

“The Lord’s Will”

Ephesians 5:17

March 9, 2025

Ephesians 5:17 (PowerPoint presentation)

Preface

On a cold night on New Year’s Eve of my sophomore year of high school, when I was not yet a Christian, I went to Yushima Tenjin Shrine in Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo, with my friends.

I had a purpose.

Yushima Tenjin is a famous shrine that enshrines what is considered to be the god of examinations, and that year Yushima Tenjin had an apple for sale called “the apple that won’t fall off”.

The apples were from an apple orchard in Aomori Prefecture that had been devastated by a typhoon and had remained attached to the trees through a terrible storm. The apples were sold for as much as 1,500 or 2,000 yen each as a good-luck charm that if eaten, one would not fail the entrance exam and would be accepted into the school of one’s choice.

However, when I went to Yushima Tenjin Shrine and saw the apples that would not fall off, I felt them as silly things and lost interest in buying one.

I don’t remember for sure whether it was a feeling of disgust at something superstitious, or whether I simply thought it was a waste of money, but in any case, I think my mind was caught up in fate, luck, superstition, good fortune, or good luck.

I don’t know what it was, but I wanted to rely on some god-like unseen force posing as a god, or I was bound to it. I am sure that I was praying to god to open up the path I wanted to take, and not to oppose the divine mind.

I think it was a good thing that I bought apples to help the apple orchard, but now I wonder if it was Jesus’ protection for me, who did not yet know the true God, that I did not buy such a good-luck charm.

Part One

I don’t think it makes much sense to compare Christianity, which believes in the true God, with superstitious man-made religions and religious views that are supposed to influence people’s destiny,

fortune, and life. But if I dare to compare them, I would say that superstition is like a kind of mindless worship of something by taking advantage of people's fears, tying them up with fate and fortune, and stirring up their hearts to worship it by chanting talismans, good luck charms, exorcisms, and incantatory words.

Christianity, on the other hand, seems to me to be a religion of the word of God and worship.

In other words, the passing of personalities and the building of a relationship between God and man is Christianity.

The Bible calls such things as offering something or making a wish to something that is said to be a god superstitious. And more than that, the Bible says, "The idol gods of the world do not really exist, and there is no god but one God. The things they offer are offered to demons, not to God. I do not want you to have fellowship with demons" (I Cor. 10:20).

From Amaterasu to the toilet god, the little Buddha statue, the altar, or anything more than a god within you, all of these entities are not gods, they are the exact opposite of gods, it says.

These superstitious gods and evil spirits, in order to make us human beings their slaves, arbitrarily constrain us with things such as destiny and fortune.

In order to change our destiny or fortune, they may almost blackmail us, saying, "Buy an amulet or talisman, wear a lucky charm, perform an exorcism, chant sutras or Buddhist prayers, observe festivals and rituals. Or else you will have misfortune or bad luck, you will not be able to get rid of the evil, you will be cut off from your village, you will be in big trouble, etc."

When a person is subjected to such spiritual blackmail, he or she becomes fearful and is naturally bound by such things in body and mind, and is forced to accept such bondage as a matter of course under the guise of tradition and culture.

Eventually, this becomes a worldview within the person, and they try to control their minds and souls with the superstition that if they abide by them, they will have good fortune, prosper in business, get rid of bad luck, and live a good life.

Therefore, the most important characteristic of these superstitious religions and religious views is inconvenience. It is the lack of freedom.

When you move, the date is also important.

You are not allowed to move at any time.

There are days when you should not move.

Since the day of Buddha's death is bad luck, you must move on the day of big luck (Taian).

You must go to someone who can advise you or tell your fortune and ask them in which direction you should move. You must also buy, decorate, and wear good luck charms. You must also pay attention to feng shui, where to place things and what colors to use to open or close your fortune in the new place you are moving to.

In the end, it all comes down to money, and money will try to solve the problem.

In fact, I first learned when we moved into the parsonage that moving costs for moving companies are set higher on the day of a big holiday and lower on the day of a Buddha's death.

Of course, our family is fine with any day of the year, so we dared to choose a day of Buddha's death (butsumetsu) to move into the parsonage at a lower cost.

If you interpret butsumetsu, "the day on which the evil spirit known as Buddha is destroyed," then butsumetsu becomes a rather joyous day.

We are free to lay out the furniture as we wish after entering the parsonage, and Christians who believe in Jesus are free to move in at any time, in any direction, and in any layout. We are free.

The most important value in Christianity is freedom.

Jesus said, "The truth will set you free," and Jesus, who is the truth, will set us free.

Bad luck, misfortune, failure, and everything else is an opportunity in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Opportunities.

As we saw in the sermon issue, it is just as the Lord said, "Make full use of your opportunities".

Ephesians 5:15-16 (PowerPoint)
not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity,
because the days are evil.

The words "without wisdom" and "bad times" here are synonymous, but the meaning could be "to be bound by ungodliness" or "a world that is bound by ungodliness".

We can go wherever we want.

We are free, as it says, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9).

