

Ephesians 5:17 "The Will of God and the Word of God" [\[1\]](#)

Series: "Discerning the Will of God"—part 1 [\[2\]](#)

*Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty; Hold me with Thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more,
feed me till I want no more.*

Those are the words of William Williams, in his classic hymn "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah." What a great truth! We serve a God who guides us in life. Joseph Gilmore put it this way:

*He leadeth me, O blessed thought!
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, wher-e'er I be,
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.*

Fanny Crosby penned these words, "All the way my Savior leads me, what have I to ask beside? Can I doubt His tender mercy, who thru life has been my guide?"

We serve a God who guides us, who leads us. But the question is, how does He do it? How does God guide and lead us? How do you find the will of God?

John MacArthur observes (6) that to some people God is like a cosmic Easter bunny who has stashed his will away, like Easter eggs, out of sight. It's up to us to run through life looking for it, and all the while God is up there saying, "You're getting warmer!"

I want you to think about some relevant questions with me:

How do you find the will of God? If we have to find it, does that mean it's lost? How does God reveal His will? Does God have more than one will? Does God's will ever change? Once I get OUT of God's will, can I get back IN? What role does the Word of God have in revealing the Will of God? Why does discovering God's will seem so easy for some people, and not for others?

Have you ever asked those questions? A lot of people have. A lot of people have asked ME questions like those.

With that in mind, tonight we are going to start a new series entitled, "Discerning the Will of God." The Lord willing, we'll take three weeks to explore what the Scriptures teach about this subject (more later, perhaps).

Overview of Potential Questions to be addressed in the Series:

"The Will of God and the Word of God" Ephesians 5:17

"How to Find the Will of God" Romans 12:1-2

"Is There a Center to God's Will?" Romans 15:32

"The Value of Doing the Will of God" I John 2:17

"The Work of the Spirit and the Will of God" Romans 8:27

"The Place of Prayer in the Will of God" Colossians 4:12

Our Goal:

To learn how to discern God's Will in decision-making

Other Resources:

"Decision Making and the Will of God" Gary Friesen

"Found: God's Will" John MacArthur

"Finding God's Will" J. I. Packer

"Right Choices" (RBP Sunday School elective) James Grier

"Decision Making By the Book" Haddon Robinson

Are you in the will of God tonight? Do you know for sure you are? Did you realize that we are commanded to know God's will? Turn to Eph 5:17.

5:17 "Wherefore, be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

The will of God is mandatory for the child of God.

Mk 3:35 "For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."

Rom 12:2 "And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed...will of God."

I Jn 2:17 "And the world passes away...but he that does the will of God abides forever."

Sounds like knowing the will of God is pretty important! How can we understand the will of God?

Main Idea: Tonight we're going to see that the Will of God is revealed in the Word of God.

Perhaps you're thinking, "What are you saying? Do you mean I can look in the Bible and find whether to buy a Chevy or a Ford? Am I supposed to hunt for a verse to tell me whether God wants me to take the job offer or to stay put?"

Key: The will of God is always consistent with the Word of God.

This is foundational. Yet so often overlooked by Christians. If we are going to learn to understand the will of God we need to grasp some basic truths:

Outline:

I. The God of the Bible is a Revealing God.

- A. We serve a God who does not change.
- B. We serve a God who has revealed His Character and His Will. (Heb 1:1-3)
 - 1. He revealed Himself through His Word (1).
 - 2. He revealed Himself through His Son (2).

II. The God of the Bible has revealed His Will in His Word.

- A. God revealed His Will to Adam in Genesis 1-2.
- B. God revealed His Will to Israel in the Law.
 - 1. Perpetually Binding Commands (The Ten Commands)
 - 2. Temporary Binding Commands (Dietary & Ceremonial laws)
- C. God revealed His Will to Disciples in the Sermon on the Mount.
- D. God related His Will for the Church in the Epistles.

