

# THE WILL OF GOD

*G. Michael Cocoris*



# THE WILL OF GOD

*G. Michael Cocoris*

© 2012 G. Michael Cocoris

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced (in whole or in part, edited, or revised) in any way, form, or means including, but not limited to electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or any kind of storage and retrieval system *for sale*, except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the written permission of G. Michael Cocoris, 2016 Euclid #20, Santa Monica, CA 90405, michaelcocoris@gmail.com, or his appointed representatives. Permission is hereby granted, however, for the reproduction of the whole or parts of the whole without changing the content in any way for *free distribution*, provided all copies contain this copyright notice in its entirety. Permission is also granted to charge for the cost of copying.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version ®, Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# Table of Contents

**THE PERFECT WILL OF GOD..... II**  
**THE PERSONAL WILL OF GOD..... 7**  
**THE PARTICULAR WILL OF GOD PART 1 ..... 13**  
**THE PARTICULAR WILL OF GOD PART 2 ..... 19**



# THE PERFECT WILL OF GOD

For years, I have been asked, “How can I know the will of God?” It has been said that questions about God’s guidance are among the most frequently asked by Christians. They want guidance on guidance. The answer, of course, is in the Scripture.

What does the Bible say about the will of God? The answer is, “Plenty.” For one thing, students of the Scripture agree there are two types of the will of God. First, there is the will of God that He does. He says He is going to do something, and He does it. Nebuchadnezzar said that God “does according to His will in the army of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of the earth” (Dan. 4:35). Paul says, “According to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11). Theologians call this the *decree of God*. It has also been called the *sovereign will of God*.

The second type of the will of God is His will that He wants us to do. There are several passages in the New Testament that clearly say, “This is the will of God...” If you want to know what the will of God is for you, consider those passages.

## Salvation

*Jesus* It is the will of God that people be saved. Jesus said, “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:39-40).

*Paul* In 1 Timothy, Paul said, “For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

*Peter* In 2 Peter, Peter put it like this: “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).

Salvation comes by believing in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose from the dead (Jn. 3:16). Believing is more than believing fact; it is trusting Jesus Christ to save you. It is one thing to believe that your doctor can perform a successful operation; it is another to trust him to perform it on you.

## Sanctification

*Moral Purity* It is the will of God that believers be sanctified. Paul says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). To be sanctified means to be set apart to the Lord. Paul gives some of the specifics of sanctification.

God’s will is moral purity. Paul says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3). Believers should not live according to the flesh. Peter says a believer should “no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God” (1 Pet. 4:2). John says, “And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 Jn. 2:17).

Sexual immorality is sex outside of marriage. I heard of one counselor who said every affair he has dealt with in the past six months began on Facebook. Hearing that, one pastor said, “I’m not anti-Facebook, but some of you have started online flirting, connecting with old flames, having intimate conversations. Go home tonight and delete your Facebook account.”

*Rejoice Always* Paul also says, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:16-18). The last phrase, “this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,” could go with the last command, or it could refer to all three commands. Most expositors say that it goes with all three. Thus, the will of God is for believers is to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in every situation, give thanks.

God’s will is that we rejoice always. It is easy to rejoice when things are going your way. But believers are to rejoice even in trials (Jas. 1:2). Anyone can celebrate a victory; it takes a saint to rejoice in the midst of apparent defeat. Some of the saints in Thessalonica were sorrowing for departed loved ones (1 Thess. 4:13). Others had financial problems (1 Thess. 4:11-12). All were being persecuted (1 Thess. 3:3). Yet Paul instructs them to rejoice, even in the midst of their trials. Christians can literally sing in the rain.

*Pray without Ceasing* God’s will is that we “pray without ceasing.” Does that mean believers should constantly pray without interruption like a running faucet? That’s impossible! “Without ceasing” does not mean without interruption. Rather, the idea is “constantly reoccurring” like a dripping faucet. This Greek term was used of a hacking cough. A person with such a cough does not cough nonstop all day long, but he does cough every few minutes.

Stonewall Jackson said, “I have so fixed the habit of my mind that I never raise a glass of water to my lips without asking God’s blessing, never seal a letter of putting a word of prayer under the seal, never take a letter from the post without a brief sending of my thoughts heavenward, never change my classes in the lecture room without a minute’s repetition for the cadets who go out and for those who come in.”

*Give Thanks* God’s will is “in everything give thanks.” Technically, this verse does not say “for everything give thanks,” but “in everything” (Paul also says we should give thanks always “for all things” in Eph. 5:20). The concept here is that the believer is to give thanks in every circumstance of life, in sickness and in health; in poverty and in wealth. G. K. Chesterton said that the most important thing he learned was to take things with gratitude and not for granted.

## Submission

*To Government* Peter says, “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God” (1 Pet. 2:13-16).

*To One Another* Believers are to submit to one another in fear of God (Eph. 5:21). Wives are to submit to their own husbands, as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22) and believers are to submit to church elders (Heb. 13:17). The writer to the Hebrews says, “Obey those who rule over you and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

Concerning the churches of Macedonia, Paul says, “They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God” (2 Cor. 8:5). The Macedonians first submitted themselves to the Lord to be obedient to Him. They were willing to do whatever the Lord desired them to do



with their lives and possessions. Then they gave themselves to Paul and his companions to serve them in any way they could, in the will of God. God's will is for believers to obey Him and serve others. That is precisely what the Macedonians did.

## Spiritual Transformation

*Present Your Bodies as a Sacrifice* Paul writes, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1a). Based on God's mercy, Paul entreats believers to present their bodies as sacrifices. The Greek word translated "present" is the same one that was used in Romans 6:13, 16, 19. In Romans 6, the point is that you can use your body for either sin or righteousness. Thus, Romans 12:1 calls for obedience to God through the body. In short, use your body to obey God.

