

Divine Guidance Is So Crucial!

Number One

Knowing and Doing God's Will

In our world there are so many complexities, so many things to choose from, so many opportunities that knowing the will of God at times is very difficult. When I graduated from Bible College in 1956, before us were four different places I could have gone, or at least knocked on the door to see if it was open as God's will. What do I do? Which is God's will? Will I have God's peace in doing a certain thing? (Col. 3:15-17)

Many saved individuals want to do right. They want to do what God desires and might express it in the statement, "I'd be willing to do right, if I only knew what it was!" God gives us many directives toward knowing His will. Not only is there biblical guidance, but also His providential guidance. There is God's *preceptive* will (if I may call it by that name) and His *directive* will. There is what we ought to do (what His word teaches us), and what He will certainly bring to pass to direct us if we wait on Him.

There Are Important Questions That We Face Every Day of Our Lives:

What is His will in any given matter? And, do we want to know the will of God in order to do it, or just to consider it? Do we have a will of our own, and just want His rubber stamp in what we already plan to do?

There Is Biblical Guidance to Accept: (Prov. 3:5,6; John 15:13)

The Holy Spirit is the author of guidance in a very real sense. He indicates to us the will of God for life. (John 14:26) He is the One who would guide us into all truth (and that naturally includes God's will). The sons of God are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14). The Word of God is replete with instructions and principles that give direction. If we are truly in the Scriptures, and seek by the Holy Spirit's direction what we are to do -- we will know in due time, if we wait on the Lord. But we must have no will of our own, and be willing for God to bring any kind of test or trial in our lives. (Prov. 3:5,6) We are to be submitted to God in life or death, in good or ill, and often this is the real issue. As God tested Israel, so He will test us to see if we truly trust Him, and walk by faith.

There is obviously moral guidance from the Word of God and by our own consciences. We don't have to wonder about many things. Many choices are obviously right or wrong. If we study the words of Christ, the New Testament Epistles, and all the other clear directives in the Word of God we would not be bewildered about knowing God's will. The Holy Spirit gives us many clear-cut examples and principles throughout the Word of God for situations which we face.

The Word of God must be studied, accepted and followed. We must know it thoroughly, if we are to find the Spirit's guidance. He does not teach one person for example, that smoking is alright and to another it is wrong. We can't expect His precious guidance to fill in for our laziness. The Holy Spirit guides by our obedience to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit will not do apart from the Word, what He has already done through giving us the Word of God. (II Tim. 2:15) The Scriptures are the infallible guide for our lives. If we don't know what to do, possibly our problem is we have not search God's Word, nor waited upon God to reveal it to us through the Word and His providential leading.

The Scriptures must illumine our minds and hearts. When we read the Spirit's guide book, (the Word of God) it must be with a mind and heart that is sanctified, and illuminated by the Spirit. There must be a keen desire from the heart to walk in obedience, in submission to the expressed and implied will of God as noted in the pages of the Scriptures. When we seek to do His will consistently, and learn how to discern His will, it becomes a more natural thing to ascertain His will for our lives.

The Word of God must be applied to the realm of liberty. Often there are two or more alternatives, choices to make and this is not between things right or wrong, but between different alternatives. Perhaps we face such things as: Do I take this subject in school or another? Do we vacation one place or another? Do I date this person or marry this person or wait for God's direction for another? Should I take this Sunday School class or be a deacon, or both? Now, I firmly believe God has the right thing for me to do -- His will for me. It does make a difference who I marry, where I attend college, what my major might be, etc. And this perfect will of God is something to be decided every day of our lives. As we get older, it may become more obvious what His will is for us, as many milestones and major decisions are in the past. God says to us: "*Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" (Eph. 5:17) We are to stand in will of God (Col. 4:12).

It is wise if we would engage all our faculties in studying various factors, in praying for wisdom in His will (James 1:5-8) and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the choices of life. Ask the Lord to control all the circumstances of life in order to move you into His will. (Rom. 8:28, 29) I trust you will thoroughly study the things we will be sharing about knowing and doing the will of God.

Lesson Two

Errors to Avoid in Seeking God's Will

In knowing God's will there are some basic principles that are to be observed. We want to look at some of these.

We must be careful to always seek God's glory in all things.

