

How To Know God's Will

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

copyright © 1998 by J. W. Jepson

All rights reserved, including the right to grant the following permission and to prohibit the misuse thereof:

The Author hereby grants permission to reproduce the text of this article, without changes or alterations*, as a ministry, but not for commercial or non-ministry purposes.

***Permission is given for publication of excerpts and condensed versions.**

(First published in The Pentecostal Messenger in 1966; then in the Pentecostal Evangel, March 30, 1969; then in revised form in the Pentecostal Evangel, December 11, 1994)

* * * * *

(NIV) Scripture quotations from the Holy Bible, New International Version are copyright © 1973, 1978, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

(NKJV) Scripture quotations from The Holy Bible, New King James Version are copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

(NASB) Scripture quotations from the New American Standard Bible are copyright © 1972, The Lockman Foundation.

* * * * *

When Saul of Tarsus met Jesus on the road to Damascus, one of his first questions was, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). That is evidence of a genuine conversion!

Every true Christian should be vitally concerned about the will of God. God has a plan for our lives and He wants us to know it and follow it. "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is" (Ephesians 5:17 NIV). James 4:15 instructs us to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that" (NIV).

Paul asked God "to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9 NIV).

Wanting to know and do God's will implies a willing and obedient heart. Submission and discipleship flow out of love.

Also, a person who is committed to do the will of God will know the truth. Jesus said, "If a man chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (John 7:17 NIV). Self-will leads to error; submission keeps us in the truth.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1,2 NKJV).

So then, knowing the will of God requires a proper condition of the heart--a living sacrifice, holy . . . not conformed to this world . . . transformed.

First is a right motive. Then we build right principles. Then we make right decisions. "How to live" comes before "what to do."

Then we will pray according to the will of God and he will hear us (1 John 5:14). Some people are determined to have their own way and are merely trying to talk God into letting them have it. They are not praying in tune with the will of God because they are not submissive to His will.

God will show us the path of life (Psalm 16:11). "A man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23 NIV). "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" (Proverbs 16:9 NIV). "A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?" (Proverbs 20:24 NIV).

That settles it! We need divine direction. And God has promised to give it. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (Psalm 32:8 NIV). "The Lord will guide you always" (Isaiah 58:11 NIV). "When he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them" (John 10:4 NKJV).

The will of God has identifying characteristics. Let's consider several.

God's will is always scriptural. The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Bible, and He will never contradict Himself by leading us to do something contrary to or inconsistent with His word. When the Bible has spoken on any subject, that is God's will. When we know what the Bible says about the matter, we must not tempt God by saying, "I'll pray about it to see if it is God's will."

God's will is reasonable and wise. His will is always what is best for us. It is based on good and wise reasons. God's will might take us along a path that neither we nor others fully understand; however, God never leads us to do things that are disruptive, harmful, or that bring reproach upon Christ, His Church, His cause, or our testimony.

God's will is holy. God never leads us to violate a clear moral obligation. It is always His will for us to be Christ-like, to manifest the fruit of the Spirit, to be truthful and holy, to act like Christian ladies and gentlemen. "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15 NIV). "The integrity of the upright guides them" (Proverbs 11:3 NIV).

God's will is practical. He always leads us to do what is useful and constructive. Are you thinking about doing something that would lessen your usefulness or serve no real purpose? Be wise and forget it.

God's will is realistic. God does set goals and visions before us that are beyond our human ability to achieve; however, if it is of God, He will confirm it by enabling us and opening the doors for us. The same passage in Romans 12 that urges us to recognize God's will also reminds us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think soberly (realistically) according to the measure

of faith God has given to each. Let us not draw back from it or presume beyond it, but be faithful in it and ask God to increase it.

The will of God is often in wise counsel. Proverbs 15 speaks about this. Verse 22 says, "Without consultation plans are frustrated" (NASB). We must avoid two extremes: depending on others to find the will of God for us, or trying to figure it out all by ourselves. We are not "lone rangers," but members of a body where all the parts work together. Did you ever go off on your own to do something you thought was the will of God, only to have it end in frustration? If you had sought and accepted wise counsel, the disappointment could have been avoided.

Often the will of God is providential. God may indicate or confirm His will by a convergence of circumstances, including providing proper opportunities. Sometimes the will of God is not so much something we "find" as it is something we do as a matter of course as we walk with God. Many struggle to "find" God's will when all the time they are right in the middle of it or it is lying right in front of them.

"Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5 NKJV). "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way" (vs. 23 NKJV). "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5,6 NIV).

The will of God is positioned in faith. God never wants us to be quitters or to run from responsibility. God's will is never just the easy way out. It never leads into defeat. When seeking to know the will of God, our heart must be in a position of faith. Paul and Silas were in God's will even in the Philippian jail (Acts 16). When duty is clear, the will of God is clear. Take the whole armor of God and stand (Ephesians 6).

The will of God is spiritual. A careless or carnal attitude leads to trouble. Spiritual negligence is the devil's opportunity. Satan uses the weak and careless moment to induce people to make impulsive and ruinous decisions. We are always most open to the will of God when we are in a spirit of prayer. As we walk softly before God, we are sensitive to the leadings, guidings, movings, checks, and inclinations of the Holy Spirit. Our best decisions are made on our knees.

The will of God is now. You might feel that because you missed the will of God in the past, you cannot be your best for God now. But for the Christian, the will of God is not something in the past. *The will of God is now!* Even though you might have missed opportunities, God has a plan for you right now. "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18 NIV).