Using your body to obey the Lord is a sacrifice to Him. Romans 12:1 says, "Present your bodies a *living* sacrifice." The Greek text, however, simply says, "Present your bodies a sacrifice" and adds three phrases to describe such an action. It is living, holy, and acceptable to God. The Old Testament animal sacrifice was dead. By contrast, the presentation of our bodies is a living sacrifice. "Living" here is more than just physical life, however. Believers have been raised with Christ to walk in "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Our sacrifice is a spiritually-living sacrifice.

Using your body to obey the Lord is holy; it is set apart to the Lord. Consequently, our sacrifice is acceptable to God. God is well pleased with the presentation of our bodies. He delights in such sacrifices.

Paul adds, "Which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1b). Our sacrifice is further described as our "reasonable service." The Greek word translated "reasonable" is the word from which we get the English word "logic." In light of God's great mercies, a life of obedience is rational and reasonable.

Romans 12:1 is often used to urge believers to "dedicate" themselves to the Lord as an act of consecration. Though that may be beneficial to some, it is not what the verse is describing. This verse calls for a life of obedience. You can *decide* to do that in a church service, but it can only be done *as you obey*.

*Do Not be Conformed to the World* Paul continues, "And do not be conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2). Paul is exhorting the believer not to be continually molded and fashioned by this present, passing age. In an auto plant, a huge piece of flat metal is fed into a massive press that comes down upon it with unbelievable pressure. The sheet of metal is conformed to the mold of the press. Out comes the hood of a Chevy or a Ford.

Paul says, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). The word "therefore" draws a conclusion from what precedes. Because the days are evil, believers must not be unwise; rather, they should understand the will of God. The spirit of this age is selfishness. Every individual is obsessed with his or her happiness or his or her desires being met. That is conformity to this world.

*Renew Your of the Mind* Rather than being conformed to this age, Paul writes, "But be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Instead of being molded into the shape of this age, the believer should be transformed from the inside out by the renewing of the mind.

This is no doubt a reference to the "spiritual mindedness" mentioned earlier (Rom. 8:4). As the mind, the heart, and will of believers are fixed and focused on the Word of God in general,

and Christ in the Word in particular, they are transformed more and more into Christ-likeness (2 Cor. 3:18, the only other place in Paul's writing where the word "transformed" appears).

The result of this transformation is "that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). By being changed through a renewed mind and obedience, you will prove in your experience the will of God. This will is further described as good, acceptable, and perfect. The word translated "perfect" means "to reach its end, finished, complete." Being transformed and obedient results in God's complete will, which is good and pleasing to Him.

Believers need to think like God thinks, so they will act as God wants them to act.

The paraphrase of J. B. Phillips captures the message of these two verses: "With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship to give Him your bodies as a living sacrifice consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold, but let God remold your minds from within so that you may prove and practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity."

For example, Paul says slaves are to serve "not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph. 6:6).

**Summary:** The will of God is our salvation, sanctification, submission, and spiritual transformation. The perfect will of God is our transformation into the image of Christ; it is spiritual maturity.

What do we need to do to demonstrate the will of God in our lives? First, we need the Word. It is the mirror into which we look to have our minds renewed and our lives transformed (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2). What you need to know about the perfect will of God is in the Word of God. God's Word has revealed 100% of God's will. As John Calvin said, "His will is not to be sought anywhere else than in His Word."

We need to pray for one another. Paul says, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:9-12). Paul also says, "Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12).

We must choose to do the will of God. In the introduction, I said there are two types of the will of God: His will that *He does*, and His will He wants *us to do*. The will He does is called the sovereign will of God. The will He wants us to do has been called the moral will of God. That is not a bad title. The nature of the will of God is basically moral. In other words, the moral will of God is His will He wants us to do, meaning we must choose to do it. There is a permissive will of God in the sense that God will *permit* you to *not* do His will; that is, He won't necessarily stop you from going outside His will, if you so choose. Choices have consequences. There are consequences to that, but God will allow you to do it.

Years ago, two brothers were born into a family. One was named John and the other was named Charles. From his earliest days, John was studious, thoughtful, and reverent. John was John Calvin, one of the great reformers. He wrote what many consider to be one of the world's greatest books, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. When he died at Geneva in 1564, he

bequeathed to the world the great principles of democracy and religious freedom. His brother Charles pursued a selfish course of a worthless and wasteful life. How do you explain the difference between those two men? Not heredity, not environment, not education, for they had the same heredity, the same environment, the same home, the same early influences. The difference is the choices they made.



# THE PERSONAL WILL OF GOD

The New Testament says the will of God includes our salvation, sanctification, submission, and spiritual transformation. But when believers ask about the will of God, they don't have those kinds of things in mind. They usually have something more personal in mind. Is there a personal will of God?

## Service

Romans 12:1-2 speaks of the perfect will of God for all believers. Immediately after that, Paul starts talking about people in more personal terms, not in general terms.

*Your Spiritual Gift* "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3). Having said the perfect will of God is the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2), Paul speaks about of the way we think about ourselves. Believers are to think of themselves realistically.

A young man received a medal from an organization. Eloquent language was used in extolling his accomplishments. Jubilantly, he went home and proudly repeated what had happened to his mother. Then he asked, "How many great men are there in the world today?" After a long pause, his mother replied, "One less than you think."

The phrase "a measure of faith" is usually taken to be the equivalent of "gift." Thus, Paul is saying that believers are to think of themselves according to the gift they have received.

When believers first trust Christ, they are given a spiritual gift. That gift should determine their estimate of themselves and their place in the body of Christ. Thus, they will have a sane, sober estimate of themselves and won't think too highly of themselves; that is, they won't be puffed up with self-importance.

Paul thought of himself in terms of his spiritual gift. In the Epistles, the expression "the will of God" appears 20 times. In five of the 20, Paul is saying that he is an apostle by the will of God (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1).

