Not I, but Christ through Me”. Building from last week, we will now move to the second aspect of our mission statement and that is obeying His will. The question to raise this morning is this: what is the will of Jesus for our lives? And how does the will of Jesus relate back to our saving union with Him? Lets go to the Lord in prayer...

As Christians, we believe that the God we worship is actively involved in the details of our lives. Just as God guided and directed the steps of the people we read about in the Bible, we believe that He will also guide and direct ours. And so when we talk about the will of God and use that terminology, most of the time we are referring to how God guides and directs our steps in life. But the will of God is not limited only to guidance and direction in terms of where we go and what we do, but the will of God also gives us specific commands that are to be obeyed. In other words, we cant expect God to answer our prayers, and lead and guide us if we aren't interested also in doing what He says and living in accordance with His commands. In fact, when it comes to the will of God, I would surmise that God is probably more concerned about WHO we are in terms of our ongoing obedience to His commands than He is about us following some kind of specific blue-print for our live's direction.

So this morning, I want us to explore together God's will for our lives – no matter who you are, where you are, etc. To discover God's will, I want to take us to the words of Jesus Himself, let's hear directly from Him what He wants from us as we seek to orient our lives around Him.

Context of Jesus's Last Discourse in John 13-17

Beginning in chapter 13, Jesus takes His disciples to a small room where they can retire by themselves and He can have His final moments with them before He goes to the cross. After He washes their feet, Jesus gives them final instructions and parting words. I want to begin in chapter 15, and for us to hear from the mouth of Jesus Himself, what His will for our lives is. John 15:1-8

Jesus is the true Israel-Vine

Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus defines Himself with a series of "I AM" statements. Here is the final one: I am the TRUE VINE. What does it mean that Jesus is the "true vine"? Remember, in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is referred to as God's vine. Israel the "Vine" of God, called to bear fruit for God – to glorify God – with obedience:

Isa. 5:1-7, Jer. 2:21, Ezek. 15:1-8; 17:1-21; 19:10-14, Hos. 10:1-2, Ps. 80. Interestingly enough, in almost all of these texts, the prophet complains that Israel has not lived up to their calling and is not bearing fruit for God. As a result, Israel becomes a fruitless branch and is cut-off.

However, in verse 1 Jesus defines Himself as the true vine. If you recall from two weeks ago, I said that God's plan for His people is centered on dwelling among His people in a specific place: in the bible that place moves from Eden, to Tabernacle, to the Temple in Jerusalem. Well, John tells us that Jesus replaces the Temple as the new place where God's presence dwells. So to be near God you must be near Jesus. He is the true vine – true Israel – the true Temple – the place where God and humanity meet in a single person.

True Believers are fruit-bearing branches

Those who are joined to Him by faith in the power of the Spirit, these are the true branches (true believers). So Israel is now redefined not in terms of ethnicity or circumcision or law-keeping, but in relationship to Jesus. Notice what Jesus says: "You are already clean." Same thing in chapter 13 He told to Peter when Peter wouldn't allow Jesus to wash His feet. In terms of our position, since we are joined to Him we have a cleansing. This foreshadows what baptism is to symbolize, spiritual-cleansing. "Abide in me as I [abide] in you." Mutual indwelling between the vine and the branch. The life-force of the vine infuses the branches. So Christ does with us. It also looks back to what was promised under the prophet Ezekiel, when God would enact a new covenant with the people: Ezek. 36:25-27. After making these amazing statements about what is true about us and how to experience it, Jesus concludes by giving us specific commandments – commands which if we obey, we experience this amazing reality: John 15:9-11

What is the will of Jesus?

- 1) Abide in His love
- 2) Bear spiritual fruit to the glory of the Father
- 3) Keep His commandments
- 4) Be filled with His joy

Now, notice something. Everything Jesus wants us to have belongs to or is associated with Himself. We abide in *His* love; We bear fruit to *His* Father's glory, prove to be *His* disciples. We keep *His* commands just as He kept the Father's commands. We have joy from Him as He has joy with the Father.

His love | His fruit | His commandments | His joy

In other words, what Jesus wants us to have is: *Himself*. This is the will of Jesus – to give Himself, to share Himself, with His people. So how do we obey Him, and do His will so as to receive from Him all of these benefits of being one of His branches? Well, in the previous chapter, He tells us. Listen carefully to the pattern: John 14:15, John 14:21, John 23-24. What is our basic calling, our basic duty, as Christians? To love Jesus, and therefore to love others. Now don't forget the order: we become branches first; we get Jesus first; we are united to Jesus first; saved, washed, cleansed, indwelt with the Spirit, and because of that blessed union. Then, with transformed hearts, we learn to obey His will and love Him and thereby love others the way He does.

Main Point:

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It's so very simple, yet so easy to forget, and lose sight of. Which is why we put this in our vision statement (that all would see Christ!) and our mission: to bring pleasure and glory to Jesus by expressing His life (union) and obey His will (love Him, love others) and advance His kingdom (which we'll get to next week). But for now, I want us to dwell on these rich, simple truths for a few more minutes by making some application for us.

Application:

- 1) Who are the fruitless branches in danger of being cut-off?
- 2) Who are the branches being pruned for more fruitfulness?

First, who are the fruitless branches in danger of being cut-off? For some of you, you may read this passage and feel a bit of panic in thinking: what if I'm a fruitless branch? I look at my life and it looks kinda barren, lots of struggles, lots of valleys, and not much "fruit" to show for. As I have tried to show, the fruitless branch that gets cut-off is not the struggling one, that sincerely loves Jesus and wants to please Him; the branch that gets cut off is the one that does not abide in and remain attached to Him. And therefore it does not produce fruit for Him. And what is the condition for abiding? Its love for Jesus. The fruitless branch is one that maybe likes the benefits of Jesus; likes the moral teachings of Jesus; or aspects of Jesus. But do they love Jesus and are they obeying Jesus? No. We see this throughout the NT – there are those who claim to be disciples but aren't really disciples because they aren't really in it for Jesus. And eventually, they do fall away. Whether persecution, hardship, boredom, when the benefits run out – they eventually leave. It happens. It's not Jesus rejecting them, it's them rejecting Him. These are the fruitless branches.

Fruitless Branches: False Disciples interested in the benefits of Jesus but not in the person of Jesus

Second, who are the branches that are being pruned? What is the point of the pruning? To be more fruitful.

Pruned Branches: Genuine believers who are being prepared for greater fruitfulness and deeper friendship with Jesus