In I Corinthians 10:13, 14 we read: "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles nor to the church of God.*" Somewhat similar to this is the verse in Colossians 3:17 that reads: "*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*"

When we study these verses we note 1) we must actively seek after, or do only those things that bring glory to God, 2) be aware if we will in any way bring offense to saved or to unsaved, 3) that all words and deeds in which we engage will be done only in His name, and 4) that we are to give thanks for all things. (Eph. 5:20; I Thess. 5:18). In the very act of giving thanks for everything we must have already placed everything about life in God's hands to do as He sees fit. Thus, we actively thank Him for the good and the ill of life. Giving Him thanks for trials frees us to accept His providential dealings with our lives, teaching us by the things He allows or brings into our lives.

We must not lean on circumstances only.

Here I want to share the thinking of some people in the ways they ascertained the will of God. Our pastor, in my early years of knowing the Lord, was discouraged, (maybe

other things were also involved, I don't know) and wondered if he ought to resign the Bible Baptist Church in Columbus, NE. He decided if they (a family of three) slept in until 9 A.M. it was a sign the he should resign. They always were very early risers, like 5 A.M. They slept in that particular morning until after nine, so he resigned very soon after that. He took that as God's sign to them that he should leave the church. Can Satan also cause a person or persons to sleep late? Did this open them to a wrong decision? The church was never the same, many horrible things took place when they called the next preacher. I have always doubted that he was in the will of God through such guidance.

One person said to himself, *"If I see a 6 foot sign with the letters, INDIA, then I will know I am to be a missionary in India."* Another reasoned that if he led a certain person to Christ with whom he was working, then he was to marry a certain young lady. Some have opened their Bible at random, blindly pointing at a verse, and on that basis made a decision.

By irrational arbitrariness one can go astray. Self deception comes from looking to circumstances as the major source of wisdom in making choices in life. It is true that God leads us by His providential working and guidance, but that does not stand alone as the source of wisdom in making choices. Indeed Joseph was at the right place at the right time, doing the right thing, and God controlled the details of his life -- but Joseph must have had a yielded heart prior to all the events that took place as a result of being sold into slavery. And it is obvious that he had a deep trust in the LORD concerning events over which he had no control.

We must not seek some special revelation.

God has given to us His final complete revelation, the Word of God. (II Tim 3:15, 16) And the Holy Spirit is in our lives to give illumination and direction from the Word. That necessitates our obedience more than anything else. To look for some special revelation, or to read the Word of God and then sit in a trance, putting thinking and reasoning into neutral is to open oneself to error and to Satan's workings. We are not to wait for some new revelation or a special moving of the Spirit, but we are to obediently do what God's Word says. (We should often read Psalm 19:7-14.)

The Holy Spirit uses His Word to prompt, to guide, to urge us about our decisions. If we think the Holy Spirit has led us in a certain direction out of inner impressions, hunches or mental impulses -- we had better be sure the Word of God is also clear about the choice we are planning to make. We will never be impressed to do something that is outside the direct commands and leadership of the Scriptures. As an example: more than once in life, as a pastor, (etc.) I have left my office or whatever I was doing, feeling much impressed to make a visit or call at that time on a certain individual or family. Most always the need and results revealed I was in His will in going. But then, the going was already a command of God. Then "when" should or can be obviously led of God was well.

It must be our desire to stand perfect and complete in the will of God. To stand mainstream in God's will is a blessed joy in the Christian life. May it be yours as well. (Col. 4:12; Psa. 37:23)

Knowing and Doing God's Will

(Col. 1:9; 4:12; Eph. 5:17; 6:6)

The Bible has a lot to say about knowing the will of God. There are few things more important in the life of a Christian than knowing God's will in all things. This includes God's commands, principles of the Word, promises, examples, etc., which are to be lived out in daily life. His will is that we might adorn His doctrine. (Titus 2:10-14; Romans 12:1,2)

No matter how much we pray; how much you give, do, serve, or are busy in activities for the Lord, if we are not in His will it avails but very little. Now the will of God for every unsaved person is clearly taught in Scripture as well. It is clear that he needs to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the price for sin that man could not pay. (Acts 20:21; 16:30,31; John 3:36).

If you know the stories of the following then when I ask this question you will see the importance of God's will. What if the following had not done the will of God? Moses, Noah, Abraham, Daniel, Joseph, Elijah, Elisha, David, and on and on we could list names. It isn't they were perfect, but they did seek to do that to which God called them.

One reason Christians have troubles, like physical breakdowns, as well as mental depression, disappointments, discouragements, etc., can be due to their failure to live within the confines of God's will. Outside the will of God the strains and trials of life will overwhelm us. God does not honor, or bless or sanction disobedience to His will. We need to know and do His will. It is very difficult to have trials and testings when we have no assurance that we are in His will.