*Serve the Lord* "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them" (Rom. 12:6). The ultimate aim is not just sober thinking about yourself and your gift, but your service with that gift in the body of Christ. God has sovereignly given you a gift and His will is that you use it. Paul then mentions seven gifts; God's will for you personally is that you serve Him with the gift He has given you.

How do you identify your spiritual gift? For every gift, there is a corresponding responsibility. For example, there is a gift of giving, but all believers are to give. There is a gift of exhortation, but all are to exhort one another daily. There is a gift of mercy, but all are to show mercy. As you fulfill your responsibility in service, you will discover that you particularly enjoy one type of service and that you are good at it. Others will also recognize your giftedness.

## Suffering

*You May Suffer* Peter says, “For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (1 Pet. 3:17). Notice that Peter says, “*if* it is the will of God,” indicating that it may *not* be. Suffering for righteousness is not God’s usual will, but if the unlikely happens (the Greek construction in verse 17 is called a fourth-class condition, which means it is very unlikely that it will happen), it is not a matter of blind chance. If suffering comes, it is the will of God.

The Gospel of John records that Jesus said to Peter, “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” John explains, “This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God” (Jn. 21:18-19a). The Lord tells Peter that when he was young, he fastened his own belt and went where he wished, but in old age, he will do neither; he will be restrained and no longer master of his movements. In other words, the Lord is telling Peter that when he was younger, he moved about unrestricted, but in his old age he will stretch forth his hands, that is, he will be helpless and seeking help. Another shall gird him, that is, he shall be bound as a “condemned criminal” and carried where he does not want to go, namely to a violent death.

“And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me’” (Jn. 21:19b). The fact that the next verse says that Peter turned around indicates that this is to be taken literally, although the figurative meaning should not be totally excluded. At any rate, Peter began to follow the Lord.

“Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, ‘Lord, who is the one who betrays You?’ Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, ‘But Lord, what about this man?’” (Jn. 21:20-21). Peter looked at John, who is identified as the one who leaned on Jesus’ bosom and asked who would betray Him. Peter wanted to know if John would also suffer a violent death.

“Jesus said to him, ‘If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me’” (Jn. 21:22). Jesus told him in no uncertain terms that if it were His will for one to suffer and another to wait, that was none of Peter’s business. Some suffer; some do not.

*Commit Yourself to the Lord* In his first epistle, Peter says, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Pet. 4:19). If you are suffering according to God’s will, that is, not because you did something wrong (4:15), but because you did something right (you were suffering for righteousness’ sake, for Christ’s sake—4:14), then trust yourself to God by doing good in every area of your life.

Martin Luther said, “Go on in faith and love; if the cross comes, take it; if it comes not, do not seek it.”

## **A Specific Place**

Does God have a specific place for you to be? As a general rule, you should maintain your life situation.

*Stay where you are* Paul says, “But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (1 Cor. 7:17-19). Believers should remain in the external circumstances they were in when they were saved. One’s Jewishness or Gentileness should also be maintained. Bodily marks that indicate a commitment prior to conversion are insignificant. They do not have to be removed.

Men who were tattooed when they were young become Christians. Some believers feel that all tattoos should be removed, but Paul says, in effect, “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, tattooed or untattooed, makes any difference.” What matters is keeping the commandment of God.

Paul goes on to say, “Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freed man. Likewise, he who is called while free is Christ’s slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that calling in which he was called” (1 Cor. 7:20-24). One’s slave/free status should be maintained. To paraphrase, stay in the occupation you were in when you were saved. A slave can be a good Christian. A freedman can also be a good Christian. In fact, a slave is the Lord’s freedman. He is freed from sin, and a freedman is the Lord’s slave. Both slaves and freedmen are bought with a price—the blood of Christ. So, don’t become a slave to men by letting social relationships interfere with the relationship you have to the One who bought you. Paul closes this section with the same principle formulated in verse 17, only this time he adds “with God” (see also 1 Cor. 7:20). Let believers walk before God in the external circumstances they were in when they got saved, unless, of course, the situation is sinful.

As a general rule, your life’s situation should remain the same. Jews should remain circumcised, and Gentiles uncircumcised. Slaves should not worry about being slaves, and freedmen need not become slaves again. Verse 24 sums it up—walk before God in the calling you were in when you were called by the gospel. What matters is keeping the commands of God (1 Cor. 7:19).

This passage talks about position, not place, but the principle applies. As a general rule: stay where you were when you got saved. Bloom where you are planted.

That does not mean that you cannot change your situation. Paul does say that if you can improve your status by becoming free, do it (1 Cor. 7:21). Therefore if you can improve your situation, you’re not prohibited from doing so.

*God Has Moved People* Does God tell believers to go to a certain place or do a certain thing? There are cases in the Bible of God putting a person in a particular place. He *told* Abraham to go to Canaan (Gen. 12:1-3). He *told* Jonah to go to Nineveh (Jonah 1:2). He *told* Philip to go to the desert (Acts 8:26). He *told* Peter to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:17-20). He *told* Paul to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:10). In each of those cases God communicated directly by *an audible voice* (see “The LORD had said to Abram” in Gen. 12:1; “the word of the LORD came to Jonah” in Jonah 1:1; “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip” in Acts 8:26) or by *a vision and words* (see “While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him” in Acts 10:19 and “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’” in Acts 16:9). In those cases, God revealed His will through an audible voice, the appearance of an angel, or a vision that included an audible voice. (Based on the way the Spirit communicated to people in the book of Acts, it is safe to assume that when the text says “they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” in Acts 16:6 and, “After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them” in Acts 16:7, the Holy Spirit spoke to them in an audible voice.) Notice carefully that all of the examples of individual guidance are instances of supernatural revelation. In his book *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View*, Garry Friesen concludes, “One could argue that God *may* give a believer guidance that is more

specific than that found in the Bible. But if He does, it would be through supernatural means” (Friesen, p. 91, italics his).

