

## **What Is the Will of God For My Life?, 1**

How many times have you asked that question? What is God's will for my life? Or how often have you asked, what is God's will in regards to who I marry? What is God's will with regard what career choice I make?

Why do we want to know God's will? I think there are three possibilities:

1) Firstly, we are simply curious. Given the choice, we'd like to know the future. There's a deceitful part of us that would also like to see if God's plan for us is what we'd personally like or not.

2) There is a part of us that does not like decision-making. We fight on the one hand to make our own decisions, but when we get that right, we groan under the weight of the decision. Part of it is laziness, a slothfulness to research, gather information, ask people, and above all, diligently read the Bible for answers. It just seems like too much work in our automatic, press-a-button age. So we are lazy to pay the price necessary.

3) Also, there is fear. Fear that we will make the wrong decisions. We genuinely want to do right, but are often paralysed with the fear that if we make a wrong move, our life will go tumbling down in the wrong direction. So fear and laziness cause us to shy away from decision-making, and that is often what people mean when they say, "What is God's will for my life?" They mean, "I wish God would just make the decision for me, and let me know what it is."

But as we are going to see, God's will is at once revealed and hidden; it is at the same time something we are commanded to know, and part of it we are told to not even ask for. Sounds confusing? Let's see what the Bible has to say about God's will for your life.

Firstly, let's say that people often have a lot of poor methods for discerning God's will. Most of them are what we call mystical. Mysticism is interpreting life through experience. So for instance, a person is debating whether to drive or fly to his holiday destination. Just then a bird flies over, and he says, "Yes! That's God's way of saying I must fly there!" Or a girl is praying, "Lord, show me if my boyfriend is the man you want me to marry." And just then he phones. She concludes it was God's way of saying "Yes".

Now, as you can imagine, this is extremely dangerous. Circumstances are something that can be interpreted in many different ways by different people. In fact, your mood will probably shape a lot of how you interpret the circumstance. God can and does use circumstances to direct us, but only in a secondary sense. Christians love talking about the open and closed door. God opened the door, and so I went. Or God closed the door, so I didn't go. Again, that is living life mystically. Perhaps what looks like a closed door is God's way of testing your persistence. Perhaps the open door is a diversion from what God really wants you to do. Obviously, we are getting nowhere if we simply try to discern God's will through circumstances. God may close doors, but you will see that the door is closed after having applied all of the other principles that we will see. Jonah is a good example. Jonah knew God's will, go to Nineveh. Now the fact that there was a ship available going to Tarsus did not mean God had changed His mind. It would've been ridiculous for Jonah to say, "Oh, here is a boat going to Tarsus, God has opened the

door”. On the other hand, when God stirred up a storm, it was His way of showing Jonah that he truly was going in the wrong direction. The point is, like Jonah we need to have something objective to follow, and not pretend to interpret our circumstances.

Even more dangerous, someone comes up to you and says, I got a word from God, a vision, a message that says you are to become a missionary to Upper Volta next year. God told me.” To that, I would suggest you reply, “Thank you. I’ll wait for God to tell me that Himself before I go.” Be very careful of people who take upon themselves the place of speaking directly for God, but will not accept the mantle of 100% accuracy that God’s Word demands of a true prophet in Deuteronomy 18:20-22.

Another way people try to discern God’s will is through their emotions. They say, I prayed about it, and I have peace. Again, this is dangerous because it becomes extremely subjective. You may have peace about something that is wrong, as strange as it seems. If you are looking for a magically tranquil feeling to direct you, beware that your deceitful heart doesn’t give you that when you think about the decision that appeals to your selfish heart the most.

Paul tells us to pray, and says the peace of God will keep our hearts in Christ. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, a state of rest and contentment, that should be our experience whenever we are Spirit-controlled, not a way of divining if decisions are Biblical. People say, “that witnesses with my spirit”, and by that I think they mean they feel something inside which seems to agree with them. A particular false teaching tells you to look for a burning in your bosom to tell if something is true or not. But what if what you have been taught is warped, faulty or downright wrong? Then your feeling inside you will be off too. What if you have heartburn just at the time you are presented with a false option? Again, we definitely need something more objective than our feelings and our circumstances, and the state of our stomach.

