

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (1)

“THE SOURCE”

Sermon 4/29/18

I did not grow up in a Christian home. I was not raised in the church and, though we had one King James Bible sitting on a shelf in our home, I never read it nor did anyone else in my household. I was struggling in junior high but I did not know why. As I grew older and graduated from High School I found myself searching for something greater than myself to help me stop sinning. I did not call it sin of course because I did not know the Biblical term for what I was doing. All I knew was that I was unhappy with myself and could not stop doing the things which I did not want to do.

If I had read the Bible I would have gladly echoed the words of Paul in Romans chapter 7 where he says, *“I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want... Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”*

In my third year of college God surrounded me with four friends who just happened to be Christians. They befriended me and lived lives that outwardly showed their devotion to Christ. They seemed to have what I was looking for so I decided to purchase a Bible for myself to see what I could discover. Before I finished the gospels I knew I had found the One I was looking for – the One who had the power to help me resist the evil that lurked so powerfully within me. I confessed my many sins to God and gave my life to Christ some time in February of 1969. And I have never looked back.

As most every new believer experiences, life becomes instantly better once you know your sins are forgiven. There is some growing up to do and some readjustments to life that are necessary but the struggles with sin dissipate with time as you become more acquainted with the Savior and the power of the Holy Spirit within you. This was true for me as well.

But after some time I became frustrated. I was not very educated in the things of God, and though I had started to attend church and Bible Studies I was ignorant of what He required of me. At one point in my ignorance I told God that if He would just tell me what He wanted me to do I would do it. To me it was as simple as that. Just have God tell me what His will was and I would do it. Boy was I naive. As good as my intentions were I quickly realized that my sinful nature would not go gently into that good night. My flesh was not willing to be that compliant to God's will. It was very reluctant to surrender control. The old nature may have died but the flesh was still very much active and the mind truly did not want to do God's will even with only an inclining of what it was.

Even so, with the Spirit's help I began a search to know what the will of God was in its entirety. As I searched the Scriptures it was comforting to know that Philippians 2:13 says, *“It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”*. I was not alone. God was working with me to discern and to do His will.

But in my search I learned there were many who claimed to know what the will of God was and not all of them were grounded in God's word. Some had ulterior motives which they used to ensnare me in words and actions which were contrary to the word of God. In Matthew chapter 7 Jesus warned us against false prophets who claim to know the will of God but actually lead people away from His will. Jesus says these types of people come to us in sheep's clothing, appearing innocent and trustworthy; inwardly though they are ravenous wolves seeking to separate us from other believers in order to devour us with their false teachings. Just because these people say they are believers does not mean they are.

But how do we tell the true from the false? Jesus said we could distinguish them by the fruit their lives bear. A life that does not produce the fruit of holiness is not a life that has been impacted by holiness. Or as Jesus said, good trees cannot produce bad fruit and bad trees cannot produce good fruit. After giving this analogy Jesus hits at the heart of the matter by saying this:

MATTHEW 7:21

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”

Those who do the will of the Father are those who will inherit the kingdom of Heaven. Those who do not do the will of the Father will not inherit the kingdom of Heaven. It's as simple as that. Yet, what is the will of the Father and how can we know it? If it is a prerequisite for entry into heaven how can we discover what God's will is so that we may do it and assure ourselves a place in heaven?

First of all I need to emphasize once again, despite what I have just said, that there is nothing we can personally do to gain entrance into heaven. Everything we do to gain God's favor is considered as filthy rags by our Creator (Isaiah 64:6). It is not by the works we do that heaven is opened to us. It is only by faith in the death and resurrection of Christ that Heaven's gate is open wide.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

“By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Jesus confirmed this when He was asked the question, *“What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”* And Jesus replied,

JOHN 6:29, 40

“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent... For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

The work that God requires of us is belief and that belief is centered in His Son Jesus. There is no other work we can do that is pleasing in the Father's sight. To believe in Christ IS the work of God. But that is just the beginning; as Jesus said there is fruit to be seen from a believing tree and that fruit is the work we do because and as a result of our belief. James puts this in

perspective when he reminds us that “*faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26). So if doing the will of our heavenly Father is required of us and not simply mouthing the words, “*Lord, Lord,*” what is the will of the Lord that we are to do besides believing in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus that assures us entrance into heaven? That is what I want to look at today and over the next several weeks.

But before we look at what the will of God is I want us to look first at how the will of God is revealed to us. Where do we go to determine the will of God and are these places reliable? Before we accept anyone’s word for what God’s will is we need to make sure these people are giving an accurate account and not speaking falsely. So today we will look at how God reveals His will to us, what are the accurate sources we can turn to, and then next week we will start looking at what the will of God is specifically.