The question is, “Are these cases of normal Christian experience, or are they unique experiences that are highly unusual?” “The examples of detailed divine guidance in Scripture are infrequent in appearance, limited in scope, and directed to persons who play a special role in the outworking of God’s program on earth” (Friesen, p. 91). Furthermore, there are no examples in Scripture of God giving special instructions on the ordinary decisions of life. Therefore, the examples of direct communication in the Bible are the exceptions, not the rule. To illustrate, God once spoke through a donkey (Num. 22:28-30). As one author has suggested, “Should each believer keep [a donkey] in his back yard just in case?” (Friesen, p. 89).

*Providence* God does not work that way today, but He is in control of everything that happens and He does providentially put people in a particular place for a particular time for a particular purpose. He providentially put Esther in a place and position where she could save her people. In the providence of God, Esther was chosen queen and Mordecai discovered a plot to assassinate the king and another plot to eradicate the Jewish people. The point of the book of Esther is that God is working to provide for, protect, and preserve His people (Esther 4:14). The problem is that the Bible does not tell us how to interpret providence ahead of time. We usually look back and see providence.

**Summary:** The personal will of God is for believers to serve the Lord according to their spiritual gifts, possibly to suffer, and perhaps to be providentially put in a particular place.

What matters is keeping the commandments of God. “To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge! To do the will of God is the greatest achievement!” (George W. Truett, cited in “Toolkit,” *Cell Church*, Winter, 1996, p. 10).

It should also be noted that the Lord is personally working in the lives of believers. He gives each one a spiritual gift. The Holy Spirit enlightens and empowers them. He answers their prayers.

We should acknowledge the providential working of the Lord. James says, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit; whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead, you *ought* to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that’” (Jas. 4:13-15). James is not saying that it is wrong to make plans. He is saying, “Make plans and acknowledge that the Lord is in control of what actually happens.”

Paul is an illustration. He made short-range plans (Acts 20:16; 1 Cor. 4:19) and long-range plans (Acts 18:21; 19:21; 1 Cor. 16:5-7). Sometimes he was hindered. “Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles” (Rom. 1:13). What hindered him? Later in the letter, he explains that it was his ministry (Rom. 15:22; also 1 Thess. 2:18, where he says Satan hindered him from returning to Thessalonica). John Calvin said, “We may take this to mean that the Lord employed him in more urgent business which he could not have neglected without damage to the church.” Most of Paul’s plans did come to pass (Acts 18:21; 1 Tim. 1:3).

Paul always acknowledged the Lord’s working out His will. Paul said, “making request if, by some means, now, at last, I may find a way in the will of God to come to you” (Rom. 1:10) and



“that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you” (Rom. 15:32).

God is working in your life. Trust Him to do what He wants to do. In the meantime, keep the commandments of God.

Me: God, can I ask You a question?

God: Sure.

Me: Promise you won't get mad.

God: I promise.

Me: Why did You let so much stuff happen to me today?

God: What do you mean?

Me: Well, I woke up late.

God: Yes.

Me: My car took forever to start.

God: Okay.

Me: At lunch, they made my sandwich wrong and I had to wait.

God: Hmmmm.

Me: On the way home, my phone went dead, just as I picked up a call.

God: All right.

Me: And on top of it all, when I got home, I just wanted to soak my feet in my new foot massager and relax, but it wouldn't work!!! Nothing went right today! Why did You do that?

God: Let me see. The Death Angel was at your bed this morning and I had to send one of the other angels to battle him for your life. I let you sleep through that.

Me (humbled): OH...

GOD: I didn't let your car start because there was a drunk driver on your route who would have hit you, if you had been on the road.

Me: Oops!

God: The first person who made your sandwich today was sick, and I didn't want you to catch what they have. I knew you couldn't afford to miss work.

Me (embarrassed): Okay...

God: Your phone went dead because the person who was calling was going to give you false information. I didn't even let you talk to them so you would be covered.

Me (softly): I see, Lord.

God: Oh, and that foot massager—it had an electrical short that was going to throw out all of the power in your house tonight. I didn't think you wanted to be in the dark.

Me: I'm sorry, God.

God: Don't be sorry, Just learn to trust Me.....in all things, the good and the bad.

Me: I will trust you.

God: And don't doubt that My plan for your day is always better than your plan.

Me: I won't, God. And let me just tell you God, thank you for everything today.

God: You're welcome, child. It was just another day being your Father, and I love looking after my children.



# THE PARTICULAR WILL OF GOD Part 1

In my experience, when believers ask about the will of God, they are usually concerned about a *particular* decision they have to make, such as whom to marry, which college to go to, or which job to take.

Does God have a particular will when it comes to your marriage, college, vocation, etc.? Is there one specific person God has picked out for you to marry? Does God have a particular occupation for you to enter? Does God have an ideal plan uniquely designed in every detail for a person's life?

## Scriptural Answer

*Marriage* Does God have one and only one person picked out for you to marry? There are only two cases in the Bible in which God determined who a person should marry. God created Eve for Adam. Adam had no choice. God chose Rebecca for Isaac. Isaac could have married someone else, but if he had done so, he would not have married the person God intended for him to marry.

The question is, "Are these normative or are they special cases?" The answer is that these are special cases. There are no other such cases in the Bible. Furthermore, Paul says, "A wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39). The only restriction Paul puts on the remarriage of a believing widow is that she marry a believer. You are free to marry any believer you want to marry!

There is freedom within the revealed will of God. In areas where the Bible does not give a command or principle, believers are free to choose their own course of action.

*Occupation* Does the will of God include your vocation? In that every individual has a natural talent and a spiritual gift, perhaps, in a sense, God intends for a person to have a certain vocation. On the other hand, the Scripture never makes vocation a part of the will of God; rather, it says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Eccl. 9:10).

*Location* Does the will of God include your location? As was mentioned in the last chapter, *as a general rule*, remain where you were when you got saved. If you can improve yourself, do it. There is freedom in the will of God. God is more interested in *who* you are than He is in *where* you are. Friesen says, "The idea of an individual will of God for every detail of a person's life is not found in Scripture" (Friesen, pp. 82-83). "God does not have an ideal, detailed life-plan uniquely designed for each believer that must be discovered in order to make correct decisions" (Friesen, p. 145).

