

Discerning God's Will
Selected Scriptures

Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

Preached 11/24/13

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INTRODUCTION

1. If there is ever a subject that captures the attention of every child of God it would be one that addresses the will of God.
2. For the believer this is where all of life revolves.
3. All of us are faced with decisions.
4. Some are more complex than others.
5. Therefore, the will of God is an important matter.
6. It's so important that Paul has something to say about it in Ephesians 5:15-17.

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

7. He first says to see to it that you “walk circumspectly.”
8. The word “walk” is *peripateo* (pres.act.ind.), which means, “to conduct one’s life” (Fritz Rienecker, *The*

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Linguistic Key to the Greek NT) or “to order one's behavior” (Wuest) or literally to “behave” (LN)

- a) Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Cor.3:3 that they were “still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and **behaving** [peripateo] like mere men?
 - b) He told the Thessalonians that they “should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to **walk** [peripateo] and to please God” (1 Thess.4:1).
9. The word “circumspectly” Gr.akribos, means, “accurately, carefully” (Rienecker), or “exactly” (Wuest). “The idea here is, that they were to take special pains to guard against the temptations around them, and to live as they ought to” (Albert Barnes, Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible).

“As believers walk through the spiritual mine field of the world, they are to be constantly alert to every danger that Satan puts in their way” (John MacArthur, Ephesians).

Discerning God's Will
Selected Scriptures

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10. So Paul tells the Ephesians to be careful how they conduct themselves; be alert. You have to conduct yourselves as those who are *wise* and not *fools* “redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”
11. I think it is important to note at this point if you’re not conducting your life in this manner it is impossible to know what the will of God is for you life.
12. He’s not going to reveal to you anymore than what He has already revealed.
13. In other words, if you don’t obey what is the clear will of God, as noted here in Ephesians 5:15, then don’t expect Him to reveal anything else.
14. Paul goes on to say that we are to walk carefully as wise (see Proverbs 2).
15. Verse 17 he says, “Therefore do not be unwise but understand what the will of the Lord is.”
16. It is clear from this verse alone that we are to “understand what the will of the Lord is.”

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17. But before we can progress further in what he is about to say we have to back up to chapter 1.
18. In Ephesians 1:1 he uses an address to these believers that tells us where the will of God begins.
19. Notice what verse 1 says, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the **saints** who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus.”

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Selected Scriptures

Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

Preached 11/24/13

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I. The Will of God Begins at Salvation

A. You Cannot Know the Will of God Apart from Salvation

1. Paul addresses the Ephesians as **saints** which is something he could not have done if they had not been saved (Eph.1:1).
2. This is true of all his epistles
 - a) He said to the Romans - “To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints” (Rom.1:7)
 - b) To the Corinthians he addressed them as “the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Cor.1:2)
 - c) He later challenged the Corinthians on their reception of the Gospel in chapter

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Selected Scriptures

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15:1-2:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved if you hold fast that word which I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.”

d) He made the same statement to the Colossians:

“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight— if indeed you continue in faith, grounded and steadfast and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which, I, Paul, became a minister” (Col.1:21-23).

3. All the wisdom and Word of God begins at

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Salvation

- a) In Matthew 13:10-11 the disciples asked Jesus ““Why do You speak to them in parables? He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’”
- b) Again, Paul writing to the Corinthians, tells them that “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches the deep things of God” (1 Cor.2:9-10).
- c) In verse 14 he says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

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Selected Scriptures

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B. The Will of God At this Point is to Repent and
Come to Jesus and Be Saved

1. John the Baptist told the Pharisees and Sadducees that came to his baptism to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Mat.3:8)
2. When Jesus began His ministry He said in Mark 1:15 “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”
3. Paul said this is God’s will “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim.2:4).
4. Peter said, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet.3:9).
5. These two verses stress the responsibility of man to repent at the hearing of the Gospel.

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Selected Scriptures

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6. The death of Jesus on the cross was sufficient for every man to believe, therefore, he calls all men to repent:

Acts 17:30-31 - "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

II. The Will of God Continues Once You're Saved

A. God's Will is that You Be Spirit-Filled

1. Ephesians 5:17 says you are "not to be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."
2. Then in the next verse he tells you what "the will of the Lord is."
3. He says, "And do not be drunk with wine, in

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Selected Scriptures

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Preached 11/24/13

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which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit” (v.18)

4. The verb “be filled” is pleroo (pres.pass.imp) which is a command that can only be obeyed when you die to self. The passive voice is used here and indicates that you are the recipient of the action, which means you don’t fill yourself; the Spirit fills or controls you. You have to do what is necessary to not hinder the process. What hinders being controlled by the Spirit is sin.
5. Paul says in verse 2 of chapter 5 of Ephesians that we are to “walk in love” and not let “fornication, all uncleanness or covetousness...even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which is not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (vv.3-4).
6. In verse 6-8 he says not to “let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on

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Selected Scriptures

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Preached 11/24/13

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the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”

7. In verse 11 he further says not to have “fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”
8. All of this has to be either affirmed or denied in order to carry out verse 18.
9. Spirit-filling is different than Spirit-indwelling
 - a) Spirit-indwelling occurs one time at salvation (Eph.1:13; 1 Cor.12:13)
 - b) Spirit-filling occurs repeatedly as you yield yourself to the Spirit's control (Col.3:16; Gal.5:16)

B. God's Will is that You Be Sanctified

1. This means you were called to be holy

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Selected Scriptures

Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

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- a) Eph.1:3 - “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”
 - b) Eph.2:10 - “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”
2. Holiness is not an option for the believer
- a) Romans 6:22 says since we have been “set free from sin, and [have] become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”
 - b) 1 Thess.4:7 says that “God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.”
3. Holiness then is to be a daily pursuit
- a) We are to “present [our] bodies” as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God”

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Selected Scriptures

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Preached 11/24/13

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and “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind, that [we] may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom.12:1-2).