This is the freedom that those who believe in the Lord Jesus, who is the form of the invisible God and in whom the fullness of the nature of the One who is called God dwells in form, gain, the freedom that is given, the freedom that is restored.

The reason why people feel inconvenienced is because they have lost, forgotten, do not know, do not believe in, and are not with Jesus, the true God.

The “will of the Lord” that God wants, expects, and “wants us to be” is not an exorcism, not luck or fate, not a choice of day, but our very existence.

To live with the realization that our very existence is an opportunity.

To live remembering that no matter what fate, no matter what fortune, no matter what day, no matter where you are, my very being, your very being, is a unique opportunity that God has given us.

Valuing God’s Word is valuing who I am. To try to live according to the Word of God is freedom. To worship the Lord Jesus and to believe and love Him is to not be bound by all sorts of superstitions. This, in turn, leads to loving others, which is the fundamental problem and solution that has remained unchanged ever since the world came into existence. It seems to me that all of the Bible says that this is what the Lord wants, “It is the Lord’s will“.

Part Two

As Christians, we often ask, “What is the Lord’s will? What do you mean by “the will of the Lord” when you ask “what is the will of the Lord?”

“Is it the Lord’s will for me to go to this school or that school?”

“Is it the Lord’s will that I go to this company or that company?”

“Is it the Lord’s will that I choose this person or that person?” What do you think of the words “the Lord’s will” when you ask these questions?

“Which will open up my destiny?” “Which way will bring me more blessings?” “Which will make me richer?” It is not uncommon for us to

wish with superstitious thoughts of choice, “Which will bring me more fortune?”

Of course, there are many things such as a better environment or conditions, but the Lord God seems to be not at all concerned about the environment or conditions.

Jesus Himself was born in a place that was the weakest, the worst, the lowest, if we consider the choice of environment and conditions or in terms of destiny and fortune.

He lived in such a place.

In this context, what Jesus consistently persisted in was “the will of the Lord“.

What He wanted to teach us and what He wanted us to know was “the will of the Lord“.

(PowerPoint)

Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

(Matthew 26:39)

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. (John 4:34)

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38)

It was the Lord’s will that Jesus would do wherever He went.

Jesus never once used the phrase “the Lord’s will” in the sense of “go this way and that way, choose this and that, get this and get that,” as if it were a matter of fortune, destiny, or good fortune.

In terms of conditions and environment, it was in the wilderness that the Israelites were saved and led.

At that time, 4,000 years ago, the best, most favorable environment for civilized living on the earth was Egypt, the first of the four great civilizations of the world, which boasted of its civilization.

The Israelites were in the best conditions and environment, so while God could have simply released them from their slavery and let them stay in Egypt to live the life they wanted, which they thought would open up their destiny, fortune, and fortune. God, however, led them on, saying, “Leave Egypt and go three days’ journey into the wilderness, where there is nothing, the worst, the weakest, and the lowest environmental conditions, and live.”

More than whether or not to go there, the “Lord’s will” was to live the “Lord’s will” in the place where they go.

So, what is the “will of the Lord”?

Part Three

What is the “Lord’s Will”?

The Lord’s Will has already been presented to all of us here.

Where?

In the Bible.

All over the Bible, everywhere, all you have to do is to open the Bible, and there you will find all of the Lord’s will.

‘Be holy’, ‘Return to me, your God,’ ‘Know the Lord your God,’ ‘Follow me,’ ‘Love one another, love first,’ ‘Forgive one another, forgive first’; ‘Pursue peace with all men and keep peace with all men as long as you can’; ‘Be forgiving’; ”Do not judge. Who are you to judge your neighbor?”; ‘Do not consider yourself wise’; ‘Be humble and consider others better than yourself’; ‘Be one’; ‘Pray’; ‘Be thankful’; ‘Be joyful’; ‘Do not quench the Spirit’; ”Seek that which is above. Do not seek things on earth”, ‘Preach the word, whether the time is good or bad’, ‘Cleanse your hearts, you double-minded. Mourn, and be sorrowful. Weep. Turn your laughter into sorrow. Humble yourselves before the Lord. And He will lift you up’.

Everywhere you read in the Bible, the Lord’s will is everywhere.

No matter where you are, under what conditions, in what circumstances, in front of whom, “Be holy,” “Return to God,” “Know God,” “Follow me, and obey me,”; ‘Love one another, love first’; ‘Forgive one another, forgive first’; ‘Pursue peace with all men and keep peace with all men as long as you can’; ‘Be forgiving’; ”Do not judge. Who are you to judge your neighbor?”; ‘Do not consider yourself wise’; ‘Be humble and consider others better than yourself’; ‘Be one’; ‘Pray’; ‘Be thankful’; ‘Be joyful’; ‘Do not quench the Spirit’; ”Seek that which is above. Do not think of the things on the earth.” “Preach the word, whether the time is good or bad”. “Sinners, cleanse your hands. Cleanse your heart, you double-minded. Mourn, and be sorrowful. Sorrow. Weep. Turn your laughter into sorrow. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

All of this is the Lord’s will.