In the final analysis, there is freedom in the will of God. The will of God is revealed in the Word of God. We are to obey His commands, the sum of which is to love one another. God has a will for our spiritual lives and within His will there is a great deal of freedom of choice in areas such as marriage, vocation, and location.

A rancher puts up a fence so that his cattle will not wander in the road and be injured or killed. These boundaries encompass a large pasture. There is freedom within that pasture for the

cattle to graze, lie down, and drink water. Likewise, there is freedom in the will of God. Our heavenly Father puts up a spiritual and moral fence and within those boundaries, there is a lot of freedom of choice.

Suppose a son came to his father and said, “I am going outside to play. What is your will for me today?” The father might say, “Enjoy yourself, don’t get hurt, and don’t hurt anyone.” The son disappears, only to return a short time later. This time he asks his father what game he should play. The father says, “You decide. Just don’t get hurt and don’t hurt anyone.” Again, the son leaves and again comes back with the question, “Should I play baseball or football?” The father says, “I do not have a preference. Play the game that you are better at and enjoy the most. Just don’t get hurt and don’t hurt anyone.”

## Scriptural Decisions

There is a difference between *determining the will of God* and *making decisions*. Determining the will of God is easy. Read the Bible. Once within the will of God, making decisions can be difficult. Here are some guidelines.

*Pray* Ask God for wisdom. James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (Jas. 1:5). You can marry any Christian, but not every Christian will make a good mate for you. So, ask God for wisdom.

*Seek Wise Counsel* Seeking counselors (plural) is mentioned four times in Proverbs (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 20:18; 24:6). The Bible speaks about wise, sensible spiritual leaders who ought to be able to give wise counsel to others.

God told Moses, “Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you” (Deut. 1:13). Then God told these judges, “Hear *the cases* between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him” (Deut. 1:16).

Spiritual decision-makers in the New Testament are to be “sober-minded” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). The Greek word translated “sober-minded” means “of sound mind, sane, sensible.” It describes a person of balanced judgment.

Paul told the Corinthians, “I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?” (1 Cor. 6:5).

*Make a Wise Discussion* Notice the way some decisions were made *by the apostles*. “Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘*It is not desirable* that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business’” (Acts 6:2-3, italics added). “They analyzed the problem, reviewed their assignments, and made came up with a wise, practical plan that would meet all the relevant needs” (Friesen, p. 185).

“Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, *we thought it good* to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this” (1 Thess. 3:1-3, italics added).

“But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly. Yet *I considered it necessary* to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and

the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick” (Phil. 2:24-26, italics added).

“And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But *if it is fitting* that I go also, they will go with me” (1 Cor. 16:3-4, italics added). “He was simply calculating how it made the best use of his time and energy for the Lord” (Friesen, p. 184). The apostles made their decisions based on what was desirable, good, necessary and fitting.

There are even some situations where unbelievers can be a valuable source of wisdom (Lk. 16:8).

In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul tells a widow she is free to marry whomsoever she wills, but in his opinion, she is happier if she remains single. In other words, it is certainly a measure of the greatness of God’s love that the matter of one’s own personal happiness is permitted as a valid consideration in the process of decision-making. Obviously, it is not the only consideration, nor is it the primary factor (Mt. 6:19-33), but one’s experience of happiness is certainly significant and should not be discounted in the decision-making process.

By the way, common sense is a part of wisdom. Use your common sense. As the golfer approached the first tee, a hazardous hole with a green surrounded by water, he debated if he should use his new golf ball. Deciding that the hole was too treacherous, he pulled out an old ball and placed it on the tee. Just then, he heard a voice from above say loudly: “USE THE NEW BALL!” Frightened, he replaced the old ball with the new one and approached the tee. Now the voice from above shouted: “TAKE A PRACTICE SWING!” With this, the golfer stepped backward and took a swing. Feeling more confident, he approached the tee when the voice again rang out: “USE THE OLD BALL!” You do not need a voice from heaven to know to use an old golf ball when hitting over water.

J. I. Packer wrote an article entitled “Making Right Decisions.” In it, he said, “If we want God to guide us, our attitude needs to be right. Here are some guidelines as to how we can play our part in arriving at the right decisions.

“First, we must be willing to think. It is false piety, super-supernaturalism of an unhealthy pernicious sort that demands inward impressions with no rational base, and declines to heed the constant biblical summons to consider. God made us thinking beings, and he guides our minds as we think things out in his presence.

“Second, we must be willing to think ahead and weigh the long-term consequences of alternative courses of action. Often we can only see what is wise and right, and what is foolish and wrong, as we dwell on the long-term issues.

“Third, we must be willing to take advice. It is a sign of conceit and immaturity to dispense with taking advice in major decisions. There are always people who know the Bible, human nature, and our own gifts and limitations better than we do, and even if we cannot finally accept their advice, nothing but good will come to us from carefully weighing what they say.

“Fourth, we must be willing to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves. We must suspect ourselves: ask ourselves why we feel a particular course of action will be right and make ourselves give reasons.

“Fifth, we must be willing to wait. ‘Wait on the Lord’ is a constant refrain in the Psalms and it is a necessary word, for the Lord often keeps us waiting. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God.”

In an article published in *Discipleship Journal*, Elaine Brown asks us to consider the following seven questions before saying “yes” to a new opportunity.

1. Will my spouse and children be adversely affected if I say “yes” to this?
  2. Is this new opportunity likely to place undue stress on my mind, emotions, and/or body?
  3. Am I fully aware of all that is involved in this commitment?
  4. Could this new opportunity undermine my effectiveness in already existing commitments?
  5. Will this opportunity enable me to use my God-given spiritual gifts and natural talents?
  6. Would it be better for someone else to do this?
  7. What are my motives for considering this opportunity?
- (Brown, cited by Ron Barnes, “Cultivating a Humble Heart,” *Kindred Spirit*, vol. 22, No. 3, Autumn, 1998, p. 7).