Example: I Thes 4:3

I. The God of the Bible is a Revealing God.

A. We serve a God who does not change.

Mal 3:6 "For I am the Lord, I change not." God never changes. That is important. His character remains the same forever. And since He is unchanging, we can count on Him. We can count on what He says.

B. We serve a God who has revealed His Character and His Will. (Heb 1:1-3)

It's incredible when you stop and think about it. The awesome God who created the heavens and the earth, the

All-wise God who fashioned us to be His image-bearer, that King of the Universe is a revealing God. He did not leave us in the dark. He revealed His character and His will to us.

How did He do it? Turn to Hebrews 1.

1. He revealed Himself through His Word (1).

V 1 "God...spoke in time past by the prophets." The prophets. God spoke to the world through OT prophets like Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, and Malachi. Thus saith the Lord. But the climax of His revelation came when?

2. He revealed Himself through His Son (2).

V 2 "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son..." He has SPOKEN to us by His Son. There it is. God spoke to the world, through the prophets, and through His Son. He spoke. Past tense.

Does God still speak today? Special revelation has ceased. God is not revealing Himself in special revelation in our day. He has already given us everything we need for guidance in life. Where? In His written Word, the Old and New Testaments.

II Pet 1:3

Heb 2:1-4

You say, "I don't get it. What does this talk about special revelation have to do with decision making?" Good question!

Here's the connection. When you're facing a decision and you want God's guidance, how do you find it? How can you find out what God wants you to do? Should you look for a sign? Should you listen for a voice?

How does God speak to us today?

Think about it: James Grier (25), "God is not now revealing Himself in special revelation. With the completion of the NT canon, special revelation closed. Whatever demands we make on God to determine His will, we cannot expect Him to reveal His will to us in a direct and immediate way. As we try to understand His will, we may experience a certain feeling, a burden or an inclination, but this is not a mode of special revelation. We are dependent on Scripture, for Scripture alone teaches us what God wants us to do."

Objection: "Wait a minute. What about Gideon? He faced a decision so he put out a fleece. That's the way God directed Gideon to find His will. What do you say about that?"

When did Gideon live? Gideon lived when special revelation was OPEN. When Gideon put out the fleece, he did not have the completed Scriptures. We do.

II. The God of the Bible has revealed His Will in His Word.

What do we mean when we say that God has revealed His will in His Word? Do we mean that He reveals whether to buy a blue car or a red one?

No. God's Word is like a grid. Through that grid we pour every decision. God reveals His moral will in His Word.

A. God revealed His Will to Adam in Genesis 1-2.

God gave Adam several commands. Before Adam sinned, God revealed His moral will for Adam. For example:

--He told Adam to develop the earth (1:28). What guidance does this give us when it comes to decisions affecting the environment?

--God told Adam to procreate (1:28). Do you think this moral command has anything to say to a couple that makes the decision not to have children because children would interfere with their career?

--God told Adam that marriage was permanent (2:23-24). Do you think this admonition would apply to couples today contemplating divorce?

Remember God does not change. He gave Adam these commands BEFORE sin entered the world.

God also gave Adam one negative moral command. What was it? 2:17 "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil..." Did Adam obey God's moral will? No.

Centuries later, God formed a nation for Himself. Israel . He chose to reveal Himself to the world through this nation. How did God do it? He redeemed Israel from Egypt , and entered into a covenant relationship with them at Mt. Sinai . There at Sinai...

B. God revealed His Will to Israel in the Law.

Why did God give Israel the Law? So they could earn salvation? No.

He gave them the Law to reveal His character to them. And in giving the Law, God showed His people how He expected them to live. His Law was to govern their conduct.

Key Distinction: The Law included 2 kinds of commands...

1. Perpetually Binding Commands (The Ten Commands)

See: Ex 20:1-17 The first four commands have to do with a person's relationship with God (No other gods. No carved images. No swearing. Keep the sabbath). The other six have to do with a person's responsibilities in society (Honor parents. No murder. No adultery. No stealing. No false witness. No coveting.).