They are not dependent on location, environment, or conditions.

The ultimate words are those of the apostle Paul, who spoke to those who were in the weakest, worst, and worst of all, slaves.

Ephesians 6:5-8 (PowerPoint)

He did not say, “Demonstrate so that slavery can be abolished. Fight. Be politically active. Be powerful and change the social structure.” He sidelined expecting the Lord to give them the fruit of uprooting and abolishing from a deeper level, which will be the result. He then says, “First of all, serve your earthly master sincerely, that man who is before you now, who treats you like a thing, who thinks of you as a disposable tool. As a free man in Christ, fulfill your slavery faithfully”.

He tells us, “One day this may lead to a reform or abolition that will uproot and overturn the system from the very roots, but even if it does not, you will surely receive your reward from the Lord,” and that “the way to uproot and overturn is to live according to His will”, He tells us

He tells us, “To love, to forgive, to respect, to divide, not to judge, to forgive. Instead of looking others and being angry, gnashing of teeth, and frustrated at being looked down upon and patronized, keep your eyes on Jesus, the Founder and Finisher of our faith. To fight your own sins, not the sins of others, until you shed blood. Live such a will of the Lord. He teaches and encourages us the most important thing for a person to do as a human being.

In other words, “We have the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God.”

Part Four

We often think “What is in my heart must be the Lord’s will. No, I would be grateful if you would say that what is in my heart is the Lord’s will, and that would mean that my prayer has been heard.”

I am sure that there is a kind of greed that puts my heart before the Lord’s will. God told the Israelites earlier why He led them into the wilderness, which at first glance may seem to have the weakest, worst, and least desirable conditions.

Deuteronomy 8:2-7, 17-20 (PowerPoint)

“It was to know what was in your heart.”

The Israelites, and what is in our hearts, was not “the will of the Lord”. The Lord led them into the wilderness so that they might understand that it is something other than His will.

Where we eat the Word of God as if we were eating manna, to know that “the power of my might, the power of my hands” ultimately occupies our hearts, and thereby know the will of God every day. And even though we honestly admit that we do not try to live His will even though we know it, we do not give up trying to live His will, but seek mercy, forgiveness, help, grace, and humility, and try to live by doing His will. God teaches us that this is the meaning of life and the meaning of those who believe in Christ.

He teaches us that to realize the Lord’s will and to do it once we have realized it is the way, and that the Lord God will lead us into the good land and into the Kingdom of God as if He were accompanying us on that path.

The will of the Lord is written in the Pentateuch of Moses from one end of the Bible to the other.

But I am being asked if I am not paying attention to the Lord’s will, not listening to it, forcing my heart on the Lord, or making up my own imagination of the Lord’s will.

Part Five

The Apostle Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, and most of his letters are motivated by the fact that the church, which is supposed to be the flock of Christ, has been doing things that are not the Lord’s will, to a greater or lesser extent. They are saying, “this is what I have done,” “this is what I have been doing with all my might,” “I am getting these results,” “Why that person, why this person!”. The books were written out of concern for the state of the church, which is not united, boasting of “my power, the power of my hands,” as if each person is praising himself or herself.

My heart more than the Lord’s will, what I am doing and want to do more than the Lord’s will, my power more than the Lord’s will, my wishes and judgments more than the Lord’s will.

However, the Lord’s will over my heart, His will over what I am doing or want to do, His will over my strength, His will over my desires and judgments. These all are already written in the Bible.

I myself often question the Lord’s will by asking, “Is it this way or that way, this or that?” But the Lord’s will, which is shown to us each time, is

“Love. Forgive. Follow me. Be humble. Cry. Be holy. Love first. You first forgive. You first kneel. You first open your hands. You are first to renounce yourself. You first, pray. Turn your eyes to Me. Do not take your eyes off Me to love others.”

To be honest, it is painful.

My heart is tired, my body is weak, I hate people, and I get tired of worrying about what kind of face I should put on when I go out in public and what kind of face I should put on when I speak the words of the Bible.

I sometimes feel like I am a spiritual fraud.

But, still, at such times, when I open the Bible and seek the Lord’s will, I am sure to be given freedom.

Liberation is given.

The words of the Bible come to me as God’s words to me.

Sometimes He says, “No, you don’t have to forgive now. When the time comes, you will forgive, and I will make it possible for you to forgive.

You don’t have to love now. But when the time comes, you will love, and I will make it possible for you to love.

Fall down now. When the time comes, I will wake you up.

It is okay if you cannot do it now. I will make you do it when the time comes.” I feel the Lord God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit who are like parents who are always on my side, no matter how unforgivable I have done.

Conclusion

Therefore, we cannot quit trying to understand God’s will.

We cannot give up trying to realize God’s will.

We cannot stop trying to do God’s will.

We cannot back down from trying to do God’s will.

We cannot forget how blessed we are to follow God’s will.

We wish that we will give up, and we will not forget to continue to realize the Lord’s will.

Let’s pray.

Benediction : Ephesians 5:17)