

The Will of God

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Published by NTChurchSource.com

How can I know the will of God? Does that question often come to our minds? It is most often heard when a major decision is before us--such as where we should live or work, or whether we should go to a certain school. If we have committed our lives to God, we know that He must lead us, and we want to do His will in every circumstance. But how can we know God's will? Two or more paths are before us, and we do not know which one to take.

The following encouragement is directed to those who have honest questions, that light may be shed on our paths. If we are yielded to God, He will make the way plain.

God's Purpose in Christ, the Will Of God

One of the first things that will help us in the question before us is to see how God looks at His overall purpose. Often we are looking from a lower level. We are considering the immediate decision such as which job to take. If we will allow our vision to be lifted to a higher point of view, the matter may become clear immediately. To use a phrase of the world, sometimes we cannot see the forest because of all the trees.

What is the will of God? By this we mean, what is God's overall purpose? Consider these scriptures: *"And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are"* (John 17:10,11). *"Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth..."* (Ephesians 1:9,10). *"Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all"* (I Corinthians 15:28). In these scriptures we find statements of the will of God, or God's ultimate purpose. Before we can answer the immediate question or the choice that is before us, we must first ask whether we are committed to the will of God. Does God's purpose possess us? If it does, then the choices we make will be guided by that purpose. Let us not pass over this question lightly, for in this truth lies the answer to many of our questions.

God is moving with a purpose that encompasses all of eternity. He is not moving in a haphazard manner, making decisions according to the circumstances of the moment. Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Nothing takes God by surprise. He saw the end from the beginning before time began, and every movement of God is based on and guided by the goal that is in His mind. Consider Christ as He came to earth. He was born into mankind to manifest the life of God in human form and die on the cross to pay the price of sin and redeem us back to God. Every action, every word, every choice He made was with this in view. The crowds did not move Him; men in their ignorance did not deter Him; Satan could not tempt Him in any way. He was fixed in His purpose. He said of Himself that He came to do the will of God. *"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come...to do Your will, O God'"* (Hebrews 10:7).

Now if God Himself moves in this manner, should this not also be the underlying foundation of our movement? We have been baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and it is for one purpose:

that we may do the will of God. God has a body on this earth in just as much reality as when Christ was here in physical form. Our calling is the same as His calling, namely, to do God's will. This is the purpose of every one who names the name of God. It is not just for a chosen few, but for every Christian. When we came into Christ we accepted this calling whether we understood much about it or not. As the implications begin to dawn upon us, we may feel that it is too restrictive, but God is moving according to His purposes, not ours. We were saved not for ourselves, but for Him.

Many times, here is where the conflict lies. We want heaven, we want blessings, and we don't want any bad thing to happen to us. But we don't necessarily want to live His life; we want to live our own lives. We want to be the ones to make the decisions, according to our desires and goals. We have not fully accepted God's goals and purposes as ours. Thus, when we come to a choice in life, we find ourselves torn. Why? Because there is a conflict of authority. Is God in control of our lives? Have we laid down our will? We should have settled this question at the beginning, but many times either we did not let God deal in the first place, or we have allowed coldness to creep in, and have gone back on the choice we once made. Clouding of our vision comes in at every turn because the foundation is faulty. The only way to remedy the situation is go back to God and deal with the foundation. Have I hated my life? (Luke 14:26) If not, I cannot be a disciple, and I will always be wondering what the will of God is, in situations in my life.

Note that the scriptures above which state the will of God do not directly answer questions like which job I should take. Instead they concentrate on our relationship with God. This is because that is what God is building--relationships. First comes our relationship with God; then that relationship controls all other relationships. All reality is found in right relationships. When man sinned, his relationship with God was broken. When Christ came, He made the way for right relationships to be restored. It should be obvious to us, then, that any leading of God will be in line with this purpose: namely, that every person will be rightly related to God and thus rightly related to others. When relationships are right, then God will be glorified and His purpose realized in our lives. Could we ask for more?

The Will of God in Specific Circumstances

At this point we may be thinking, "But I need to know which job to take. What does all this have to do with the decision before me?" It has everything to do with it if we can see what God is showing us. Before we can make the choice properly, we must be in right relationship with God. Are we in that right relationship? If we are not, we will not be able to sense God's mind. We may have a desire to know God's will, but we will not know His mind unless we are in a right relationship.

At this point, many just force the issue instead of coming back to God and making the relationship right. We know what we want to do, so we begin to justify our thinking. And usually we are able to find enough reasons and scripture verses to give us justification to do what we want to do and say it is God's will. We do this to our own destruction, for in the end we are the ones who suffer the most. A heart that has not been dealt with by God will lead us astray when decision time comes. Our motives will not be pure and our minds will not think clearly in God. Any discussion with others regarding the will of God in the choices before us is next to meaningless, because we will argue with God and with man. But when we have let God have His way, we will find our hearts at rest, not pushing in any direction, but totally yielded before Him.

