

Romans 15:32 “Why Plan If God Has A Will?”[\[1\]](#)

Series: “Discerning the Will of God”—part 3[\[2\]](#)

Some time ago I have shared with you the story of Jim Elliot, a missionary who was martyr for Christ at the age of 28. There was a man with a passion to serve God. He had a great burden to reach the Auca Indians in Ecuador. He wanted to take the gospel to this stone age tribe. But it was not God's will for him. God took Jim home to heaven before he even reached thirty.

In this message we want to probe a difficult question: *If God has a will, why plan?* When Jim Elliot was 23 years old, he wrote these words, "Wherever you are, be ALL there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God."

That's the way he lived his life. Whatever he did, he did it to the hilt. He was ALL there. That meant he gave it 100%--whether studying for a college class, or doing Bible study, or praying, or discipling, or wrestling, or just having fun--he was ALL there. He lived out Eccl 9:10, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."

But again, I want to raise that uncomfortable, yet relevant question. *If God has a will for your life, why plan?* What's the point of planning if a sovereign God has a will?

What's the point of spending 4 years in college, of cracking the books to graduate summa cum laude, of learning a foreign language, of developing a plan to reach a lost tribe, if God was going to take him home to heaven at the age of 28 anyway?

Is it God's will for us to make plans? Obviously, we know it is. But how should we go about making plans in a way that pleases God?

Tonight, we want to do a case study in the Bible. We want to investigate the decision-making process of a godly man who definitely yielded his life to God's will, and even eventually gave his life in Christ's service, yet who also made plans.

Our case study character is the apostle Paul. Specifically, we want to investigate the decision-making process Paul went through as described in Romans 15:32. But first, let's back up and retrace our steps...

### Current Series: “Discerning God’s Will”

Week #1: We learned that God's will never contradicts God's Word. To the opposite, God's will is always consistent with God's Word. But what about decisions involving areas where God's Word is silent? We explored that question last time...

Week #2: In Romans 12:1-2, we learned four principles that are key to understanding the will of God.

Principle #1: I must be in the place of Total Surrender to God.

Principle #2: I must be aware of the Conflict of Values.

A. The Will of the World

B. The Will of God

Principle #3: I must emphasize the importance of my Mind, and not my Feelings.

Principle #4: I must evaluate the alternatives with these questions:

- A. Is it Good?
- B. Is it Acceptable to God?
- C. Will it help me be more Mature in Christ?

It's a fact. We all make decisions, a host of them continually. Several years ago, Dr. Erich Klinger at the University of Minnesota conducted a study in which he determined that all of us face between 300 and 17,000 decisions every day! (Robinson, 164-5)

Think through the decisions you make every day. Should I get up when the alarm first goes off *or* hit the snooze button? Should I wear the brown pants or the black ones? Should I shave today or go with the scruffy look? Will it be Pop Tarts for breakfast today or cereal? Do I read from God's Word this morning or am I "too busy"? What route should I take in my drive to work? And once at work there are a ton of decisions... eventually concluding with, what time should I leave work today, and should I take any work home with me? Etc., etc.

All that in one "normal" day!

Now planning is a big part of decision-making. So let's turn to our case study of Paul. We'll begin with a question.

Was Paul in God's will? One of the things that strikes me about Paul is his confidence regarding the will of God. For instance...

1 Cor 1:1 "Paul, called to be an apostle through the will of God"

2 Cor 1:1 "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God"

Eph 1:1 "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God"

Col 1:1 "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God"

2 Tim 1:1 "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God"

Paul knew it was God's will for him to be an apostle. He had no doubts whatsoever about that. He knew he was doing what God wanted him to do.

By the way, do you have confidence that you are doing what God wants you to do occupationally? What motivated you to pursue your vocation? Are you in the job you're in today because of money, or perhaps prestige, or because you know it's the will of God? Thankfully, God's grace abounds so that even if we made a poor choice, or a choice for deficient reasons, He is able to use us where we are and give us great joy if we will surrender our lives to Him and live our lives unto Him.

So Paul could say, "I know I'm in the will of God. I'm doing what God designed me to do."

Yet I would suggest to you that there was another sense in which the will of God was not quite so black and white even to Paul. Let's investigate a specific decision-making opportunity this man of God faced in Rom 15.

