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How to Find the Will of God: The Concept

1115-B

Series: The Will of God

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How to Find the Will of God: The Concept

No subject is more intriguing to the believer. No topic is more timely to the average Christian. Nothing you can discuss has more relevance than this one. It affects every decision we make; every choice we consider; every turn we take on the highway of life. It is the subject of how to find the will of God.

Do we change jobs, or don't we? Is this the right place for us to live, or isn't it? Should we embark on that ministry, or not? Is it the right time to buy that house, or isn't it? And anyway, does God care about the little choices we make, or is He simply interested in certain key decisions that affect Biblical principles? Does He really care who a person marries, so long as who they marry is a believer? Is there a specific place He has for us to work, or is He simply concerned that we have a job and pay our bills? Does God have a certain ministry in mind for each of us, or is He rather simply calling each of us to minister in general, leaving the choices up to us?

How do we know when the time is right to make the move we feel He wants us to make? How important is it to "feel" right about a certain decision? How much stock should we take in "open doors"? These are all questions Christians struggle with as they attempt to apply doctrinal truth to everyday decision-making. In our day and age, as much as any other, there are, floating around in the Christian hemisphere, dozens of "new" theories concerning the will of God, but there really are no "new" theories. There are, however, some basic, unchangeable absolutes that affect finding the will of God.

Two things must be made clear at the outset of this study:

1- Why are we studying this now? The only good reason I can give you is that in our opening look at Elisha's ministry and his calling, the question naturally arose: "Okay, so we know God was calling Elisha, and we know how to respond *when we know God is calling*. So how do we know when it is God doing the calling? We want to go on with Elisha's life, but while the issue of the calling of

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God, and the will of God is still fresh on our minds, it does seem appropriate to look at this issue. (It's also clear that I don't need a good reason to go off on a tangent.)

2- We're not looking for any mystical formulas that will give us a button to push to know the will of God. If there were such formulas, God would have given them to us in His Word. What God has given us in His Word are some bedrock absolutes that must not be compromised, and hundreds of God-ordained principles that do not change, but which must be applied in each individual situation, and which won't always lead to the exact same outcome. So we're not looking for "1-2-3's" as much as for Scriptural guidelines to use as we go through the process of decision-making. It will be a several-part series, (which is my way of saying no telling how long this will last), and I will give you a general outline at the beginning, asking for the privilege of revising it as we go. That general outline will look something like this: "How to Find the Will of God."

- I- The Concept
(Just What is the Will of God?)
- II- The Keys
(Three Things We Often Overlook)
- III- The Confirmation
(Three Things We Often Overemphasize)
- IV- The Cautions
(Four Things to Watch For)
- V- The Conclusion
(After We Decide, Then What?)

Today's study will begin with a look at some fundamental principles that are essential to understanding the will of God for your life and for mine.

Some of these principles may be new to you; others may seem extremely basic. Please apply the Scriptures to the issue at hand, whether it seems too basic or not. There is no way to build on a foundation, unless you have first constructed the foundation.

Today's lesson, then, will be in three parts. Outlined, we will look at it this way:

THE CONCEPT

- I- What is the Will of God?
- II- The General Will of God For You
- III- The Specific Will of God For You

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Just what is the Will of God? In today's Christian vocabulary, no phrase is used more often, and perhaps misused more often. Our purpose in this study, as much as is possible, will be to simply let the Scriptures provide their own definitions. First of all, let's examine three or four facts about the will of God to help us understand what it is. From Romans 12:2, a verse we will study in depth later in this series, we learn four things about the will of God.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Romans 12:2 NKJV)

1- We learn that it is good. The word "good" used here is a word used to define that aspect of the nature of God that does not allow Him to violate His own Word. In other words, the will of God will never violate the Word of God. It cannot. So one thing is for certain, if something you deem to be God's will for you, either because of certain circumstances, or because of some vision or dream or feeling you had, does not perfectly harmonize with the revealed Word of God, you have been deceived. *The Word of God is the will of God revealed.* So if you decide that you must lie or steal time or misrepresent something in order to do God's will, you have been lied to by Satan, and you have bought the lie. God's will is good. It is in perfect harmony with His character as revealed in His Word.

