

Willing God's Will as a Way of Knowing Christ's Word

by John Piper

The sermon teaches that aligning our will with God's will is essential for truly knowing and understanding Christ's teachings.

Duration: 42:54

Scripture: John 7:16-24, John 7:37-38, John 8:12, John 8:31-32, John 14:6

Topics: "Heart Transformation", "Righteous Judgment"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of not judging by appearances but with righteous judgment, focusing on aligning our will with God's will to truly know Jesus. It highlights the need for a heart transformation to prioritize God's glory over self-exaltation, enabling a deeper understanding of Christ's teachings and truth.

Transcript

Let's pray. What a weighty word, Lord. Don't judge by appearances.

Judge with a righteous judgment. The brothers had judged by appearances. The crowds had judged by appearances.

So God grant that we here would not judge by appearances. We wouldn't think on the surface of things. That we'd see through deeds and see through words.

To the heart of things, to the reality of things. We don't want to be a shell-gazing people. We wanna get to the heart of the matter.

So work now in this room, I pray. And grant me to see truth and to speak truth. Forbid that I would want to seek my own glory and not the glory of him who sent me.

And so prove to be a false prophet in the end. Oh God, grant that your people would so love your glory that they would be a God-exalting people rather than a self-exalting people. And so have within them the moral grounds for knowing Jesus.

I ask this now in his great name, amen. This is the second time now we're going through this text. The title of the message will tip you off to where the focus will be in this message.

The title is Willing God's Will as a Way of Knowing Christ's Word, which you can see comes from verse 17. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God. So that's where we're going, verses 17 and 18 in particular.

And I can remember back to my college days when this truth and this text was first brought to my attention. I remember the fall of 67 and what effect it had on me. I'll say more about that later.

What a great astonishment it was that willing is the basis of knowing. Really, I thought. I thought you had to know Christ in order to form a volition about his truthfulness.

What is this, Jesus? How can he say this? That before you can know Christ and whether he's true, your will must come into alignment with God's will. These are very profound things. Shook me up big time in 1967.

There are things for you to learn here, I don't doubt, about your own soul, how it works in relation to your head. How knowing and willing are all related to each other. So that's where we're going, but let's start at verse three.

So his brother said to him, leave here and go to Judea and that your disciples may see the works that you're doing for no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world. And then this astonishing statement, because not even his brothers believed in him.

So they believed in him as a miracle worker, they were just blown away. Our brother can work miracles, we've seen him. So we want to get him to do it in a more public way.

Go up to Jerusalem, that's where everybody is, and if you want to be known, for goodness sakes, go to Jerusalem and do your works publicly. And they said this because they didn't believe in him. That was last week's message, trying to figure that out.

And what we saw was that they didn't see through, they were judging by appearances. Verse 24 really rise, flies like a banner over this passage. They didn't see through to who he was, what his heart was.

Sure, he was gonna go up to Jerusalem, but he wasn't gonna go up to try to attract a lot of attention to himself and get a lot of praise. He was going to die, he was gonna be spit upon, have his beard pulled and be beaten, ripped to shreds. That's why he's going up, you want to go? They didn't want to go.

They were all about seeking their own praise, and they've got a brother now who can help them in that process, and if that's what makes your heart tick, you can't know him. And they didn't, they didn't believe, and they didn't know him. So he says to him in verse six, "My time has not yet come, your time is always here.

"The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, "because I testify about it that its works are evil. "So my time for glory, oh, there's glory coming, "but my time for glory isn't here yet, "and it's certainly not here "in the way you think it's coming. "So you go up, the world's not gonna hate you.

"Why isn't the world gonna hate you? "You think like the world. "Your life, your disposition is no indictment "to the world at all, I'm an indictment to the world.' They look at me and they get mad, because

I live for my father's glory, and they live for theirs, and therefore I call them into question. Everything I say and do is a problem for the world, not for you.

The world looks at you, and they see a reflection of themselves, a religious version, but they're not gonna get upset about your life as long as you want to be made somebody by my miracle working. So he went up, in private first, and then he went more public, and he began to teach, and what he said was amazing to the Jewish people. So verse 15.