READ Romans 15:30-33

## Background of Romans 15

--When Paul wrote Romans, he was in Corinth during his 3rd missionary journey. The year was about 57-58 A.D.

--Paul had never been to Rome , the capital city of the Roman Empire .

--Paul had a great burden to go to Rome and minister there (1:8-12; 15:23).

--Paul had even tried several times to go to Rome , but was prevented (1:13).

Why did Paul want to go to Rome ? A couple of factors influenced this desire. First, he knew it was God's will for him to be an apostle to Gentiles. From the day of his conversion he knew this, based on Acts 9:15, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings..."

A second influencing factor was this. Paul's missionary strategy was to go to the large, strategic urban centers of the Roman Empire . He went to the masses, to Ephesus , to Thessalonica, to Corinth , to Philippi . He expected the people he reached in the urban centers to spread the gospel to the surrounding towns and villages. So you can see why Paul wanted to go to Rome . Rome was the hub of the known world. It was *the key urban center*.

So guess what Paul did? He devised a plan. He reveals his plan in Romans 15. Let's look at the steps involved in Paul's plan:

### **Paul's Plan in Romans 15:**

By this time in his life, Paul had been on 3 missionary journeys. He had gone hundreds, even thousands of miles, taking the gospel to lost people.

Yet Paul operated by a principle, namely, he didn't infringe on someone else's turf. Romans 15:20 "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."

Let's notice Paul's objectives. He operated with two levels of objectives...

#### A. Overall Objectives:

Paul was constantly looking for new, unreached areas needing the gospel. So he developed a two-fold aim which he explains here:

1. *To go minister in unreached Spain (24)*

2. *To stop in Rome on the way (24)*

That was his overall objective, his big agenda. But to accomplish that, there were some intermediate steps, which he also shares in this passage.

#### B. Intermediate Objectives:

Paul mentions three such objectives here...

1. *To leave Corinth and go to Jerusalem (25)*

Why? It wasn't a vacation trip. Rather, his intent was...

2. *To take a benevolent offering from the saints in Greece to the saints in Jerusalem (26)*

An economic recession had hit Palestine . The church in Jerusalem was especially hard hit. In loving response, the churches in Macedonia and Achaia took up an offering to help. Paul coordinated the collection, and was responsible to hand deliver the gift.

Please note this balance. Paul had future plans. He planned to go to Spain . But his future plans didn't interfere with past commitments. Years ago, as recorded in Acts 15, Paul promised the leaders in Jerusalem , he would remember the poor. Here he is, years later, fulfilling that requirement.

There's a simple lesson we need to see here. Some folks are always jumping into new things before they finish the old. They love to make plans and initiate new ventures. They're big on ideas and lacking when it comes to follow through.

Paul had a third intermediate objective...

3. *To leave Jerusalem and head for Spain, via Rome (28)*

Think about it. Those were lofty objectives! Don't underestimate the magnitude of Paul's vision! This was more than a 7 day trip! Take a look at the map in the back of your Bible...

From Corinth to Jerusalem was at least 600 miles. From Jerusalem to Rome would be over 1000 miles. And from Rome to Spain would be at least another 600 miles. And remember, there were no 747's or interstate highways!

So Paul devised a plan, a lofty one at that! God has given us minds. He wants us to use them, in dependence upon Him. It's okay to plan. The Scriptures call us to plan...

Proverbs 12:5 "The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful."

Proverbs 15:22 "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."

Proverbs 16:3 "Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

Proverbs 21:5 "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty."

So we've seen Paul's overall and immediate objectives in planning. Notice thirdly...

C. Paul's Assumptions in his Planning:

Once again what strikes me about Paul's plan is his confidence. Listen to him...

Romans 15:28-29 "So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, *I will go to Spain* and visit you on the way. I know that *when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.*"

Paul's confidence is pretty interesting in light of the impending danger. He indicates...

### *1. He anticipated roadblocks to his plan*

Romans 15:30 "I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me."

Paul knew there could be, and probably would be roadblocks to his plan. He knew there was danger. In fact, he talks about the danger elsewhere in the record of the book of Acts...