Now when it comes to the will of God, there are three things to do: obey the revealed will of God, don’t worry about His secret will, and apply Biblical wisdom to our decision-making. God has a revealed will, revealed in the Word. This He expects us to follow. He has a secret will, which He is not going to reveal to us, this we are expected to leave to Him to know. And finally, when we are obeying the revealed will of God, we can apply Biblical wisdom to the details of our lives, who to marry, where to live etc.

Now how do we know that God has a revealed will and a secret will?

Deuteronomy 29:29 : “The secret *things* belong unto the LORD our God: but those *things which* are revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law.” Moses says, the secret things belong to God, but the revealed things belong to us and our children. There is knowledge that God alone has, and has chosen not to share it with us, and there is knowledge that is widely available for all His children.

Notice the words ‘that we may do all the words of this law’. God’s revealed will is found in His Word. Those who say God will direct you apart from His Word are lying to you.

God will never contradict Himself. Moreover, God will not be redundant, He will not need a prophet to say, what a prophet already wrote. God gifts the body of Christ with teachers to expound what He has already said. That is why Jude speaks of the faith 'once delivered' unto the saints.

So, God's revealed will is found in the Word. If you focus on obeying His revealed will, the details of your life will come together.

So what is His revealed will?

Firstly, it is that you be **saved**. I Timothy 2:3-4 "For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; <sup>4</sup>Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth". God wants you to be saved. It is His will. In 2 Peter 3:9, Peter says that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." In James 1:18, we are told "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." To be in God's will, you must first be saved. To exist in unbelief, you are actually in a state of rebellion to God's will. You are resisting Him that is speaking, and according to John 3:18 and verse 36, you are in a state of condemnation. An unbeliever cannot begin to discern God's will for Him, because he has not entered the sphere of submission to God, which begins with salvation. God's desire is that you repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and Lord and Saviour. 'Saved' is a Biblical term, and despite what others may tell you, growing up in a church does not make you saved. There is an event that must occur when you have reached an age of understanding, where you can personally repent and trust Christ. That's the first step of obeying God's revealed will.

The next mention of God's revealed will is found in Ephesians 5:17-18 : "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*. <sup>18</sup>And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;" Now that's a really striking verse. It says that to be ignorant of God's will is to be unwise, to be foolish. So much for the theory that you can never know God's will. God's revealed will is so plain that He says if you don't know it, you are unwise. Well, what is God's revealed will in this context? Be **Spirit-filled**.

A lot of people get confused over the words 'be ye filled with the Spirit'. It's really very simple. Scripture is not teaching that you can have more of the Spirit today and less of Him tomorrow. Some people think that the Spirit is like petrol, you kind of use Him up during the week and need to get a refill on Sunday. No, that's not what the Scripture is teaching here. It is used in the sense we often use when we say, "He was filled with anger" or 'She was filled with sadness'. What do we mean? We mean sadness or anger was the thing controlling them at the time. It was the thing that had the strongest influence over them. Now in exactly the same way, Scripture is saying be controlled by the Spirit. Come under His influence. How do we know it is saying that? Look at the first part of the verse, 'be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but,...'. When you are drunk with wine, what happens? You come under its influence? You become a different person! Now Paul says, don't come under the influence of alcohol to the point of drunkenness,

but come under the influence of the Spirit. Let Him control you. Not you getting more of Him, it's Him getting more of you.