The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning "when he has never studied?" So the brothers were stargazing at his miracle working power, and the people were stargazing at his," what? He sounds learned, but he hasn't studied. That he's not a rabbi like our rabbis, but goodness, listen to him. That's all surface.

The miracle admiration was surface. The learning admiration was surface. Judge with right judgment, not with appearances.

See through, hear through, move through. Their amazement was not a godly amazement. It wasn't a spiritual amazement.

And something about his teaching wowed them. Learned, scholarly, literary, articulate, profound, whatever it was, they say, "How does this man have learning "when he's never studied?" He was impressive. He was impressive to them, and they were not touched at all spiritually, not at all.

So Jesus did the same thing with them that he did with his brothers. He deflected their admiration to God," verse 16. So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me." So if you're gonna admire something, direct it to God.

Of course, he could have said, couldn't he, "You wonder why you're wowed at my teaching? "I'm God, what do you expect?" He could have said that, and we wrestled with this a little bit last week, that the deflection of praise isn't what he always did. He came to be worshiped. But he is a man as well as divine, and therefore he's modeling for us how to live in relation to the Father.

And in this case, at this point in his ministry, he's modeling for us the perfect manhood that he has, and it isn't out to get human praise. It's out to serve, it's out to suffer. So he deflects their amazement away from himself to God, verse 16, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me." So he says, and now the question arises, how can we know that? You say so.

Well, how can we know that? How can you know that? I'm sure there are people in this room who don't know that, that when Jesus speaks, God is speaking. Don't believe that. You're here, somebody brought you, or you're exploring, or there've always been lurking doubts in your heart.

So it's your question. It's really all of our question. And isn't it good that Jesus raises it? Jesus raises this question.

And he raises it here because it's very clear to him, these crowds do not know that his teaching comes from God. They don't believe that. And you can see it in verse 15.

How is it that this man has learning when he's never studied? Goodness gracious. Who cares if he has learning? I mean, why are you fixated on learning? That I think Jesus would just shake in his head and

say, I'm here to give life and to speak ultimate truth. And you're puzzling about my articulate sentences or whatever.

How is it that this man has learning? In other words, they're shell gazers. It's the shell. This is a shell.

We all have shells. And a lot of people just live at the level of shell gazing. Oh, that woman is beautiful and she has such a voice.

That preacher is learned. His sentences hang together. Let's go there.

Check your relationship to your favorite heroes, your God, your friends, yourself, and whether you're a shell gazer or whether you don't care too much about the shell. I just wanna go through. I want life.

I want truth. I want reality. I'm going through.

I don't care about the shell of this singer or this preacher or this actor. America is just media driven by these stars, right? And we're just shell gazers. There's only one question that matters with anybody.

Are they true? Do they speak truth? Are they true? What they say, what they are in relation to God and the world, does it all hang together in perfect integrity and truth? That's all I care about. What do I give a rip about miracle working and articulate sermons? I want truth. That's the issue.

So many preachers, so many singers, so many actors. Whoa, this man's got learning. Whoa, she's got looks and a voice.

Whoa, he's hip, cool, shell, shell, shell. Question is, are they true? So Jesus poses the big question for your heroes, for your friends, for your God, for yourself. How can you know? How can you know? Here's his answer, verse 17.

If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God. He'll know. Or whether I'm speaking on my own authority.

So 1967, the fall, Wheaton College, I was just shocked when I heard this. I mean, I'd read the gospel of John goodness in those 100 times, maybe, by that point in my life. How could I miss this? Right willing is the foundation of right knowing.

Right willing? This seemed to make life really complicated. It made life more mysterious than I never thought it was. It made me less in control.

I've got a brain, I know how to use it, but you tell me my brain is gonna perceive truth when my willing gets right? That complicates life for me. Puts me out of control. It makes life less rationalistic.

Can't manage things so easily if this is true. I feel off kilter. I feel out of balance, out of control.