To Understand the Will of God Is Your Problem:

The worse thing that can happen to a man, woman, or youth saved by the grace of God, is for God to allow you to have what you want when it is outside the will of God. The worse thing is to have our own way and be outside His will. I think at times God allows us to do what we want as He did Jonah even though it is to our own hurt.

Surely, since God wants me to know His will, He will not allow me to be in the dark, but will give adequate guidance to know and do His will. From Proverbs 3:5,6 it is clear we can know the will of God. How? Through His Word (II Tim. 3:15,16; II Tim. 2:15) which He will use to reveal His plan and purpose for me. Through the Holy Spirit's leading, giving inner peace about God's direction in my life. (I Cor. 2:9-13) And through God people who can give me counsel, and also through the circumstances of life that only God can bring about in my life. So I must understand the will of God before I can do it. Then I must desire to DO His will before He will reveal it to me. (Psa. 32:8; Prov. 3:5,6; Rom. 12:1,2)

To Undertake the Will of God Is Your Privilege:

What a great privilege and joy or delight we have when we do His will. And what a miserable life a Christian has outside God's will. Colossians 4:12 is one of my favorite verses. To stand in the river of the known will of God is to stand in the place of fruitfulness and joy. (Psa. 1:1-3)

Satan will oppose you at every turn as he is against any person who wants to know and do the will of God. Satan will oppose those who pray that God will make known His

will; who seek to obey His Word, to study it and to know and do the will of God. (Rom. 12:1,2)

The flesh, the carnal nature, will oppose and challenge you about doing the will of God. Self will always take the line of least resistance. Self (our sinful self-centered heart) will want its own way. (Luke 9:23; Matt. 16:24,25)

There will be people around you who will oppose you, and challenge you about what you are about to do, or plan to do which you know to be God's will. Your grandparents may well oppose your choices for the Lord. Or parents may often remind their youth about what they want them to do in life. As one man said to me when I had just graduated from Bible College in 1956, *Why move to Wyoming and take that church, you will starve to death. You don't want to move there.* My parents had expected me, the oldest boy, to take over the farm in Nebraska and were not very thrilled that I would be moving away with our family.

To Undercut the Will of God Is Your Peril:

Oh, the sorry and hurt that Samson experienced as he pushed aside the will of God for his life. What a terrible loss took place because of his lust and driving motivation to do what self and sin desired. He found himself in the place of God's chastening.

King Saul knew the expressed will of God for it had been clearly revealed as messages were given to him by God's prophet, Samuel. The king had no excuse, but his own stubborn determination to do as he pleased. It was a terrible end to die on the battlefield outside God's good hand on his life. Then what about David's failures and Solomon's? The Word of God has many examples of the price people paid when they undercut the will of God, yes, it was to their own peril.

Surely God expects more of each one of us! With His revelation, the Word forever settle in heaven, that will never pass away, we can readily know His will. In humility and contrition on our part God will gloriously lead us in His divine plans for our lives. May you know the joy and privilege of it!

Lesson Four

Who Is Your Master? (Rom. 6:14-22; 6:13; I Cor. 6:19, 10)

What fundamentally is the Christian life?

What, after all, IS a Christian? He is a blood-bought individually who no longer belongs to himself! There is one single word that Paul used more than any other, a statement that he made about himself that is at the core of knowing and doing the will of God. It was at the core of Paul's being and service to God. The expression occurred over and over again as Paul loved to use it, he attached himself to this term. He spoke of himself as "A **servant** of Jesus Christ," or *His servant.*" Paul used the Greek term, "**doulos**," which means "*to bind a slave, the lowest term of servitude, or one who gives himself up to the will of another,*" to simplify, "*to be bondage to another.*" (read and consider: I Cor 7:22-23; Rom. 6:16, 18-22; Rom. 1:1; Eph. 6:6; Phil. 1:1; Col. 4:12) We are Christ's freemen, although we are his bond-servants.

What does being a slave to Christ truly mean?

As Paul spoke of himself being a bond-slave, what did he mean? As lost souls we all had been slaves to sin, slaves to our wicked, adamic, deceitful heart. Christ died to not only give us salvation but to set us free from the corruption and bondage of sin. He died to set us free from sinful self, the world and Satan's control. (consider Gal. 1:4; Heb. 2:14; I John 3:8; John 8:32-36; 16:33)

We have been set free to be **released** to a new Master: a loving, eternal heavenly Father, the Son of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We do not belong to ourselves, we have been purchased by the death and resurrection of the Son of God. We now belong to the Lord. Our talents, time, worldly goods, bodies, minds, hearts, intellects, possession, children, spouse, yes, everything belongs to Him, and we are to live out the will of God -- His clear directions for our life.