2- The will of God is acceptable. The word literally means "well-pleasing" and is usually used in relation to how what we do affects God. Nothing pleases the heart of God more than when the Christian devotes his life to coming to know, then coming to do, the will of God. This is well-pleasing to God. It produces in God a response of joy at the obedience of His children. The same word is used in Romans 14:18, and the context is the same as well. Paul is telling us not to judge one another, because every one of us must give account of himself to God. He goes on to say that the worst thing you can do is become a stumbling block in your brother's way; then he adds:

For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

(Romans 14:18 NKJV)

He is doing the will of God, and God is pleased.

3- The will of God is perfect. Or literally, the will of God is complete. There is nothing that can be added to it, and nothing

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that can be taken from it, without taking from it, its perfect power. So to “sort of” do what God wants you to is not enough. The will of God is vital, specific, essential, and complete. If you find and do the will of God, there need be nothing else for you to do. Please don’t question that principle until we look at it in more detail.

4- The moment you become a Christian, doing the will of God becomes your total objective in life. Not a part of it, not an addendum to your goals, but your one driving purpose in life. That’s why studying how to find the will of God is so important. Paul reflected on this principle in Acts 22:13, when Ananias came to him and stood by him and said:

... ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And the same hour [Paul says], I looked upon him.

And then he [Ananias] said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.

‘For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.’
(Acts 22:13-15 NKJV)

The plan of God for the Christian is the progressive revelation of the will of God. The purpose of God for the Christian is the continual doing of that revelation. So if you never do another thing in your Christian life, if you never study another thing in your Christian life, come to understand the will of God. It is why you were born, and why you were born again.

Those are just four of the basic observations the Word makes about the will of God. From them and other Scriptures, however, we can at least begin to formulate a definition of God’s will.

The will of God is the perfect plan of God for the obedient child of God. It is good, that is, it is in perfect harmony with His revealed Word. It is acceptable; that is, it is His plan to allow us to bring Him pleasure; and it is perfect; that is, it is without error, it is complete, and it is unchangeable. That is the will of God. It is, simply put, what God wants you to do with your life. In detail. Without modification. Without compromise. He has such a plan for your life. He has such a plan for my life. And we can know it. Our passage, Romans 12:2, ends by telling us that God’s purpose is “that we might *know* what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” That is why our daily prayer should be with the Psalmist in Psalm 143, who prayed:

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...Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

(Psalm 143:8b paraphrase)

Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God.

(Psalm 143:10 NKJV)

Now about the general will of God. If you were to take a poll in most Christian groups and ask them what is the most disturbing issue in their lives, most believers would answer, "Knowing the will of God." But, Beloved, that is not true. The major issue in most of our lives revolves around "doing the will of God." Before God can reveal more of His will to us, we must do what we already know to do. A child who will not pass the tests in class, cannot be promoted to the next class to assimilate more information. He has to stay where he is until he has proved that he knows what has already been revealed to him. So it is with us.

I believe this principle is the most important part of the whole issue of the will of God. Let me give you some illustrations. Suppose someone comes to you and says to you: "I want to know God's will concerning my job. I'm not happy there." The first thing you say to them is, "You already know God's will concerning your job." They may answer, "No, I don't." You can reply, "Yes, you do. Are you in perfect submission to your boss? That is the will of God for you. Are you laboring hard, by the sweat of your brow? That is the will of God for you. Are you giving 110% effort for every minute you are on the job (as unto Christ)? That's the will of God for you." You know the will of God, and if you are not doing what you know, there is nothing more to know. Peter said in I Peter:

Be submissive to every human institution for the Lord's sake...

for this is God's will that by behaving well you should silence the ignorance of thoughtless people.

[likewise] you domestic slaves [or employees] should with unqualified respect be submissive to your masters, not only to the kind and considerate but also to those who are harsh.

(I Peter 2:13,15,18 paraphrase)

In fact:

If you bear patiently with suffering when you are doing right, this is pleasing to God.

To such an experience you have been called.

(I Peter 2:20, 21 paraphrase)

That's the will of God for your job. The will of God is that your

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job be a visual presentation of the grace of God, with your responses to authority being the slide show. The key isn't where you make the most money. The key isn't where you get the most fulfillment. The key is where can you best be placed in the furnace to reveal the awesome grace of God. This is God's will...that by behaving well you should silence the ignorance of thoughtless people (those who say that the Christian is no different, has no different standards, has no different spirit). With unqualified respect, you are to be submissive to those you work for or under, *especially if they are gross, unfair, inconsiderate, and harsh*. This is your calling. To do so is "pleasing to God", that is, it is the will of God for you.