**Summary:** Within God’s revealed will in His Word and His providential placement, there is freedom for you to choose your own course of action, even in the areas of marriage, occupation, and location, so make wise decisions.

The Bible does not teach that God has an ideal will He reveals through inward impulses and outward signs. Within the revealed will of God, you have freedom to make wise decisions.

Adam was hungry. He had had a long, challenging day naming animals. As the sun began to set, Adam discovered that he had worked up an appetite. “I think we should eat,” he said to Eve. “Let’s call the evening meal ‘supper.’” “Oh, you’re so decisive, Adam,” replied Eve admiringly. “I like that in a man. And ‘supper’ has a nice ring to it.”

As they discussed how they should proceed, they decided that Adam would gather fruit from the garden, and Eve would prepare it for their meal. Adam set about his task and soon returned with a basket full of ripe fruit. He gave it to Eve, and went to soak his feet in the soothing current of the Pishon River until supper was ready.

He had been reviewing the animals’ names for about five minutes when he heard his wife’s troubled voice.

“Adam, could you help me for a moment?”

“What seems to be the problem, dear?” he replied.

“I’m not sure which of these lovely fruits I should prepare for supper. I’ve prayed for guidance from the Lord, but I’m not really sure what He wants me to do. I certainly don’t want to miss His will on my very first decision. Would you go to the Lord and ask Him what I should do about supper?”

Adam’s hunger was intensifying, but he understood Eve’s dilemma. So he left her to go speak with the Lord. Shortly, he returned. He appeared perplexed.

“Well?” probed Eve.

“He didn’t really answer your question,” he answered.

“What do you mean? Didn’t He say anything?”

“Oh yes,” replied Adam. “But He just repeated what He said earlier today during the garden tour: ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.’ I assure you, Eve, I steered clear of the forbidden tree.”

“But that doesn’t solve my problem,” said Eve. “What should I prepare for tonight?”

From the rumbling in his stomach, Adam was discovering that lions and tigers are not the only things that growl. So he said, “I’ve never seen such crisp, juicy apples. I feel a sense of peace about them. Why don’t you prepare them for supper? Maybe while you’re getting them ready, you’ll experience the same peace I have.”

“All right, Adam,” she agreed. “I guess you’ve had more experience at making decisions than I have. I appreciate your leadership. I’ll call you when supper is ready.”

“OK,” replied Adam, relieved. “I’ll get back to my easy-bank.” Adam was only halfway to the river when he heard Eve’s call. He was so hungry that he jogged back to the clearing where she was working. But his anticipation evaporated when he saw her face.

“More problems?” he asked.

“Adam, I just can’t decide what I should do with these apples. I could slice them, dice them, mash them, bake them in a pie, a cobbler, fritters, or dumplings. Or we could just polish them and eat them raw. I really want to be your helper, but I also want to be certain of the Lord’s will on this decision. Would you be a dear and go just one more time to the Lord with my problem?”

Since he didn’t have any better solution himself, Adam did as Eve requested.

When he returned, he said, “I got the same answer as before: ‘From *any* tree of the garden you may eat *freely*; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.’ “

Adam and Eve were both silent for a moment. Then Adam said, “You know, Eve, the Lord made that statement as though it ought to fully answer my question. I’m sure He could have told me what to eat and how to eat it; but I think He wants us to make those decisions. It was the same way with the animals today. He just left their names up to me.”

Eve was incredulous. “Do you mean that it doesn’t matter which of these fruits we have for supper? Are you telling me that I *can’t* miss God’s will in this decision?”

Adam explained: “The only way you could do that is to pick some fruit from the forbidden tree. But all of these fruits are all right. Why, I suppose we could eat all of them.” Adam snapped his fingers and exclaimed, “Say, that’s a great idea! Let’s have fruit salad for supper!”

Eve hesitated. “What’s a salad?”

(edited from Friesen, pp. 165-67).





## THE PARTICULAR WILL OF GOD Part 2

Let's review. The *perfect* will of God is revealed in the Word of God. God's will is that you be transformed into the image of Christ. The *personal* will of God is that you serve Him and perhaps suffer and be placed in a particular place, but the suffering is not revealed ahead of time and the placing is done providentially. When it comes to particulars, such as marriage and occupation, there is freedom for you to choose your own course of action and still be in the will of God.

Upon hearing that, some believers say, "I thought God had a plan for my life, including who I marry, what I do for a living, and where I live." In other words, they have heard the standard answer that God has an ideal will for every area of your life. This detailed plan is usually called "the perfect will of God," but the perfect will of God is that you be transformed into the image of Christ.

According to the standard answer, the way to determine God's ideal will is that when the Bible, circumstances, and the leading of the Holy Spirit through inner impressions all agree (and you have inner peace), you know you are in the will of God. The illustration often used is that of a boat going through a harbor. When three poles on the shore line up, the captain knows he is in the channel and the ship is safe. So the standard answer is that when the Bible, circumstances and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit all line up, you know you are in the ideal will of God. Is that standard answer correct?

### Using a Fleece

*The Notion* The notion of "putting out a fleece" comes from the story of Gideon in the book of Judges: "So Gideon said to God, 'If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said—look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and *it is* dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.' And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.' And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground" (Judges 6:36-40).

*The Problem* The problem with Gideon's fleece was Gideon's faith. God had already revealed His will to Gideon earlier in the same chapter: "And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him [Gideon], and said to him, 'The LORD *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!' Gideon said to Him, 'O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where *are* all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.' Then the LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?'" (Judges 6:12-14).

Furthermore, the Lord told Gideon again that he would defeat the Midianites: "So he said to Him, 'O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan *is* the weakest in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father's house. And the LORD said to him, 'Surely I will be with you, and you

shall defeat the Midianites as one man” (Judges 6:15-16).