HOW DOES GOD REVEAL HIS WILL?

God reveals His will to us in five different ways: through the words and works of Jesus, through a direct revelation from the Father, through a prophet of God, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and through the Scriptures themselves. Let’s take a look at them one at a time.

#1 - THROUGH THE WORDS AND WORKS OF JESUS

Jesus said in John chapters 5 and 12 that He could do nothing unless it was something He saw the Father doing. He did not even speak on His own initiative but whatever the Father gave Him to say, that is what He said (John 5:19; 12:49). So if we want to know what the will of the Father is we can start with the words Jesus spoke and the works which He did in His Father’s name.

I do not intend to go through everything Jesus said or did today. You can do that for yourself. But I do want to highlight a few things worth noting. For instance Jesus taught the word of God to many and at every opportunity. So when we teach or speak God’s word we can be absolutely certain that we are doing the will of God. Of course if we twist His word like the devil did with Jesus, and do so for our own means or to exalt ourselves, then we will lead others astray. This actually violates God’s word and is in direct contrast to it. So when we speak or teach God’s word we must be certain that we are doing what Jesus did – speaking only what the Father gives us to say. In that way we can know we are doing the will of God.

Jesus also spent time in prayer before making decisions and when He prayed He was willing to give up His own will so that the will of the Father might be done. When we consult God before making decisions and are willing to give up our will for His we are following the example of Jesus and can therefore know that we are doing the will of the Father.

There was a book written many years ago entitled, “What Would Jesus Do?” Several years ago the youth adopted this phrase and wore bracelets on their wrists which had the initials “WWJD” – what would Jesus do? It was a reminder that before any activity or decision they needed to ask themselves “What would Jesus do?” and then go and do likewise. Jesus is our model, our inspiration, and our guide as to what the Father’s will is. The will of God is revealed through the words and works of Jesus.

#2 - THROUGH A REVELATION FROM THE FATHER

Jesus once asked His disciples who people thought He was. After some discussion He asked His disciples who they thought He was. Simon Peter answered, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*” And Jesus said to him, “*Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 16:13-17).

Peter did not come up with this answer on His own using deductive reasoning or human intuition. Jesus explicitly stated that His Father in heaven had revealed directly to Simon Peter the true identity of Jesus. So one of the ways God’s will is revealed is through a revelation coming directly from the Father.

Let me give you a modern day example. Many years ago a pastor friend of mine told me about an idea he had for the church he was ministering in. When he told me about the idea I knew instantly that it was from God. I cannot tell you how, but I had no doubt that what he was proposing was what the Father wanted his church to do. I had what some call “a witness in my spirit” that his proposal was God ordained. Unfortunately the ruling elders of his church did not agree and they voted the proposal down.

What happens when God reveals His will for a church but the people in charge of this church reject it? In my friend’s case the proposal had to do with how to spend the excess money they had. The ruling elders decided to keep the excess instead of sharing it with others whom they knew were in need. As a result of that decision the church suffered many, many years of financial hardship. It may or may not happen frequently, but God can and often does reveal His will directly to His people. When that occurs, whether in positions of authority or not, we would do well to pay attention, for God’s will can be revealed through a revelation directly from the Father.

#3 - THROUGH A PROPHET

When Paul was on his way to Rome late in his ministry he stayed at the home of Phillip the evangelist. While he was there a prophet named Agabus came to see him. When he saw Paul the Scriptures say Agabus did the following (Acts 21:10-14): “*He took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, ‘This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him in to the hands of the Gentiles.’*” When those who were there heard what Agabus had said they began begging Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

It appears from this Scripture that those who heard the prophet speak and saw the things he did were so convinced of his authenticity that they begged Paul not to go and fulfill the prophet’s words. But Paul would not be persuaded from going, declaring that he was ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ Since he would not be persuaded, they all fell silent after saying, “*The will of the Lord be done!*”

Paul refusal to heed the words of Agabus does not imply that he was tired of resisting and ready to give up and allow the Jews to do with him as they wished. No, the Lord had already revealed to Him what lie ahead. When at Ephesus, before he sailed to Miletus to be with Phillip, Paul told the people that he was bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, not knowing what would happen to him there, except that the Holy Spirit had solemnly testified to him in every city that bonds and afflictions awaited him. When Agabus spoke it merely confirmed what the Holy Spirit

had already told Paul.

As much as they wished otherwise, the people also became convinced it was God's will that Paul be bound hands and feet by the Jews at Jerusalem and be delivered him into the hands of the Gentiles. So with heavy hearts they said their goodbye's let him go.