We hold dear all we normally set our affection on. But it all belongs to Him, and we are to seek first the Kingdom of God, and all our needs will be added unto us. We are to seek after heavenly things, set our affection on things above and live with eternity in view. (Matt. 6:33; Col. 3:1-3) The living out of the will of God hinges on our attitude and submission to the truth -- we are not our own at all, in any way. And death to self is perhaps our greatest battle.

We are not worth anything in ourselves, for our worth is bound up in what He has done for us, and to whom we now belong. Our worth to Him is surely bound up in the extent to which we surrender, consecrate all to Him. (II Cor. 5:14,15) His transaction of love on the Cross purchased us for eternity. We must enter into the volitional act of turning everything over to Him, and then to live in the light of that act! Doing the will of God, (and all that I have shared about this subject in the three earlier studies), hinges totally upon our submission.

What about the will of the bond-slave? How should we respond?

Paul spoke of *bringing himself under*, of bringing himself into bondage to Christ and not to allow self to reign. (I Cor. 9:19) Paul understood being a bond-slave meant that he was not free to make his own choices, nor direct his own life, choose his own work or way, place of residence, ministry, etc. Well, we say, "*That is different, that has to do with Paul, and he was especially called.*" We who are saved, are all called -- not to fulfill our own purpose, but His purpose. (II Tim. 1:9 is an awesome verse.)

In slavery there was no limitation in the control of the master. In the days of the Roman Empire, the number of slaves was tremendous. The life of the slave was not his own in any way but was to be lived in continuous, obedient, servitude. He was not a free man, whereas for Paul he knew what freedom meant as a Roman citizen for he was free-born.

This relationship of being a bond-slave to a perfect Master ought to be considered a great privilege. We have a Master who loves us perfectly, constantly, unconditionally, and yielding to such a Lord and Master ought to be perfect delight. Why do we struggle? Why do we find it such a hard thing to do? Is it still the spirit of Satan, wanting our own will? Oh, that we would meditate and pray about this, and allow Him to be Lord and change our attitude about it all. As Dr. Bob Jones Sr., used to say, "**Anything can be changed, if we have a change of attitude.**" **We must yield to the truth of the Word of God!**

Discipline In Decisions

We all recognize that ours is an undisciplined age. The old disciplines have broken down for the most part. The discipline of the home, of the schoolroom, and in our nation in so many ways no longer exists. We don't see much of the rugged strength of Christian character which comes from the discipline of spirit, mind and body.

Perhaps many or some of us are at decision's crossroads. It may all seem so trivial, but life is made up of many seemingly trivial things. And you are not apt to come to these crossroads again. Perhaps you feel the need of guidance from the One who knows the beginning from the end. The scriptures give abundant promises to the trusting Christian who believes God and takes Him at His word. In Psalm 32:8, David wrote about God as the one who would say to us: *"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way thou shalt go, I will guide thee with mine eye."* In Psalm 25:9 we read: *"The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way."*

There Must Be the Willingness to Ask for Guidance:

The prophets of old who were God's spokesmen, the great godly kings of Israel, and others whom God called deeply desired God's guidance and hand on their lives. In Jeremiah 42:1-3 we read the following: *"Then all the captains of the forces, and Jonathan... and Jezaniah... and all the people from the least unto the greatest, came near, And said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the LORD our God, even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) That the LORD thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do."* In the extremity of their need, they call out for Jeremiah to pray for them to know God's way and the thing they were to do. If always in all things sought God's direction would He not give it?

Willingly seeking God's will is seen many times in the Word of God. I think of Moses as he called to God at the Red Sea for what he should do. We could study Joshua's attitude as they came to the river Jordan, or Ruth in Bethlehem, David in the wilderness, Nehemiah at the Persia court, or Paul on board the storm-tossed ship. Being willing to ask and seek God for guidance implies honesty, sincerity, desiring to obey, asking in faith and a committal unto God's guidance and will. God gives us blessed assurance that He will guide.