Now, where does this happen? At church? At a special service? No. The Greek words literally are, be ye continually getting filled, i.e. This is an ongoing experience. It is part of your relationship with God. Surrendering to God moment to moment is coming under His control. Moment to moment, confessing your sin, meditating on Scripture, obeying Him, depending on Him, praying to Him, this is coming under His control. It is the only way our relationship with God works, when we empty ourselves of self, when we confess our sins before Him, and we say, "God, You lead, guide, control, teach". When you give over control to Him on a moment-to-moment basis, this is being controlled by the Spirit. The effects are seen in the following verses - praise, thanksgiving, submission, sacrificial love, harmonious relationships. But please note something about being Spirit-filled. We find an almost identical passage in Colossians 3:16 and following. Listen to its phrasing: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." The word of Christ is the Word of God, the Bible. The verse says, be so saturated with the Bible. Let it be at home in your life, and the same results will follow that are mentioned in Ephesians 5. The conclusion: a Spirit-filled person is a Word-filled person. The Holy Spirit does not control and lead us in a vacuum. He works with the Word He wrote. And the more of the Word in you, saturated into your very thinking, the more He is able to lead, guide and direct you in every day situations. I would go so far as to say that the proportion in which you take in the Word with a view to obeying it is the proportion in which you will be surrendered to the Holy Spirit. Not just learning the Word, but learning it with a view to obeying it. We are to study Scripture to find the Person of Christ, with a view to imitating Him by the power of the Spirit. Let's put it this way, be saturated with Christ to be filled by the Spirit. Don't expect the Spirit's control over your marriage, if you have never studied Scripture on marriage. Likewise for any area of your life. So, it's God's will that we be Spirit-controlled, but that will only happen when we diligently study Scripture, memorise it and meditate on it. Especially when it comes to the decisions of our lives. We look for signs and some kind of circumstance to direct us, when most often there are very clear Scriptural principles to guide us. So God's will is that we be Spirit-filled or Word-filled, that is dependent upon Him to help us obey the Scriptures we have studied.

So thus far, God's will is looking very clear, and moreover, very practical: Be saved, Be Spirit-filled, or Son-filled, if you like.

Well, Scripture has more on the revealed will of God. I Thessalonians 4:3: "For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication." Paul writing to the Thessalonians is teaching on sexual purity, and he here points out that the will of God is that believers be sanctified. He then shows that sexual purity is part of sanctification. Sanctification is simply, becoming like Christ. It is the process of being increasingly set apart from sin, and increasingly given over to holiness. It happens positionally when we are saved, but practically, it must occur daily in our lives. We are to be **sanctified**. God wants you to live a holy life.

Listen to how Paul put it in Romans 12:1-2: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. <sup>2</sup>And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”. Paul says, present your bodies a holy sacrifice to God. A sacrifice would be dead, no will to resist, and so Paul is calling for the kind of surrender that a lifeless corpse would give the one moving its limbs. Yet we are to be living sacrifices, not passive robots, but willing participants. To surrender ourselves and our lives at the altar of God each day, to be holy for Him. Paul says this is your reasonable service. Reasonable means logical, that is, to respond this way to God is fitting, logical, it is the only logical sensible response to so great a God. Paul adds then in verse 2, don’t let the world squeeze you into its shape, don’t imitate its thinking and ways, but rather be metamorphasized, like a caterpillar to a butterfly. Be sanctified. The notice what Paul says, by doing this you may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God. God’s will is our sanctification. How do I grow in holiness?

Scripture has a simple three-stage principle, put off, be renewed and put on. Ephesians 4:22-24 “<sup>22</sup>That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; <sup>23</sup>And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; <sup>24</sup>And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Stage 1, put off. Identify the sin that you need to stop. Stage 2, change your thinking. Be renewed in your mind - that’s how Paul said we would be transformed in Romans 12:2. Go to His Word, see Him there, and allow His glory, the image of who He is, so imprint itself on your mind and your thinking, that you think differently about it. Then, stage 3, put on, replace the disobedient behaviour with obedience. Mortify the Flesh, Meditate on the Word and then Manifest Christlikeness, all by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We’ve just begun to look at the revealed will of God, and already we see that there is more than enough to keep us occupied. Next week, we will look at the last three revealed aspects of God’s will, and ask how do I make biblical decisions?