Acts 20:22 "I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen"

Acts 21:4 "...urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem"

Acts 21:10-11 "Agabus...Jews will bind you"

What was Paul's attitude towards this possible setback to his plan? Acts 21:13 "I am ready to die in Jerusalem!"

Don't miss that. Paul had plans. He planned to go to Jerusalem, then to Rome, and then to Spain. But his plans were realistic. He knew only God knows the future. Paul operated by another assumption in his planning...

### *2. Prayer was essential.*

Romans 15:30-31 "I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there..." Notice that Paul asked the Romans to pray...

--for him (30)

--for his deliverance from dangerous men (31)

--for an acceptable ministry in Jerusalem (31)

In his commentary on Romans, Ray Stedman stresses the importance of prayer. He says, "Prayer is particularly powerful at this point; it can protect someone in danger. After Paul arrived in Jerusalem, as we learn from the book of Acts, he was set upon by a mob in the temple courts. They were out to kill him right on the spot. They had rocks in their hands and were ready to stone him to death. But at this critical moment, the commander of the Roman legion on the other side of the wall, in the castle of Antonia, looked over into the temple court and saw what was going on. He came down with a band of soldiers and rescued the apostle in the nick of time." (208)

A coincidence? No. Prayer was answered.

### *3. He submitted his plan to the will of God (32).*

Romans 15:3 "...So that *by God's will* I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed." Paul was not presumptuous. He submitted his plans to the good purposes of His sovereign and wise God.

James put it this way in James 4:13-15, “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’”

So that was Paul's plan: to minister in Rome , and then in Spain . Now answer this. Was it God's will for Paul's plan to be accomplished? Yes, and no!

What eventually happened? Well, yes, Paul made it to Rome alright...*in chains*. And apparently, according to tradition, he did make it to Spain ...*after a 3 to 4 year prison term*.

What's the point? What can we learn from this case study of Paul? Let’s discuss that critical question together.

### **Application:**

Discuss: What principles can we learn about Decision-making in this case study?

Allow me to suggest six principles regarding decision-making and the will of God based on this incident from Paul’s life in Romans 15:

1. *It's okay for me to PLAN. God often utilizes our plans to accomplish His will.*

2. *I must make sure my plans reflect God's revealed will.*

Paul knew God had called him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Any plan he made had to be in line with that clear commission.

Let’s consider a present day example. Suppose you are a mother and are trying to decide whether to take a job outside the home. There are many factors in any decision, including this one. For now, let’s just focus on one factor, that is, making sure my plans reflect obedience to God’s revealed will.

Answer this. What did God say is to be the wife's primary responsibility? It’s to her home, right? Where did He say that? Titus 2:4-5 “Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.”

So the question is, will this job opportunity enhance the woman’s ability to fulfill God-given responsibilities, beginning first in the home?

“But I’ll be able to make more money and help with our bills if I take this job.” Meeting financial responsibilities is important, but is generating income God’s *primary* intended purpose for a wife and mother? Those are the kinds of questions we must address and think through biblically if we are to make God-honoring decisions. The fact that “everybody’s doing it” isn’t the criteria. Remember last weeks’ discussion? We must constantly recognize the conflict of values involved in decision making.

3. *I must submit my plans to God's purposes and timing.*

He is sovereign. We aren't.

E.g.—

4. *I must not be intimidated by roadblocks.*

Just because life gets hard doesn't mean I made a decision outside of God's will. The fact that Paul ended up in prison didn't mean he was out of God's will. God was actually preparing to take him to Rome all expenses paid by the Roman government!

The cross of Jesus is the ultimate illustration of this point. Did Jesus obey His Father's will? Perfectly. Yet He suffered and died. Why? Listen to Isaiah 53:10, "Yet it was *the LORD's will to crush him* and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and *the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.*"

5. *Prayer is a vital part of the decision-making process.*

James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should *ask God* who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

6. *I must seek ways to invest my life in God's service.*

Paul didn't just coast home in life. He was constantly thinking, "What can I do to please the Lord with my life?" In our next study (the Lord willing!), we'll discuss a model for decision making.

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[1] These unedited teaching notes are provided for your reading and edification. Pastor Brad Brandt

[2] This series is adapted from a similar series taught at WBC in 1993.