After all of that, Gideon still said, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me” (Judges 6:17). For Gideon, God’s Word was not enough. He still requested a sign. In other words, He did not believe God! He plainly said, “If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said” (Judges 6:36).

*Today* Should we use a “fleece” today? No! Gideon should not have used it! God revealed His will and His promise to Gideon. Note: the fleece was not a method of determining God’s will. God revealed His will to Gideon. Putting out the fleece after God had clearly revealed His will was an act of unbelief.

When people use the “fleece” today, they usually do not do it right. I had a fellow tell me that as he was lying in bed, he said to the Lord, “If it is Your will, let the light go out” and the light went out. I said to him, “For that to have been a biblical fleece, you would have had to have said, ‘Now let the light come back on.’”

## **Casting Lots**

*Proverbs* In Proverbs 16:33, Solomon says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision *is* from the LORD.” Casting lots consisted of writing options on stones, placing the stones in a vessel (or, as here, the lap, that is, in the fold of a garment) and shaking the container until one fell out. Proverbs 16:33 is saying that the one that falls out is not the result of mere chance; it is the result of the hand of the Lord.

*The Old Testament* In the Old Testament, the Lord used the casting of lots for people to determine His will (1 Sam. 14:37-42). It was used for the selection of a scapegoat (Lev. 16:8), the distribution of the duties of the priest (1 Chron. 24:5-19), and the division of the land (Josh. 18:8). It was also used to determine the duties in the Temple.

*The New Testament* In Acts 1, the casting of lots was used to determine who should replace Judas Iscariot. Thus, Matthias was not appointed by the apostles or the church, but directly by the Lord. Notice exactly what the apostles did. They looked at the Scripture (Acts 1:15-17, 21), prayed (Acts 1:24-25), and agreed as a group (Acts 1:23). The Lord had opened their minds to understand the Scripture (Lk. 24:45) and the Lord had breathed on them imparting to them the Holy Spirit until Pentecost (Jn. 20:22), at which time they were baptized by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). In other words, Peter was not referring to the Psalms on his own; he was being guided into all truth by the Spirit of God.

*Today* The question is, “Should we use casting lots today to determine God’s will?” No. The last incident of casting lots in the Bible is in Acts 1. After the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, there is not another case of believers casting lots. So to determine the will of God, do not cast lots. Ask God for wisdom. Search the Scripture and consult a group of godly people.

## **Looking at Circumstances**

*The Notion* Does an “open door” indicate God’s will? What does the Bible say about open doors? The expression “open door” is found five times in the New Testament. (Acts 14:27; 1

Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:8). In four of the five, it clearly refers to some opportunity for gospel ministry and that is probably also the meaning in the fifth.

Acts 14:27 says God “opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” In other words, God gave the Gentiles an opportunity to hear and believe the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 16:9, Paul says, “a great and effective door has opened” to him at Ephesus. The word “door” is a figure for entrance or opportunity. In Ephesus, the opportunities were “great,” that is, numerous, and they were “effective,” meaning productive.

In 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, Paul says, “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord. I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia” (2 Cor. 2:12-13). When Paul got to Troas, the Lord opened a door of opportunity to preach the gospel, but he was deeply concerned about the response of the Corinthians to the letter he had written to them. So he left Troas to find out about the Corinthians. In this case, Paul walked away from an open door!

In Colossians 4:3, Paul asked the Colossians to pray for him “that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains.” The phrase “open to us a door” simply means “to give us an opportunity.” Paul desired an opportunity to speak the Word.

In Revelation 3:7, Jesus identifies Himself as “He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.” In the next verse, He goes on to tell the church at Philadelphia, “I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it.” The open door has been interpreted as the door into the eternal kingdom and as opportunities for service. Since the figure of an open door is used elsewhere in the New Testament of an opportunity to preach the gospel, that is probably the meaning here.

*The Problem* An open door is not necessarily a sign that the opportunity is the will of God. Remember, Paul walked away from an open door.

Circumstances must be interpreted. In his book, *Decision-making and the Will of God*, Friesen says, “Just listen to this imaginary believable discussion concerning the ‘message’ God was trying to convey when lightning struck a church steeple. ‘God is telling us to relocate in the suburbs.’ ‘Oh no, I think it’s quite obvious he’s saying ‘no’ to our expansion plans.’ ‘Maybe the Lord is telling us that there is a sin holding back the work in our church’” (Friesen, p. 213). Later in his book, Friesen adds, “An event cannot communicate a message apart from divine revelation” (Friesen, p. 215).

God is the supreme sovereign of the universe and nothing happens without His knowledge and even permission (Job 1-2). Yet the Scripture also allows for chance. Putting God’s control and chance together is one of life’s puzzles. There is no doubt that God is ultimately in control of everything, yet from a human point of view, it often seems like chance.

When Ruth gleaned in the field after the reapers, “She *happened* to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz” (Ruth 2:3, italics added). Ruth landed on Boaz’s field by “chance” (Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth*). It was a “stroke of luck” (Robert L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*). God is ultimately in control of everything (Ruth 1:20-21) and yet things happen by chance (Ruth 2:3). Most scholars conclude, “Our author thinks of God as being in all of this” (Morris) or “unseen divine providence lay behind her good luck” (Hubbard).

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus said “*by chance* a certain priest came down that road” (Lk. 10:31, italics added).

Concerning the runaway slave Onesimus, Paul told his owner Philemon, “*Perhaps* he departed for a while for this purpose that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave, but

more than a slave, as a beloved brother” especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord” (Phlm. 15-16, italics added). Paul said *perhaps* Onesimus ran away so Philemon would receive him as a brother.