That is the known will of God concerning your job. He wants you to be in unquestionable submission responding with joy, even when wronged, so you can silence the arguments of unbelieving skeptics. Until and unless you are in that mode, living that life, don't ask God or man for counsel on the will of God. Do what you know to do first. That is His primary, or general, will for you. We usually aren't interested in that. We are usually more interested in God's sending a bolt of lightning or writing on the wall what He wants us to do next. He did better. He wrote it indelibly, eternally, infallibly in His Holy Word. It will never change. That's the will of God for you.

Suppose someone phones you and says, "I need to know the will of God for my marriage." "Are you prepared to do it?" you answer. They will probably answer excitedly, "Of course I am!" It is at that point that you can take them to this same passage, review it for them, as it says clearly, "This is the will of God for you," and then go on to verse 1 of chapter three which begins "Likewise you wives." "Likewise, you wives, the will of God for you is to be submissive to your own husbands, so that if any of them will not be persuaded by the message, they may without the message, be won over by your chaste and respectful behavior." That's the will of God for the Christian wife. When she does that, she "puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men" even if, and especially if, her husband is, as I Peter 2:18 (TLB) reminds us, "insensitive and cruel". That's the will of God. Until and unless you walk in that manner consistently, prayerfully, successfully, then don't ask God to reveal His will for your marriage. He already has. The husband is told "likewise" in I Peter 3:7 that God's will for you is to:

Live considerately with your wife, being thoughtful of her needs, honoring her as the weaker sex, loving her as Christ

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loved the church, willing to die for her, whether she deserves it, humanly speaking, or not. (I Peter 3:7 paraphrase)

This is so important, Peter says, “If you don’t do this, men, you won’t have an effective prayer life.” Why? You’re out of the will of God, that’s why.

A single or a young couple who is dating may approach you and ask you to help them determine the will of God for their relationship. The first thing you do is determine if they are doing the will of God. What is the will of God for them? Here’s what it says:

It is God’s will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality;

that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable,

Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit.

(I Thessalonians 4:3,4, 8 NIV)

So before any young person can find the will of God for their relationship, make sure that their relationship is pure. If it isn’t, there is no use asking for further revelation. God’s will has been revealed. This is the will of God: total abstinence from moral impurity, physically and mentally, for Matthew 5:28 says that God sees them both as violations of His will. So if someone has a problem with either lust of the mind or actual moral violations, God cannot reveal any more of His will in that area until there is obedience in that area.

One more example, and it’s a tough one. Suppose someone says to you, “I’ve been in the furnace of affliction for so long that I cannot seem to even remember what it’s like to live free from pressure. I have major decisions facing me. Help me find the will of God.” You can lovingly answer them, “I know the will of God for you. Tell me how you pray in the midst of your trials. Tell me what you say to God and to others in the heat of your affliction, and I will tell you the will of God.” The will of God is spelled out in I Thessalonians 5:16-18:

Always be cheerful.

Pray unceasingly.

Under all circumstances, give thanks, for such is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

(I Thessalonians 5:16-18 paraphrase)

In other words, you know God’s will in times of tribulation. It is

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clearly spelled out in Scripture. It is to always choose to be cheerful, no matter how badly you are hurting, no matter how deeply you are discouraged, you are commanded to always be cheerful. Secondly, you are instructed to pray without ceasing. That means praying specifically, continually, expectantly, morning, noon, and night. As you drive to work, as you wait for that appointment, as you walk to the store, as you dial the phone...prayer becomes your second nature. You talk to God without ceasing throughout the day. When you are awakened in the night, you pray. When you rise up in the morning, you pray. That is the will of God for you. And finally, when the heat is on, and the bullets are flying, you *stop what you are doing and give thanks*.

Now to give thanks is more than to be thankful. One is an attitude, the other is an act. You are to be thankful, and because you are thankful, you are to give thanks. You are to take the time to stop and thank God for whatever circumstances you face, not because you are happy, but because you are thankful. You see, if you don't, you miss the benefit of the trial, and the tests must go on. Listen to Psalm 50:14, 15, from the Living Bible:

What I want from you [says God] is your true thanks; I want your promises fulfilled. I want you to trust me in your times of trouble, so I can rescue you and you can give me glory.

