

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

77 How Can I Know What God Wants Me to Do?

Scripture: Psalm 37:23; Ephesians 5:17

The question before us takes many forms and is frequently asked by those who have given their lives to the Lord. How do you seek the will of God? How can I find God's plan for my life? What are the ways that God reveals His will to us? When I am confronted with a choice of actions how shall I know which to take? We can find many ways in the Bible by which God revealed His purpose and will. He spoke directly to Abraham and to Moses from a burning bush. A cloud guided the children of Israel through forty years of desert wandering. This unique guardian first appeared after the first Passover following their deliverance in Egypt, and brought them to the Red Sea. (Exodus 13:20-22) God spoke directly to Samuel and led Jacob through an angelic visitation. Joseph was warned in a dream to flee into Egypt and then to return to Palestine. God confirmed His will to Gideon through a fleece and answered the prayers of believers' in Antioch about the work of Paul and Barnabas. (Acts 13). The God of the Bible is a God who guides. He constantly revealed His will to Israel and to the people who formed the New Testament church. One of the most exciting discoveries that we can make today is to understand that God directs the lives of His people and that we are candidates for this leading as we are educated in the ways of God and remain willing to obey Him.

I. DIFFICULTIES AND DEFINITION:

There are few subjects which seem more bewildering to many Christians than what is commonly referred to as "the Lord's will." Actually, there are not many who seem to even talk about seeking God's mission for their lives. It all seems so vague and indefinable. Few if any, have even set down a definition of what the will of God is. The means employed seem so basic it is sometimes difficult to believe they are trustworthy. It is often not that easy to apply Biblical principles to particular life situations. These are some of the problems associated with formulating a proper procedure for determining the Lord's will.

Different words with different meanings are used in Scripture to indicate what we call the "will" of God. Some words have to do with God's purpose, pleasure and desire. Scriptures which carry these meanings are II Tim.1:9 and

Ephesians 1:9. Thus, we are given to understand that God has certain things He desires to accomplish which will please Him. The way in which these things will be accomplished is a result of a decision God has reached in His mind. There is an interesting Greek verb, **boulomai**, which means “to desire something from the mind, the act of decision.” It has to do with a thought process and is often translated **plan**. (I Corinthians 12:11; II Corinthians 1:15; James 3:4) In order to accomplish His desires God prepares a plan. Acts 2:23 and 4:28 tell us that the crucifixion of Christ was in keeping with the plan (boule) of God.

We may define our use of the term “will of God” as God's wish (thelema) which He desires to be fulfilled according to a plan He has drafted (boule) in the counsels of His mind. The Christian is therefore concerned with what God wants him to do, and the search is to find out what it is.

II. REASONS FOR SEEKING THE WILL OF GOD:

In spite of the difficulties associated with determining the will of God, there are many sound reasons why this matter should be a great concern in our lives.

First, if God has decided on things which will please Him my love for Him should cause me to want to know what these are. If we really love Him we will want to please Him. (John 14:15, 21, 23-24) Perhaps. a worthy gauge of our love for the Lord is the concern that we have to do His will. Another reason for seeking to know the will of God is blessing which comes to our lives in being in His will.

A Christian out of the will of God is in a sorry state. He belongs neither to the world nor is He in a position to receive what God has for him. Thirdly, the Lord is going to reward those who have built their lives upon the doing of His will.

(I Corinthians 3:10-15) Another reason is that we might avoid the chastening of the Lord. (I Corinthians 11:31-32) Lastly, a person who has concern for God's will is going to be an encouragement to others. I ought not to fail to mention that it is a matter of sheer obedience. Ephesians 5:15-17 is a classic passage. The word “wise” in verse fifteen is “*sophos*” and means “having the facts.”

Christians are to bring together the facts and to understand what the will (thelema: desire from the heart) of God is. These are reasons for the will of God being a subject of importance for every Christian.