- b) If you are not being holy you cannot know what God's will is.
- c) Colossians 3:5 says that we are to “put to death [our] members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”
- d) Peter said in 1 Pet.1:14-15, “as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”
- e) When you are doing that then you are obeying the will of God to be holy.

C. God's Will is that You Be Submissive

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We have already hit on this in our recent studies but let me give you a few reminders:

1. We are to be submissive to authorities (1 Pet.2:13-15)
2. We are to be submissive to one another (Eph.5:21)
3. We are to be submissive to God (Jas.4:7)

D. God's Will is that You Suffer

1. This is definitely an issue many question
2. The problem of suffering is due to sin but Paul says it's also God's will for believers

Phil.1:29-30 - "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me."

3. He told Timothy that this would be the result of living godly

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Selected Scriptures

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Preached 11/24/13

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2 Tim.3:12 - "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

4. Jesus said "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33)
5. All of this is because they persecuted Jesus

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me" (Jn.15:20-21).

E. God's Will is that You Say Thanks

1. God hates grumbling and complaining
 - a) That's why when Paul said to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," he also said to "do all things without murmuring and disputing, that

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Selected Scriptures

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Preached 11/24/13

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you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil.2:14-15).

- b) When the children of Israel spent 12 spies into the land of Canaan and ten out of the twelve gave a bad report and the people believed them, God caused them to wandering in the wilderness for 40 years.

He said, “The carcasses of you who have murmured against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above” (Num.14:29).

- c) When the sons of Korah complained and rebelled against the Lord, God caused the earth to open “its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah,

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Selected Scriptures

Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

Preached 11/24/13

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with all their goods” (Num.16.32) and then “a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense” (Num.16:35).

2. God, on the other hand, loves a heart filled with thanksgiving
 - a) Paul said in Ephesians 5 what should not be named among saints but then said “but rather giving of thanks” (v.4).
 - b) Thanksgiving reveals a grateful heart

E.M. Bounds said, “Thanksgiving is the expression of an inward conscious gratitude to God for mercies received. It is an inward emotion of the soul, involuntarily arising therein. It is born of meditation on God’s grace and mercy, and it is opposed to all murmurings at God’s dealings with us. Gratitude and murmuring never abide in the same heart at the same time” (The Essentials of

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Selected Scriptures

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Preached 11/24/13

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Prayer, pp.37-38, 40).

- c) We are to be thankful and be known as a people who are thankful
 - (1) Paul said, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess.5:18).
 - (2) In Philippians 4:6 he said, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

III. The Will of God is Available in All Areas of Life

Even in Grey areas.

You ask “What are grey areas?” These are areas that the Bible is silent on.

If the Bible is silent then how can I know what is God's will?

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Selected Scriptures

Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

Preached 11/24/13

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First, you must be doing what we have already mentioned. Second, you can ask the following 10 questions to determine God's Will.

A. Will It Be Spiritually Profitable?

1 Cor.6:12 - "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

Some things can be wrong if they keep you from doing things that enhance your spiritual life.

B. Will It Edify?

Will it put you on the path to greater spiritual maturity?

1 Cor.10:23 - "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify."

C. Will It Lead to Excess?

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Selected Scriptures

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Preached 11/24/13

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Heb.12:1 says, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

Will it hinder you as you run the Christian race? Being out late Saturday night is not a sin, but it may not be the best choice if it leave you too tired to concentrate at church Sunday morning.

D. Will It Bring Me Under Its Control?

1 Cor.6:12 again says, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”

We all know it's wrong to be controlled by drink or drugs (I consider cigarettes a form of a drug because of the nicotine and it's control). But it is also wrong to be controlled by music, sports or tv?

E. Will It Cause Me to Use My Freedom in Christ

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Selected Scriptures

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Preached 11/24/13

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As a Cover for Catering to Evil, Sinful Desires?

1 Pet.2:16 says, “as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.”

F. Will It Violate the Lordship of Christ in My Life? (Rom.14:2-8)

Don't let others talk yo into doing what you don't think the Lord would have you to do.

G. Will Doing This Set a Good or a Bad Example for Others to Follow?

1 Cor.8:9 says, “But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.”

H. Will It Cause Non-Believers to See a Difference in My Life?

I. Would Jesus Do It?

J. Will It Glorify God?

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Selected Scriptures

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CONCLUSION

1. If you apply all these principles then it will reveal who is controlling your desires.
2. Psalm 37:4 says, “Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.”
3. Are you saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submissive, suffering, and saying thanks?