

Discerning God's Leading - 1

(material adapted from Kevin T. Bauder)

The problem: Christians do not agree about “how God’s will works.” In fact, Christians do not even agree that God has an individual will that He wants each believer to follow. Second, those who think that God does have an individual will don’t always agree about how they should discover it or how it should guide their lives. Others confuse God’s will with some purely subjective sense or feeling. They make their choices because they “feel led” or “have peace” about it.

- 1. What are some ways you have heard people talk about God’s will? Which do you think are biblical? Which do you think are not?*
- 2. How have you tried to discern God’s leading in your life?*
- 2. Have you ever faced a decision in which you felt that you had no idea what God’s will might be? How did you finally make that decision?*

God’s Providential Will

God knows not only every event that occurs, but also every event that will occur. Sometimes He causes those events directly. Other times He causes them indirectly by permitting bad things to happen. If He wished, He could prevent those bad events. Consequently, whatever happens is within His providential will. At some level we can say, “This is God’s will for me,” even when we are facing persecution or dreadful calamity. We are never outside of God’s providential will. We cannot be.

Providence, however, is hidden. We usually don’t see God’s intentions as quickly or as clearly as we see the events themselves. Under normal circumstances, we can’t perceive how those events—especially the calamitous ones—fit into God’s plan. That is why theologians often refer to God’s providential will as His *hidden* or *secret* will. Sometimes they also call it His *permissive* will, because He chooses to permit evil that He does not directly cause. God’s providential will encompasses the life of every believer. The events of our lives always occur within God’s will, arranged by Him before the foundation of the world. These events always work together for good for those who love God, i.e., those who are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). Because it is secret, however, this providential will of God cannot be known in advance. It is found only in events as they occur, and it may not be understood until we are actually living in the presence of God.

- 1. Can you think of other biblical examples in which a sinful human being—or even a sinning spirit being—intended evil, but God turned it into good?*
- 2. Have you personally ever experienced calamitous circumstances that God turned around and used for good?*
- 3. Why can’t we use God’s providential (secret, hidden, or permissive) will to find guidance in our decisions?*

Should individual believers try to seek God's will for their lives at all? Some prominent theologians argue that we should not. They sometimes charge that if we ask for specific direction from God, then we are really asking for additional revelation beyond Scripture. To seek additional revelation, they insist, would be to deny the sufficiency of Scripture. Instead, they argue that the Bible provides all the principles that we need to make wise choices under every circumstance. Consequently, they claim that we do not need to know God's will specifically. Instead, we must simply exercise wisdom in our choices. For these people, any choice that we make using biblical wisdom is within God's will.

When the stakes are very high and all choices seem bad, we yearn to ask God to help us find a way forward. We recognize the fragility of our own wisdom, even if it is informed by the Scriptures. We long for some level of divine guidance and direction. This longing is no less genuine if we recognize that the Bible has a back cover and that God is no longer granting new revelations. The question is whether God could somehow provide guidance for His children without endangering the finality and sufficiency of Scripture.

I believe the answer to that question is *yes*. If God knows and desires what is best for each believer, then He will not turn away when His people cry out to Him for help. He has provided a way in which each of His children can face choices with confidence that their Father will direct their paths (Prov 3:5-6).

Three False Methods:

- 1) Fleeces
- 2) Expecting additional revelation
- 3) Bibliomancy It involves opening the Bible, reading a verse (perhaps at random), and expecting that verse to reveal the will of God in answer to our question.

1. Why would people seek God's will through signs, tests, and "fleeces?" Why would they engage in bibliomancy?

2. Have you ever heard people claim that God was leading them to do something that you knew to be against Scripture? Why did they think that God was leading them?

Principle One: God's will always accords with Scripture rightly understood.

Whatever other tools or techniques one uses to discern God's direction, the Bible always has the final word. God will never lead contrary to His revealed will in the Bible.