III. HOW GOD REVEALS HIS WILL:

There are many people in the world who have grown weary of the course they have charted for their lives. The more they have done what they wanted to do, the less they have enjoyed what they have done. They are living examples of

Galatians 6:7, "*Remember you can't ignore God and get away with it: a man will always reap just the kind of crop he sows.*" For such people comes the good news about a master planner. He has a perfect plan because he knows all about them. He knows all about strengths and weaknesses. His is a wonderful plan because He has the power to fulfill anything which He plans. His plan looks at our lives from the standpoint of eternity and therefore will reveal what the important things are in this life, the things which ought to receive our affection and efforts. The wonderful thing is that God does have a will for our lives. Let us think of several ways in which God reveals His will to us:

1. Through Belief in Christ As Savior:

A favorite verse of Christians is Romans 8:28 "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*" The promise of all things working together for good (God's ordered plan) is for those who have fulfilled the condition. Those who are called according to His purpose are those who are sons of God by faith in Christ. God has no responsibility to plan the life of someone who does not belong to him. You must be a child of God if you want to know God's will for your life.

2. Through Surrender to God:

If you want to know the will of God, you must surrender yourself to Him. God does not lead those who are not willing to be led. I have always felt that Romans 12:1 played an important role in finding the will of God. "*I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*" Years ago I met a man by the name of Norman Townsend who was at the time the pastor of a very large church in Rhode Island. While in training for the ministry he felt a strong impulse to go to China as a missionary. He fought this call for several months and during this time his life was joyless and barren. Finally he gave in to the Lord and became willing to do anything. God eventually showed him that His will was entirely different. We must be willing to do God's will.

3. Through His Word:

This means that we can get much guidance in knowing and following, the general rules of the Bible. In many cases, there is a verse or passage of Scripture that can throw light or give some information that will help in

coming to a conclusion. There are many things which are clearly God's will for us and there is no need for further deliberation in the matter. These principles form God's will in every Christian life in all situations. We know that it is God's will that we submit to Him. (James 4:6-7). It is God's will that we provide things honest in the sight of all men. (Romans 12:17) Believers must not steal. (Ephesians 4:28) They should avoid every appearance of evil. (I Thessalonians 5:22) Christians are to marry only Christians. (II Corinthians 6:14) There are warnings about how we are to relate to possessions and where our real treasures should be. (I Timothy 6:17-19; Matthew 6:19-20) Christians are to live by faith and trust in the Lord. (Proverbs 3:5-6; Hebrews 11:6) They are to keep cleansed by confession (I John 1:9) And so, throughout the Bible we can find many rules which are given that will guide us in knowing God's will. The important thing is that we are familiar with these. We ought to know our Bibles. There is no short cut. It involves work and time. A Christian cannot expect guidance from God who does not know and follow the general rules of Scripture.

4. Through Prayer:

How often do we ask people for advice, the opinion of a close friend, or wise physician. For some reason we find it difficult to ask God. Will God give us the direction when we ask Him? Surely one of the most encouraging promises in the Bible is James 1:5, "*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*" Certainly there are other conditions which are important, but because God does not throw out His promises carelessly, His direction in our lives should be in the direct proportion to our asking for it. If we lack understanding, it is because we have not asked for it in many cases. We have sought, rather, the wisdom of man.

5. Through Open and Closed Doors:

One of the verses listed at the beginning of our study is Psalm 37:23 which states; "*that the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord.*" God will use opportunities to help us know His will. The Apostle Paul found that the door was closed to further preaching in Asia. The opportunity was not there nor in many other places. Then the Holy Spirit opened the door and Paul went into Europe with the message of the Gospel. This story is told in Acts 16:6-11. David Livingston set sail for China where he was going as a

missionary, but God closed the doors to China and opened them to Africa. David Livingston went to Africa and the world knows of his exploits there in the name of Christ. Adoniram Judson was on his way to India to be a missionary there; God closed the door and sent him to Burma instead. Plainly, God closes some doors. The Spirit says, "No." These circumstances can be very helpful in determining God's will.

