

KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD

Daniel Botkin

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" -Ephesians 5:15-17

Over the years I have met many believers who struggle over knowing the will of God for their lives. This is especially common among young people, who still have most of their adult life ahead of them. Important decisions have to be made. What is God's will for me? Am I supposed to get a job or go to school? If a job, what kind? Where? If school, where? What does the Lord want me to study? Should I marry? Who? When? Where should I live? Should I rent or buy a home? Which congregation does God want me to join?

These are important questions to a person who really wants to do the will of God, and is afraid he might make a wrong decision and find himself outside the will of God. As the above verses from Ephesians show, the wise understand what the will of the Lord is, but the foolish do not.

In my early 30s, I went through a difficult time of confusion and depression as the result of my uncertainty about God's will for my life. I had just returned home from a seven-month stay in Israel. I had a wife and two children to support, no job, almost no money, no home, no ministry, no church home, no plans, and absolutely no direction. I had no idea what the Lord wanted me to do. One thing I did have was a desperate, earnest desire to find and do the will of God, coupled with a fear that I might make a wrong decision and miss the will of God.

With these thoughts in mind, I was walking along the road one night (I didn't have a car, either), grieving over how difficult it was for me to discern the will of God.

"Father," I prayed, "why is it so hard to know your will? It wasn't always this difficult."

My mind went back to my years as a new believer, when knowing God's will didn't seem to be a problem. "Why is it so hard now?" I wondered. "I'm ten years older now, and hopefully wiser. It ought to be easier for me to know God's will." Proverbs 4:18 came to mind: "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

"I've been walking the path of the just for ten years," I thought. "The light should make things clearer, not more confusing."

Then I recalled one of the very first Bible studies I had ever taught. I had been walking with the Lord for about two years at that time, and I was teaching on the so-called "Lord's Prayer" ("Our Father which art in heaven,"

etc.). "Thy will be done," I quoted. I then proceeded to comment on the fact that so many Christians seemed to be in a constant state of uncertainty and confusion about knowing God's will for them.

"I've never had that problem," I informed my audience. "For me, knowing God's will seems simple."

I then quoted Proverbs 3:5. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." I also quoted Proverbs 16:3. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established."

I then pointed out to my listeners that if we meet each of the conditions specified in these Scriptures, then we have no reason to doubt the promise that "He shall direct thy paths," and no cause to fear that it is not by our Heavenly Father that our "thoughts shall be established."

As I thought back on that study I had given about eight years earlier, I prayed, "Lord, was I just naive and immature and simple-minded back then? Or is it really that simple?"

Immediately the answer came to me like the sun rising over the horizon at daybreak. "Yes. It's really that simple."

I realized then that my confusion and doubt was due to the fact that I had let myself fall into a trap. I had allowed myself to become afraid to do anything for the Kingdom for fear that "it might not be God's will." I had let fear find a foothold in my mind by listening to the enemy say things like "Maybe it's not God's will. Maybe you're being too hasty and creating an Ishmael. Don't get ahead of the Lord. This is a good thing you want to do, but maybe it's just something sent to distract you from God's *perfect* will. You'd better wait"

Of course there is an element of truth in all the above statements, but I had become overly-cautious, and had let fear rob me of my vision to do anything for the Lord. I had, in effect, become like the unprofitable servant who said to his lord, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth."

Although we walk a narrow path, I believe the will of God is broader than many Christians think it is. God said to Joshua, "*Everyplace* where the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you" (Josh. 1:3). The Lord then proceeded to delineate the borders of the Land, so Joshua would understand that "every place" meant every place within the boundaries that God had decreed.

We, like Joshua, are given promises that suggest a wide variety of places to go and things to do for the Kingdom, a broad range

of opportunities: "*Whatsoever* thy hand findeth to do..." (Eccl. 9:10); "...*whatsoever* he doeth shall prosper" (Ps. 13); "Go ye into a//tf)ewjrW..." (Mk. 16:15).

And like Joshua, we must stay within the boundaries that God has decreed for His people. Our "boundaries" are the commandments of God. "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" is promised only to the man of whom it is said "his delight is in the Torah of Yahweh, and in His Torah doth he meditate day and night." Augustine said, "Love God, and do what you will." This is a Biblical principle, provided one truly knows what it means to love God: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3).

If we want to do something for our Father's Kingdom, we need to ask some questions to determine if it is His will. 1) Am I seeking His glory, or my own? 2) Do my goals and the methods I plan to use line up with Scripture, or do they violate Torah? 3) Have I met the conditions of His promises? 4) Am I willing to let the Holy Spirit redirect me if I am off-course?

Once we have honestly dealt with these questions, we can begin to move out. Even if we are slightly off-course, it is better to go forward than to stay stuck in the mud and go nowhere. Anyone who has ever driven a car in the mud knows that it is easier to steer a moving vehicle, even if it's not pointed exactly the right direction, than it is to try to straighten the wheels when the car is motionless.

If our plans are a little off-course, our Heavenly Father loves us enough to somehow redirect us into His perfect will. We see this wonderful truth demonstrated in Acts 16:6-10, where Paul and his team tried to preach in one place, but were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit," then in another place, "but the Spirit did not let them." Finally Paul had a vision which assured them they were to go to Macedonia.

Years ago I might have said that Paul and his team were too hasty in their attempts to go to these other places, and they should have just waited for the Macedonian vision. Now, however, I am more inclined to believe that Macedonian visions are given only to people who are at least attempting to go forward and do *something* for the Kingdom.

So often we are like the frantic sailor lost at sea, who cries out to God to help him find his way. God replies, "You have a map and a compass. Hoist up your anchor and use them!" God's reply to our cries for the knowledge of His will is "You have a Bible and the Holy Spirit. Gird up your loins and use them!"