It's miracles that gotta happen down inside of me if I'm gonna even think right about Jesus. If we stopped at verse 17, which is where we are right now, didn't go on into verse 18, we'd have a general truth. It'd be a true truth, but it would be without specifics.

And the general truth would be something like this. You will discern that Jesus is a reliable spokesman from God when your will deeply and profoundly comes into sync with God's will. That's the true general truth of verse 17.

You will know Jesus, you will recognize him for who he is as a true spokesman for God when your will is brought into sync with God's will. When your willing is in sync with God's, your knowing will be in sync with truth. That's the general truth.

But we're not gonna stop at verse 17 because Jesus has much more help to give us here. I didn't see this as clearly until I was a pastor at this church in the mid 80s. I've preached on this text before, and I intentionally did not read that sermon to get ready for this one.

Scratch from scratch. But now you got two sermons online from this text. You can see, did he change his mind or something? I did wanna say that later.

After I wrote it, I did something. So verse 18, so, so life affecting for me in relation to verse 17. So let's work with this for a minute.

The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory. But the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood or no unrighteousness, would be more literal. Now remember, when the crowds were impressed with Jesus' learning, he said to them in verse 16, my teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.

So he deflected their amazement at his learning to God from self-exaltation. He deflects it from self-exaltation to God-exaltation. That's what's going on.

They're coming at him, you're amazing. And he says, well, whatever that is, my words are not mine, they're God's. So if you want to be amazed, be amazed at God.

Now he explains in verse 18 that this, what he did in verse 16, this is how you can know he's true. The one who seeks his own glory, the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him, that's what he was doing, is true. And in him, there is no falsehood.

So let's put 17 and 18 together now and try to figure out their relationship. So verse 17 says, if your will is to do God's will, you can know whether Jesus is a true spokesman for God. Verse 18 says, the way you can know if he's true is whether he's seeking the glory of God above all things.

Okay, now that sets the stage for a lot of thinking about the relationship between those two verses. My will's got to get changed so I can know him. And the way I know him is that he loves the glory of God more than anything.

And he's not into self-exaltation, he's into God-exaltation. That's true, that's the mark of truth. So what's the relationship now between these two verses? Verse 17, willing God's will enables us to know him for who he really is.

And verse 18, you can know that he's really true because he's totally committed to exalting his father. And the way I put the two together is this, verse 18 describes specifically the deepest change that has to happen in my will in order to see Jesus as who he is. The mark of his truth is a passion for God-exaltation, not self-exaltation, got that? That's verse 18, the mark of his truthfulness is a passion for God-exaltation, not self-exaltation.

Now, for me to see that and be drawn to it and recognize it as the mark of truth, I've got to be changed. That's not the way I am by nature, nor you. By nature, we love our own glory.

We love the praise of man, that's the way we're wired. To be made much of feels better to us than anything in the world when we come into this world. And something really profound in the alteration of our wills has to happen for us to begin to enjoy making much of God more than we enjoy being made much of by people.

Something really profound has to happen, and that's the change being called for in verse 17. Our wills have to come into sync with God's will, and God's will for his son and for us is that we live for his glory, that we deflect to him, that we love to see him made much of, and we're not addicted any longer to this craving for human praise that governed us. That's the connection between 17 and 18 that I see.

By nature, I am like his brothers, all right? When I see miracles, I see, whoa, there's a possibility that I could be cool or effective, or miracles could be useful for a reputation, right? I mean, really, we could fill this church 10 times over if I could do that more. Or I'm like the crowds by nature, Sabbath-keeping, the use of the law to provide their ego strength, to provide their sense of meaning and well-being. We are the ones who keep the law.

You heal the man on the Sabbath. You're not that, and that was very threatening to them because somehow it began to undermine the use of the law as their own way to get human praise. Make long prayers in the synagogues, give your alms by blowing a trumpet ahead of you, and have a nice downcast face when you're fasting.

We know that, we know what all that's about. That's the use of the law, not for what it was designed for, but for your ego, that's what that is, and I'm like that until verse 17 happens to me. And when I'm like that, I can't know him.