Think of the commands like a fence. God said, "These commands are the boundry of My covenant with you. Stay within that fence and you'll experience Life. Go beyond the fence and you'll experience Death. Obey My commands, and you'll live. Disobey My commands, and you'll die."

The 10 Commands reveal God's Moral will. They tell us how to relate to God, and how to relate to other people. God gave Israel another category of commands.

2. *Temporary Binding Commands (Dietary & Ceremonial laws)*

Ex 23:4 "If you meet your enemies ox...take it back to him."

Ex 23:10 "Six years sow thy land...but the seventh year let it rest."

Ex 23:17 "Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord."

Are we to keep these commands? No. These were temporary binding commands. They could be kept only by the nation of Israel when living in the Promised Land.

So part of God's Law given to Israel was perpetual. Another part was temporary. In fact, years later, Jesus made it clear that He had not come to set aside God's Moral Law which God revealed through Moses.

C. God revealed His Will to Disciples in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus applied God's Moral Law to His disciples in Mt 5-7. In fact, He broadened the Law to include not only the outward act, but also the inward intention.

5:21-22 "Thou shalt not kill...But I say, Don't be angry with your brother w/o cause."

5:27-28 "Don't commit adultery...But I say, Don't lust."

What's Jesus' point? It's always God's will for us to obey God's revealed Word. That never changes. It's never right to violate God's revealed commands when making a decision.

D. God related His Will for the Church in the Epistles.

The epistles are those letters written to specific local churches by apostles like Paul, John, and Peter. Do you know what we find in the epistles?

The epistles relate God's moral will to followers of Christ in local churches. The epistles tell us that we have a moral obligation to honor God with our lives. We are to love God, and to love one another. In fact...

Rom 13:8 tells us, "He that loves another has fulfilled the law."

Rom 13:10, "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

Love doesn't cancel God's Law. Love fulfills God's Law.

Let's look at one specific example.

Eg--I Thes 4:3

I Th 4:3 "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication."

Notice that. This IS the will of God. The will of God is always consistent with the Word of God. Fornication has always been, and will always be, a violation of God's moral law. Since that is true, fornication will always be out of God's Will for the child of God.

Here's the point. God's Will for us is always consistent with God's Word.

You say, "Sounds pretty basic. Why are you spending so much time on it?" Because though it's basic, I'm amazed at how often people who call themselves Bible-believing Christians violate this basic when it comes to decision-making.

Suppose a friend comes to you and says, "Pete, I just don't love my wife any more. We're not compatible. But I've found someone else that I really love. I know God doesn't want me to be miserable. I've prayed about it. God made it clear to me that it's His will for me to divorce my wife, and marry this other person. What do you think?"

How would you respond? With a few questions.

1. Does God ever change His mind or contradict Himself? No.
2. Didn't God already reveal His Will in the Bible, and tell us that marriage is permanent, till death do us part? Yes.
3. Does God say anywhere in the Bible that divorce is permissible on the grounds of "not being compatible." No.
4. If God doesn't permit divorce on those grounds, and if God does make it clear that marriage is "till death do us part," how could it be God's will that you chuck your wife for this other person?

Response: "Well, I just don't feel anything towards her anymore."

Are we supposed to base our decisions on what we FEEL or on what we KNOW to be true?

Suppose a friend comes to you and says, "Hey, I hear you just bought Steve Green's recent cassette tape. Mind if I borrow it and make a copy so I can listen to it in my car?" You've got a decision to make. What is God's will for you in that situation?

Will God's will ever contradict God's Word? No.

Does God's Word talk about cassette tapes? No.

Does God's Word talk about civil laws? Yes.

What does God's Word say about civil laws?

Rom 13:1 "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers (gov't).

I Pt 2:13 "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake..."

Are there any civil laws that apply in this situation? Copy write laws.

How do we determine the will of God when there are no direct statements in Scripture? We'll begin to work on that next time.

[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.