There Must Be Willingness to Wait Upon God:

Do we have the patience to wait? Waiting often sifts our values, and helps us to face the value of the thing or things we are asking for. In the midst of waiting, circumstances often change and we change that for which we are praying. In the process of waiting we find our objectives being altered because of what God is doing over the process of time. Waiting is so crucial, and yet waiting we find so difficult to do. It reveals our impatience and our desire to have our own way, NOW.

Strength and courage come from waiting, and character is build as we wait upon the Lord. In Isaiah 40:31 we read: *"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint."* Is this what we need?

Then in Isaiah 30:18 we read: "*And therefore **will the Lord wait**, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.*"

And There Must Be a Willingness to Obey God's Guidance:

Obedience will easily be given IF we live as His bond-slaves, purchased by the blood of Christ, recognizing we are not our own but are left here on earth to carry out His will. Obedience is a natural outcome of a yielded heart and will. It ought to be the normal of every Christian's life! If we are walking in the Spirit and not the flesh, obeying will be a natural outcome and we will say that we delight in His way. (Psalm 37:23) For the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord!

There is a very interesting and sad section of Scripture in Jeremiah 42 and 43. The Israelites who were a remnant after some of the captivities has taken place, secretly wanted to leave Palestine and go into Egypt. They did not trust God to spare them from the King of Babylon. They were not willing to accept Jeremiah's words as from God and determined not to obey even though God warned them about His judgment in Egypt (42:15-22). How sad was their end! Oh, the dismay that disobedience can bring to the life!

Disobedience always brings sorrow, loss, pain, suffering and possible judgment as well. May the Lord give us special grace to obey Him. (Romans 6:16-18)

Lesson Six

More Thoughts About God's Will (Jer. 10:23 24; Col. 2:6,7; Psa. 25:9)

Will God give us some miraculous or supernatural way to show us His will? We read in the Old Testament especially that God appeared in miraculous ways to men, spoke to them in audible voice and we may wish He would come to us in a similar way. When we reflect on Abraham's life, or Moses, Gideon, Samuel, etc., we may wish we had such encounters with the Lord. Must we expect something like this, or wish for it?

We need to be reminded that God has given us a supernatural book, supernaturally given to us. And we who are saved have the precious indwelling Holy Spirit to illuminate our hearts, direct our steps, and give us understanding of the will of God. We have a complete revelation, verbally inspired, so God usually does not resort to the supernatural to reveal His will to us. We know He did for Paul, Peter and some others in the New Testament prior to the completion of the writing of the sacred Scriptures. Now He expects us to study the Book (II Tim. 2:15)

One of the great factors involved in the determination of the divine will is time. It takes time, there is no short cut to the royal road to guidance. We are taught in God's school how to ascertain the will of God but we must be faithful in that school with an open heart and obedient will. Without our growth spiritually, being rooted and grounded in the Word of God, we will fail to be consistent in our walk in His will. (Col. 2:6,7; Gal. 5:16,17)

Guidance is one of the severest tests of the Christian's walk as it touches every point of our lives. (Psa. 1:6; *The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way* (Psa. 25:9). (What area of our lives is not touched by knowing and

living out His will? It is for us to realize the seriousness of failure in this aspect of the Christian walk. We are told that *the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord* (Psa. 37:23). God expects to *prove that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God* (Rom 12:12) Since He calls it his good, acceptable and perfect will, then knowing and doing His will is a very critical aspect of our lives. Our daily actions, doings, decisions, words, testimony, and many other aspects of life come within this picture.

God leads one step at a time. (Psa. 37:23) This verse has been a special blessing to me. To trust the Lord a step at a time means to wait upon the Lord for His direction. (Psa. 27:14) In application to my own life, it means I must not run ahead of the Lord, but trust Him for the way through the wilderness of this world. When I can't see beyond today, and I don't know what is the next step, to trust explicitly that the Lord will guide in His way. (Prov. 3:5,6) This is not always easily done. Proverbs 16:9 says: *A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.* To balance what the Word of God teaches I must all do that which is before me with all my might. (Eccl. 9:10) In many situations I must work at what is before me as if it all depended upon me, but fully trust, for in the end it all depends upon my heavenly Father. Trusting does not mean setting in limbo expecting God to bring everything to me without my part of industrious labor. In Psalm 119:133 we read: *Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.* God has promised in Proverbs 8:20, *I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment.*

I close this study of six lessons with this from Jeremiah 10:23,24: *O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment: not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.*

May we each learn how to ascertain God's will and walk in it with joy and anticipation of His leadership and the blessing of fulfillment in our lives. God bless you richly.