There are many instances of a prophet speaking the will of God in the Old Testament and there are other prophets besides Abagus who speak God's will in the New Testament as well. Should we therefore believe every word someone who claims to be a prophet speaking in the name of the Lord? No. There have been false as well as true prophets in both Testaments. That is why John reminds us that many false prophets have gone out into the world speaking false messages, in direct contrast to the will of God. His word of caution is for believers not to believe every prophet, but to test the spirits of these prophets to see whether they are from God or not. His litmus test is this – every Spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

God reveals His will through the words and works of Jesus, through direct revelation from the Father and also through the word of a true prophet of God.

#4 - THROUGH THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

This may seem redundant in light of what I just said about testing the spirit of a prophet but it is still important none-the-less. Peter reminds us that “...no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21). Men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit to write the words of Scripture. Many religious books have been written by an act of human will. Inspired by their own thoughts some have written books that have inspired yet led many astray with their human wisdom.

An example would be Scientology. In the early 1950's according to his own words L. Ron Hubbard decided that the best way to make money was to invent a new religion. So he created the Church of Scientology for the sole purpose of making himself rich. And it worked. Unfortunately, in the wake of his millions, many were led away from the truth and were ensnared by his false teaching. The spirit of L. Ron Hubbard could not confess that Jesus was from God. In his teaching people were themselves God and in charge of their own destinies.

In contrast, the Bible was not created from the will of man or from man's lust for money or power. The Bible contains the true wisdom of God in words that the Holy Spirit moved the authors of the Bible to write. As a result we can be assured that the will of God is revealed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This brings me to my last point.

#5 – THE WILL OF GOD IS REVEALED THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

We have just stated that men wrote the Word of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so it stands to reason that these same Scriptures would reveal the will of God to us. Paul makes this point crystal clear when he says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16).

If there is anything we need to know about what the will of God is, Scripture will reveal it to us. It can be used to teach, to critique a teaching, to correct someone's words or actions, and to train someone in how to live a righteous life. The purpose of Scripture is to equip believers for every good work which the Lord requires of them. That is why it is so important to know what the Scriptures teach. Psalm 119:9-11 says, *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to your word. With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word have I treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You."* Knowing the word of God can keep a person from sinning. But if sin occurs it can also restore a person back to fellowship with God.

David was known as a man after God's own heart, yet this same man committed adultery with another man's wife and then had the man murdered to cover it up. If anyone learned the lesson of knowing God's word it is David. That is why, after being convicted by the Holy Spirit through the prophet Nathan, David was able to write these words of Scripture: *"Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."*

Sacrifices and burnt offerings were required under the Jewish Law and as a Jew David was required to give them. So how did David conclude that God was not pleased with the sacrifices and burnt offerings he offered as atonement for sin? How did He know that God was instead looking for a broken spirit and a contrite heart when a man was confessing his sin? He knew from the whole of Scripture and not from isolated parts. And He knew from his close relationship with God Himself.

God reveals Himself to us through the words He has inspired men to write. His will is evident on every page; not just through words but through illustrations and examples. Paul tells us in Romans (15:4) that *"Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through the perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."* When we read of the life of David in the Scriptures we see a flawed man but a man whom God forgave. We see a man whom God used to do great things despite his shortcoming. We see a man who was guided by the word of God even when He strayed from it.

God even used this flawed man to create the encouraging words of Scripture we read today. The words of David in the 23rd Psalm about the Lord being our Shepherd and His walking with us through the valley of the shadow of death are sung or spoken in nearly every Christian funeral today. The confession of David in Psalm 50 and his desire to be washed clean from his sin are models for everyone today that has every strayed purposely from the will of God and desired to return to His favor. And the words of Psalm 139 which state there is no place we can go from God's Spirit or His presence is comforting to all who feel distant or estranged from the nearness of God. So where can we go to discover the will of God?

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THROUGH THE WORDS AND WORKS OF JESUS
THROUGH A REVELATION FROM THE FATHER

THROUGH A PROPHET
THROUGH THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

If you want to know where to go to find the will of God these are the sources to which you should go. Next week we will look at exactly what these sources say the will of God is. But for today let me close this part of discovering God's will with these words from Scripture, also written by David the master psalmist.

PSALM 25:4-14

“Make me know Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, Your compassion and Your loving kindnesses, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to Your lovingkindness remember me. For Your goodness' sake, O Lord...

“Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way. All the paths of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies. For Your names sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great...

“Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. His soul will abide in prosperity, and His descendants will inherit the land. The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant.”

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