6. Through Experience and Ability:

There is also the matter of gifts, those talents we are born with, and those special gifts of the Holy Spirit. It seems foolish to feel you are called to be a vocal soloist if you can't sing. If you do not have the ability to serve in a certain capacity then it is often an indication that this is not God's will for you. Some people come to the faith later in life and have a rich field of experience to draw upon in serving their new-found Lord. There is one word of caution here. God may call someone to serve in a field for which he is not naturally equipped. If so, He will equip you by His grace. We should not automatically conclude that we are eliminated from a calling because we do not have a natural talent for that work. God is able to qualify when He calls.

7. Through a Test:

The phrase, "*putting out the fleece*" is familiar to people who know the Bible. It comes from the story of Gideon and his call to be a leader for God. The story is told in Judges 6:11-40. Gideon felt so inadequate to the task that God asked of him that he demanded a special proof from God. He said to God, "*If I put a piece of fleece on the ground and if tomorrow the fleece is wet and the ground is dry, then I will know that this is your will.*" God honored that request. The next day he said, "*Lord, if tonight the fleece is dry and the ground is wet, then will I know it is your will.*" God honored his request. So from this story has come the expression, "*putting out the fleece.*" I believe there are certain times in a person's life, certain major decisions, when it may be legitimate to "*put out the fleece.*" That is, you may make some test and arrange with God through serious and sincere prayer a manner in which you wish Him to show you His will. Of course any good thing can be spoiled and some have done this by putting out a fleece on just about everything that comes along. I do not think this is right. It seems to me that this ought to be a last resort when all other avenues are exhausted and there is just nowhere to go. It goes without saying that motivation will govern the return when it

comes to a dramatic test of this kind. It must be done in sincerity. God will have nothing for the person who takes this method lightly.

8. Through Common Sense:

Intelligence is a person's inherited capacity to reason, comprehend, acquire information and act upon it. Generally, within this capacity is room for a great deal of improvement. In recent years very special techniques have been developed for measuring a person's ability. Regardless of the rating a person may achieve, God has given a measure of common sense that he expects to be used. This is a very difficult area to understand when it comes to the will of God. For my own part, I have come to feel there are things we do which are thoughtless and careless which have heavy consequences in our lives and which was not a part of God's direct will for us. Of course, such things fall into the area of His permissive will and He is able to weave them into a pattern for good in the overall. The next time I bang into the rear of someone's car because I haven't been looking where I was going I ought to realize I did a careless and thoughtless thing, and not open the door with the words on my lips, "I wonder why God had this in His will for me?" There is a sanctified commonsense.

9. Through the Peace and Blessing of the Holy Spirit:

A very important test has to be the peace of heart and mind which the Holy Spirit brings when a direction is of God. Some Christians resolutely will not go ahead in a given course of action, regardless of how logical it may seem, until God has confirmed it with His peace. This involves the direct personal leadership of the Holy Spirit in a person's Life. The Spirit is up to it we can be sure.

10. Through an Active Trust in the Present:

In Genesis 24 we have the story of Abraham sending his trusted servant to find a bride for his son Isaac. The servant was to go into a land and there God was to show him the girl that was to be Isaac's bride. The servant went on his way and God did show him the bride that was to be chosen for Isaac. The servant's testimony was this as recorded in verse 27, "*I being in the way, the Lord led me.*" The servant did not sit back and wait for God to bring someone to him, but he started in the way. He started obeying God with the knowledge that he had and God took it from there. If we would know the will of God, we should not sit back and wait for instruction to drop out of heaven

for us. There are no sealed orders of this kind. Begin to serve God where you are. Be a sincere good Christian now, do not wait for full time work or outstanding things to happen. A person's potential for God is according to their faithfulness where God has them in the present.

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