



Fundamentals of the Christian Faith

The Will of God

Many Christians are perplexed about God's will. Often Christians ask, "How can I know the will of God?" Or Christians sometimes say at a tragedy, "This must be the will of God." Obviously confusion surrounds the understanding of God's will. In this lesson we will try to develop a Biblical understanding of the will of God.

There are three main parts of the will of God as found in the Bible. These three parts are **purpose**, **desire**, and **permission**. In some sense then everything that happens falls under the will of God. It can be 1) According to God's desire and God's decision, 2) According to God's desire and man's decision, or 3) According to man's decision and God's permission.

God's Desire and God's Decision

Some events occur because God desires that they occur and He takes whatever steps necessary to cause them to occur. The creation itself is an example of this type of desire and decision (Rev. 4:11). Likewise the redemptive mission of Jesus is referred to as "the will of God" (John 4:34; Acts 2:23; Heb. 10:7).

The second coming of Jesus will also come at the time of God's desire and His decision. The second coming has been promised and so it will come to be (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

God's Desire and Man's Decision

There are things that God desires to happen, but they will happen only if man chooses to make them happen (Matt. 12:50; Heb. 10:36).

It is God's desire that all find salvation, but not all will obey (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim 2:4; Matt. 8:14).

God sometimes expresses his desires and indicates that fulfillment is contingent on man's obedience (Matt. 9:13; Hebrews 10:5,8).

Man's Decision and God's Permission

There is a category of things that God allows even though it is not His desire. Sometimes this is called God's *permissive* will. This category includes those things which God permits though He has stated his opposition to them (sins). It also includes those things where God has no stated opinion. These are called *matters of opinion*.

God permitted nations to go their own ways, though it was not his desire (Acts 14:16). In 1 Cor. 16:7, Paul expresses his desire to spend time with the Corinthians "if the Lord permits" (see also Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; James 4:13-15).

Does God Have a Specific Will for Every Person's Life?

Some people contend that God has one specific will for every aspect of every person's life. This means that God has your marriage partner chosen for you, and that He has a job chosen for you, that He has a specific school in mind for you, and that He has a will for where you should live. Is this true?

If God has a specific will for every decision in our lives, He has not told us His plans. Furthermore, we can search the Bible in vain to find the answer to all the decisions that we will make in life. As Garry Friesen has written, "The idea of an *individual will* of God for every detail of a person's life is *not found in scripture*."

There are individuals in the Bible for whom God had a specific plan, such as Moses, Abraham, John the Baptist, David, and the Apostle Paul. God communicated his plans to these people by revelation. These individuals had special tasks that God used in his redemptive work. We should not assume that many people fall into this category.

We can however discover something about the Will of God through an understanding of these principles:

1. God's Will includes those things required by God's command. If God has commanded that we do a certain thing then it must certainly be a part of His will. So, if someone asks, "How can I know the will of God?" then part of the answer is: Look in the Bible.

Jack Cottrell writes, "You can know the will of God for your life by reading and studying and meditating upon (the Bible's) moral teaching.



2. God's Will means that we will not do those things that are *forbidden by God*. I can know that God does not want me to do things that He has said not to do. These forbidden things are also found within the Bible.

Note that the first two ways to know God's will are *objective* not *subjective*. Knowledge of God's will does not come from within ourselves. These first two ways of knowing God's will are *universal*. They are the same for every person everywhere. Furthermore, these precepts are *general*, not specific in nature. For instance the command to not murder is objective, general, and universal to every person.

3. Most decisions are not commanded or forbidden by God. Most decisions we will make are matters of opinion. We can say that these things are *within God's will* even though they are not required or forbidden by it. Here God gives us the freedom to make decisions. For instance 1 Tim. 5:8 requires a man to take care of his family, but it does not give a required way to provide. God gives us free will to make these types of decisions.



The umbrella illustrates God's will. So long as we are rejecting those things that are forbidden and doing those things that are required, we are acting within or under God's will.

4. As humans we still seek more help in knowing what God wants from us in our lives. How can we gain this help? James 1:5 tells us to *seek wisdom*. Friesen notes that wisdom is not a magic formula. It is not passively received; it must be actively sought and cultivated (Proverbs 4:5).



A) Pray for wisdom.

B) Seek to know as much about God as possible (Psalm 111:10). The more we learn about God, the more we will understand Him, and how best to please Him.

C) Learn about God's Word as much as possible (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

D) Know as much about life as possible.

It is God's will that we bear much fruit