## Listening to Impressions

*The Notion* According to the standard answer, one of the major ways the Lord leads us is by an inner impression. Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18 speak about being led by the Spirit. Being “led by the Spirit” is often taken as a reference to an inner impression, an inner impulse, an inner “still, small voice,” etc. The idea is that through inner impressions, the Holy Spirit leads believers into the ideal will of God.

*The Problem* The problem with that view is that the context of these verses is not dealing with daily decisions concerning non-moral issues. Moreover, nothing in these verses or in their contexts indicates that the *means* of the leading of the Holy Spirit is by an inward impression.

What does being led by the Spirit mean? In Romans 8, Paul says, “But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God these are the sons of God” (8:13-14). Notice that Romans 8:14 begins with “for,” meaning that it is an explanation of the previous verse. Romans 8:13 is saying that by depending on the Holy Spirit, believers can put to death the sins committed through the body. The result is spiritual living. Furthermore, the Spirit-led life is a life of sonship (Rom. 8:14). Being “led by the Spirit” is virtually synonymous with walking according to the Spirit (8:1, 5, 13). “Walking” highlights the active participation and effort of believers in the overall process. “Being led” underscores the passive, submissive side of dependence. It does not eliminate the active involvement of believers. One person being led through a crowd still must put forth effort to walk. This kind of a spiritual life is a life of being God’s son.

In Galatians 5, Paul says, “I say then: walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law” (Gal. 5:16-18). Being led by the Spirit is practically synonymous with walking in the Spirit. “Walking” emphasizes the active part of the believer who has to put forth effort. “Being led” stresses the passive, which is the voluntary subjection of the will, but being led does not mean there is not effort. Being led doesn’t mean being carried. A blind man being led by another still has to walk.

In these verses, Paul is talking about the moral will of God. We are led by the Spirit into the moral will of God.

Impressions are real. We all have them, but nothing in the Bible says they indicate God’s will. The simple reality is that impressions can come from all kinds of places. “Do not hastily ascribe things to God. Do not easily suppose dreams, voices, impressions, visions, or revelations to be from God. They may be from Him. They may be from nature. They may be from the Devil” (John Wesley, cited by J. K. Johnston, *Why Christians Sin*, Discovery House, 1992, p. 102).

## Waiting for Peace

*The Notion* Another standard answer is that God lets us know His will by giving us peace. The verse used to support this notion is Colossians 3:15, which says, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.” This verse is used to say that when you are faced with a decision, let the peace of God be the determining factor in knowing the will of God. But is that really what this verse is saying?

*The Problem* The problem with this notion is that this verse does not say God gives us peace to indicate we’ve made the right decision. The Greek word translated “rule” means “to act as umpire,” hence, “to arbitrate or decide.” The peace of God is to be the umpire. There are personal and social aspects to letting the peace of God umpire.

Personally, the peace of God is to umpire *in our hearts*. Personal peace is the absence of anxiety (Phil. 4:6-7). If believers let this peace with God be the umpire, they will not let anything disturb them. “Let the peace of Christ act as umpire when anger, envy, and such passions arise; and restrain them. Let not those passions give the award, so that you should be swayed by them, but let Christ’s peace be the decider of everything” (JFB).

Socially, the peace of God is to umpire in our relationships with other believers. Notice that Paul adds, “To which also you were called in one body.” Believers are to let the peace of God rule in their hearts because they are called to peace as members of one body (Eph. 4:3). The NIV says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

Should we depend on inner peace? Paul Little tells of a young woman who had signed a contract to teach. In August, she received another offer from a school closer to where she wanted to live. So, she broke the original contract. Had she acted on the biblical principle in Psalms 15:4, where God says that He is pleased with a person who swears to his own hurt and does not change, she would not have done that. The department chairman said her justification was, “I have a peace about it,” and he commented rather sardonically, “Isn’t that lovely? She’s got the peace and I’ve got the pieces.” Little says, “I believe that girl missed the will of God. She violated a principle which, if she had been alert and had applied it to her situation, would have given her clear guidance in this specific detail of her life” (Paul E. Little in a sermon, “Affirming the Will of God” in *Great Sermons of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Christianity Today*, vol. 33, no. 16).

This verse is not teaching that peace determines the will of God. Believers have used “peace” to justify what they want to do. Jessica Hahn, the former church secretary who committed im acts with Jim Bakker (former host of the PTL Club), and later brought down the PTL empire, said that God gave her “real peace” about granting an interview to *Playboy Magazine* and posing for topless pictures (9-28-87).

**Summary:** God does not have a particular will for believers that they can determine by using a fleece, casting lots, looking at circumstances, depending on impressions, or inner peace. God wants us to obey His Word.

Perhaps other verses could be examined, such as Proverbs 3:5-6, which says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” Are these verses teaching that God gives direct daily guidance? No. The Hebrew word translated “direct” means “smooth, straight, right.” The Lord will make the path of life straight for those who do not trust their worldly wisdom but trust the Lord’s wisdom.

God is a Father. As a good father, He does not make all the decisions for you. If a father still made all the decisions as the child grew older, he would raise an immature son. The standard answer of waiting for “inner peace” to know the will of God does not produce mature children.

A good father lets his children make more and more decisions as they grow older. There is a legend of a Cherokee Indian youth’s rite of passage. His father takes him into the forest, blindfolds him and leaves him alone. He is required to sit on a stump the whole night and not remove the blindfold until the rays of the morning sunshine through it. He cannot cry out for help to anyone. Once he survives the night, he is a MAN. He cannot tell the other boys of this experience, because each lad must come into manhood on his own. The boy is naturally terrified. He can hear all kinds of noises. Wild beasts must surely be all around him. Maybe even some humans might do him harm. The wind blew the grass and earth and shook his stump, but he sat stoically, never removing the blindfold. It would be the only way he could become a man!

Finally, after a horrific night, the sun appeared and the boy removed his blindfold. It was then that he discovered his father sitting on the stump next to him. He had been at watch the entire night, protecting his son from harm.

To become spiritually mature, you must learn to obey your heavenly Father and make mature decisions.