If we are going to move with purpose, there is one question that we must answer: which direction will lead me into a fuller involvement with the purpose of God? For example, one job may earn me more money, but involve me more in this world and its system. It will leave me less available to God and

less available to brothers and sisters in Christ. In other words, relationships that God holds dear will be adversely affected. If I see what God is doing, and if I have accepted His will as my will, then the decision before me will be obvious. But if I do not hold God's purpose high, I will argue, and the decision will not seem clear.

The purpose of God must hold sway in every area. If this is our guiding light, everything else will come into line. We may have the thinking that we can handle any job, and that may be partially true. God does give the grace to handle any situation we find ourselves in. But sometimes that grace is working in our lives to lead us out of the situation because it is affecting us. If we have a "fixed mentality" about these things, we may suffer loss, far more than we realize. Lot was being greatly affected in Sodom and did not realize it. God saw the situation quite differently from the way Lot saw it. We can come to a place where the sin around us pulls us down and in the end costs us our souls.

It cannot be overemphasized that God is moving for His purpose, not ours. The scriptures quoted above tell us what that purpose is--that God may be all in all. For this to take place, we must find ourselves under the authority of Christ and allow Him to build us together with other believers in order that we all may be one as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one. This is the foundation of all else, and everything must fit into this purpose. If the truth of this could grip our hearts, it would shed much light on our pathway.

For example, maybe we are wondering which school we should attend. But in asking this question, we have not considered that maybe God does not want us to attend either school because in so doing we would be taken away from the local expression of the body of Christ, and bring much detriment to our relationships--with God and with other members. Often we are not considering this at all. We say we will find fellowship after we get to school, but we really do not know that this is possible. So we need to find the fellowship first. Will there be those in this new locality that we can trust to watch over our souls? Do we think we need watching over? If the will of God is our will, we will put this at the top of the list.

Another relationship that is critical is the relationship between wife and husband. How will the choice we are making affect this relationship? In the working of God's purposes, this relationship is one of the most important because it gives forth a testimony to the world of Christ and the Church. It is foundational to the training of the children, and what other direct responsibility in the family is more important than to raise the children God has given us for Him? We tend to think of the importance of providing food and clothes for our children, but what about the importance of a proper relationship between husband and wife? What about the example of our lives as we are in proper relationship with other members of the body of Christ? Our example speaks much more than our words. Any choice before us will affect the direction of our life and the example we set before our children and others. All of these require a proper relationship with God. Which direction will move us more in line with God's purpose in Christ?

When we come before God in some of these areas, we often ask God to show us which of several options we should choose. But sometimes we have drawn a box in which we expect God to speak, and do not allow direction outside that box. Maybe God doesn't want any of our choices. Are we open to that option? If not, we will miss God entirely. This is where we must be honest before God. He is the only One who can try our hearts. We can go up and down a street looking for the house number, not even realizing we are on the wrong street or even in the wrong town.

At this point, we need to realize that no amount of natural reasoning can get us on the right track. We need God. We need divine intervention. But for God to move in our lives, He needs an invitation, for

He does not force Himself. He is able to speak to us and direct us, but do we want Him to do so? He is able to move past all of our preconceived ideas if we have chosen Him. Remember, He created man. Cannot the One who created man communicate with him?

When we have truly yielded to God and let Him have His way, there is one element that will be present in fullness, and that is the peace of God. *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6,7). If we do not have that peace in the choice which is before us, we need to continue to wait on God until we do. God is faithful, but sometimes it takes time to adjust our direction, our mind, and our desires. A good rule to follow is never to push, but wait before God until the peace of God rules. As God continues to bring light in the situation, the direction we should take will become obvious. When it is not obvious and we go ahead and make a choice, it usually is because we are pushing. We want to make sure we get our way before somebody (including God) messes things up.

Remember, God knows the future. We do not. We would tend to make choices based on what we know--but our knowledge is so limited! God knows everything and never makes a mistake. How can we benefit from God's wisdom and knowledge? By letting Him make every decision in our lives. Is this possible? It is, if we are living His life. This is the place He has made for each one of us, and our faith needs to take hold of God and walk in His life. We are His sons, and He has given the Holy Spirit to lead us in every situation of life. He doesn't want just to lead us in the big choices; He wants to control us entirely, for our good and His glory.

What could be greater than to be a vessel set aside for the glory of God to shine through? God only has one will for our lives, and it is to be found in union with Jesus Christ. Everything God is doing is summed up in Christ; therefore we can say that Jesus Christ is the will of God for each one of us. It is His will expressed in and through us that brings glory to God. *"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13).

Finally, in all of this, brothers and sisters, let this truth ring in our hearts: *"My sheep know My voice"* (John 10:27). If we belong to God, then we can know His voice. If we know His voice, then He can lead us. Are we willing to be led? If we are willing, He will lead us in every decision that is before us, and we can rest in these truths: that He will not withhold one good thing from us, and that He will keep us from the evil one. His grace is sufficient, and He will feed us from His very hand. Let each of us find a place of protection under His hand this day. We can know and do the will of God. Glory!