(Psalm 50:14,15, TLB)

That's one reason God allows you to have trouble. He wants you to trust Him and praise Him in that trouble, so He can rescue you, and you can praise Him. That's the will of God for you. In everything, give thanks. Do that, and you are doing the will of God, and you are preparing yourself to know the will of God more specifically.

So the issue is, that in most cases, we already know considerably more of the will of God than we care to obey. What we want is more information, rather than having to obey what we know. You may be saying, "But all that deals with the general will of God. Those are things all Christians should do. When I think of the will of God, I want to know what God has in mind for me personally. I want to know at which job God wants me to work, in which city God wants me to live, which person God wants me to marry. Or doesn't God care? If we are obeying the general will of God, then are the specific choices incidental? Are they simply things God wants us to decide with no help or leading from Him? This is a popular kind of theology today. It, in essence, states that God defines the parameters, and

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within those parameters, whatever you do is okay with Him.

You say, it doesn't matter where you minister? That would mean that it wasn't important for Elijah to go to Zarephath and live in that particular widow's house. All God had in mind was for him to leave that drying brook and find somebody to help. But that doesn't hold up. She was the one person in the universe God wanted Elijah to see. She was about to die. She had a son who was going to die. She had a need to be met, and Elijah had a need to meet that need. So God sent him to a specified place at a specified time for a specified purpose. For him to be anywhere else but in that upper room in that little town would have caused him to miss the will of God. So it does matter where you minister.

You say it doesn't matter where you live? That would mean that Paul didn't have to go to prison to accomplish God's purposes. He could have done it from a motel in Jerusalem. Nonsense. The guards he needed to witness to were in that jail. The believers who were gaining new strength according to Philippians, chapter one, were doing so because he was in prison. It wouldn't have been the same for Peter to have been the one. It wouldn't have been the same for Paul to have been somewhere else. That's why he could say he was "called to be a prisoner of the Lord, according to the will of God." So it does matter where you live.

You say it doesn't matter who you marry? That would mean that Abraham didn't have to marry Sarah. But that's not true. She was God's chosen partner for him as much as Eve was created by God out of Adam for Adam. She was divinely appointed to be the mother of Isaac, just as Mary was divinely appointed to be the mother of Jesus. It wasn't coincidental; it was imperative. So it does matter who you marry.

It matters to God where you live; where you minister; to whom you go; who you marry. It all matters to God, because He has a specific, peculiar, perfect plan for you that He has for no one else. The will of God is not some vague, general set of guidelines that we can, by following, then become the captain of our own fate. Jesus didn't breathe without the Father's direction. He did not even speak a word, but that the Father placed it in His mouth. So He said in John 8:28:

...I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. (NKJV)

Beloved, your God has a detailed, specific plan for your life.

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The issue isn't what's happened in the past. The issue is, from this day forward, are you willing to spend the whole of your available time seeking to find the will of God, and the whole of your available energy seeking to do it? If so, you will know what to do next. Jesus promised that in John 7:17. There He said these words:

If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. (NKJV)

The question is: Are you ready to lay down your life to do the will of God? And are you willing to do what you already know to be His will, in order to free Him to reveal more? If not, don't complain that you do not know the will of God. You do.

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:17 NKJV)

In the next few lessons we shall look at some steps to finding God's particular will in specific matters. Let us remember three things in closing:

1- The will of God is the plan of God for the individual Christian to obey the Word of God, and this pleases the heart of God. It is the reason for our existence.

2- The known will of God constitutes His general purposes for our lives, and unless we obey those things, we cannot expect to have the light necessary to find His will in specific matters.

3- God's plan is not only general, but specific. He cares where we live, what we do, who we marry, who we minister to, even to the point that the hairs on our head are numbered. Nothing is incidental in His plan.

Surrender, Beloved, this hour, to the perfect will of God for your life. No, you do not know where He will take you, through what, or to what. It does not matter. You will have embarked on the only true adventure in life that counts...the adventure of letting God live your life, and of being in the center of His precious will. For that purpose were we born. Dear God, for that purpose may we live. Amen.

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(07.20.17)