You go up, you go up to Jerusalem, my brothers, who don't have a clue who I am, and just admire the shell, and you crowds, you wanna kill me, you don't know me. My only hope for knowing is to have my will change, to agree with God's will. In verse 18 describes in detail what the deepest change is that John Piper and you need.

Namely, I need love for the glory of God more than I love my own. I need to will God exaltation more than I will self-exaltation. So that's the change in my will that has to happen according to verse 17 before I can know Jesus.

Because if it doesn't happen, if I don't get changed in that way, I will always hate Jesus, verse seven, the world hates me. Or I'll admire him for all the wrong reasons. For I won't know him.

And I won't know him because I can't stand to know him. Knowing him is too much of an indictment with my love affair with my own glory. And therefore I cannot know him.

I have to push him away. I have to reinvent him. I have to make him after my own image.

I cannot have a Jesus who makes me feel this uncomfortable with my own love affair with human praise. And therefore I cannot admit this knowledge into my mind. Why my will is so opposed to what he stands for.

Then in verse 19 to 24, Jesus confirms to the crowds that they do not will what God wills. What in their experience was the central expression of the will of God? Answer, the law. And that's the right answer.

And what does he say? Verse 19. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Which is just a way of saying, verse 17 is so far from you, you can't even see it.

Your will is so anti-God in your use of the law, you can't know his son. His son shows up, you don't have a clue that this is the son of God because you don't know God. You're a shell gazer when you come to the Torah.

Ah, he's pleading with them to judge not by appearances but with right judgment. So he says, why do you seek to kill me? Verse 19, which shows that they're not in sync with the law. And secondly, he says, why do you get angry that I healed a man back in chapter five? Remember that? That's what's going on here.

Verse 23, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath, I made a man's whole body well? You're willing to circumcise a man on the Sabbath to keep from breaking the law. I healed a man's whole body on the Sabbath and you accuse me of being a lawbreaker and wanna kill me. How can that be? He says.

And of course it can be because the way they handle the law is precisely for their own self-exaltation. Jesus is saying, what I stand for is at the heart of the law. What is the heart of the law? Most of you would get that answer right, I think.

What's the first and great commandment? Love the Lord your God. Love the Lord your God. Love his glory.

Love his exaltation. Love his being made much of with all your mind and with all your heart and with all your soul and love your paralyzed neighbor as yourself. You don't know God.

Get circumcision right and get angry that I healed a man. You don't know God. You're a shellgazer.

You're judging by appearances. You're taking the form of God's will in this holy righteous law and you're making it an instrument of your pride in order to boost your ego in showing off for people in order to get their praise. That's what you're doing with the law.

So you can't know me. Your will is so out of sync with the law, so out of sync with God's will, all you do is use the law in order to boost your human esteem. My whole life, Jesus says, contradicts that way of willing.

That's why you can't know me. Can't know me until your will is to do God's will, to do what the law deeply demands, namely to treasure, to love the glory of God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength, strength and your paralyzed neighbor as yourself. So there it is.

Now let me draw out four applications. Four applications. Number one, realize Bethlehem that the deepest obstruction to knowing the truth of Jesus is a heart obstruction, not a head obstruction.

Let this land on you with great force. The deepest obstruction to our knowing Jesus for who he really is is not a head obstruction. It's not because you're not smart enough.

It's a heart obstruction. It is a problem with our will, not first a problem with our reason. Our natural love for human glory makes it impossible to know and follow a person whose whole life is bent on emptying himself to glorify his father and save sinners.

It is impossible to know him for who he really is when his whole coming, living, dying contradicts your deepest love, namely the love of human praise. To know him for who he is, we must be changed. Not just in our ideas, but in our wills, which is why this gospel puts such an emphasis on the new birth.

You must be born again. This is what happens in the new birth. The new birth is not a decision.

The new birth is beneath decisions. The new birth is the work of God to take out a heart that loves human praise more than it loves God's praise and put in a heart that loves the praise of God more than the praise of man. That is the new birth.

Number two, therefore, pray that God would cause his name to be hallowed, glorified, treasured in your heart above all things, so that your eyes would be opened to who he really is. I pray this every day of my life. If you feel deficient, and who doesn't? I certainly do.

If you feel deficient in God exaltation, ask him to change you. Are you a fatalist? Are you a, have you just given up? Oh, that's not like that. I mean, that's not wired that way.

Well, that's why we pray to a God of the impossible. Nobody is wired by nature to love the glory of God more than they love the praise of man. Nobody.

This is a miracle. And so don't give up. Keep praying.

Pray every day. Isn't that why the Lord's Prayer is in the Bible as a daily prayer? Give us this day our daily bread is in the middle of the prayer, which means all the other pieces have to be said every day as well. I should ask God every day, oh, God, cause me to hallow your name today, because to the degree that I don't hallow your name, I can't even see.

I get the world all wrong. I'm a shellgazer. I don't love people.

I don't love you, and I don't see anything the way I ought to see it, because deep down, I'm just loving me and loving my praise, and I'm ticked off that people aren't going my way, and you can't see the world. You can't know, know Jesus until that deep, deep will problem gets changed, and I'm simply saying as application number two, ask him to change it, and don't let go of him until he does. Number three, strive to increase your spiritual taste for the glory of God as your favorite pleasure.

I just know how many of you are sitting there right now saying, I'm just so far from what you're talking about. When I say strive to increase your taste for the glory of God as your favorite pleasure, now at this point, I did go back and read my sermon from 1986, and the next minute is from that sermon. So if you see the overlap, don't think, oh, he read it first, and this is what I said, and it was so helpful to me then, and still helpful to me now.

I hope it might be helpful to you. I'm thinking of this third application now. What do you mean strive? Strive to increase your spiritual taste for the glory of God as your favorite pleasure.

If you wanted to increase your love for the glory of classical music, just increase it. It might be small, it might be big, it might be non-existent. If you wanted to increase it, what would you do? You would study it some, and spend time talking with people who love it, and might be able to explain some of it to you, and you would listen, and listen, and listen.

Or if you wanted to develop a love for the glory of visual art, you don't get it. You go to the Minneapolis Art Museum and just say, why is this considered great? If you wanted to increase your love for the glory of visual art, you would study it, and you'd go to museums, and you'd spend time with those who love it, and talk to them, and then you'd look, and look, and look. And if you wanted to develop a love for the glory of the heavens, the stars, you would get a telescope, and you would read some astronomy, and you'd spend time with people who talk about it, and are amazed by it, and can tell you facts about it, and then you'd gaze, and gaze, and gaze.

And if you want to increase your love for the glory of God, if you want to, this is the will thing. I wonder if you do. I wonder if you do.

God, please, cause you to want this. If you want to increase your love for the glory of God, above all other glories, then you'll study God. Spend time with lovers of God.

Knowers of God. You'll listen to God, and you will look at God, and you will gaze, and gaze, and gaze at the revelation of God, especially in his word, and most pointedly, in the face of Jesus Christ, his Son. We have beheld his glory.

Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. That's what the Gospel of John is written for. So, I'm pleading with you to increase, strive to increase your spiritual taste for the glory of God as your favorite pleasure.

And if you understand this sermon, you'll know that the reason for that is, then you'll know. You'll know so many things. And number four, finally, finally, know that Jesus is true.

Jesus does not merely speak from himself. I don't speak for myself. The words that I speak are from the Father.

He speaks for God. And when he says, before Abraham was, I am, he's gonna say that in chapter eight. He's claiming to be the eternal word which was with God and was God.

And when he says it, he's true. You'll know it. You'll know it.

Or when he says, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. That's true.

And you'll know it. And you'll come. You'll come.

I pray that you do. Let's pray. So Father, just like I was thrown off balance in I think a really good way in 1967, I pray that I have thrown off balance some people tonight.

I pray that balance will only be recovered in the new birth or in the reawakening to the infinite value of the glory of your great name. And that deep will work would be done in our hearts so that our reasoning would be right. Our heads would be clear and we would know you.

And your father. Have thine own way, Lord. Have thine own way.

You are the potter. We are the clay. We're yielded, listening.

Shape and have your will now in our lives. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

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