

Redeemer Church
Men's Leadership Training

3/24/10

Knowing God's Will

There are three main ways God's Will is described in Scripture:

1. His decrees (decretive will)

Q. 7. What are the decrees of God?

A. The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Eph 1:9-11 ⁹And he^[d] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. ¹¹In him we were also chosen,^[e] having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

-This will is hidden until it happens

Deut 29:29 ²⁹ The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

"The providence of God is like Hebrew words- it can be read only backwards" John Flavel

2. His precepts (perceptive will)

Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Thess 4:3-5 ³It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control his own body^[a] in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God;

-We have the power but not the right to break these laws

3. His desires (desiderative will)

Ezekiel 33:11 ¹¹ Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

-this describes God's attitude or disposition, what is pleasing to Him

"To sum up, God has a secret, sovereign plan for each of us that orders each detail of our lives. God also has a revealed, moral will for us that is summarized in the Great Commandment and has implications, preferences, and directions for extensive areas in each life. The wisdom we seek in divine guidance is God's moral will applied to the believer's life. Guidance is discerning God's moral and spiritual preferences as they apply to our life situations. It is not a detailed plan to be discovered or communicated by God in extra-scriptural communications." James C. Petty

The Puritans used this model to "find the will of God"

1. The Bible

-Eliminates options

-pinpoint vs. parameters

"If a man will not work, he shall not eat." 2 Thess 3:10

"God guides us through Scripture- This is true in both the specific sense of (a) forbidding certain options and prescribing others, and in the more general sense of (b) shaping the desires, outlook, and perspective of the child of God. For example, if I were seeking marriage, the Scripture would tell me not to marry a non-Christian, as in 'a'. But, it would also shape my concept of what marriage is, why marriage is an 'honorable estate', and the kinds of qualities to look for in a wife, as in 'b'. Thus a godly

single man will seek a Christian wife both because this is what Scripture demands and because Scripture has shaped his desires so this is also what he wants, even longs for.” *Terry L. Johnson*

2. Providence

- Eliminates options
- When do circumstances prevent your plan?

3. Vocation

- Calling (internal and external)

Divine guidance comes as we

- internalize and adopt God’s values and commandments, and
- express them in our unique situation
- through the illumination of the Holy Spirit

The three circles of God’s will:

1. Area of things prohibited
“put offs”
Requires obedience in all situations
Area of church discipline
2. Area of the application of God’s positive commands
Guidance by wisdom and discernment
Can be in or out of God’s will depending on the situation, motive, outcome, etc.
3. Area of Christian Liberty
Choices between equally good alternatives
Providential guidance (small “g”)
Motive must be to glorify God

Finding the Will of God: a pagan notion? By Bruce K. Waltke

1. Read your Bible
2. Develop a heart for God
3. Seek wise counsel
4. Look for God’s Providence
5. Does this make sense?
6. Divine Intervention

(the order of these steps is crucial!- develop your own relationship with God, don’t rely on others too quickly.)

Discovering God’s Will by Sinclair Ferguson

1. Look at God’s commands and prohibitions in Scripture
All our decisions should be filtered through God’s moral dictates
2. Look at the various principles worked out in Scripture
“Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness” Matt 6:33
“The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” 1 Tim 6:10
3. Look at similar examples or illustrations in Scripture
What did David do in a similar trial?
Where did Saul go wrong?
Did Jesus ever face this situation?

“Instead of seeking some supernatural word that will relieve us of responsibility for making godly decisions, we are to cultivate biblical decision-making through familiarity with the Word God has already revealed.” *Sinclair Ferguson*

“In general, he guides and directs his people, by affording them in answer to prayer, the light of his Holy Spirit, which enables them to understand and to love the Scriptures. The word of God... is to furnish us with just principles, right apprehensions to regulate our judgments and affections, and thereby influence and direct our conduct.” *John Newton*

“Quite simply, good students of Scripture become sound decision-makers.” *Dan McCartney*

Romans 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

“What is necessary is that we have a renewed mind, that is so shaped and so governed by the revealed will of God in the Bible, that we see and assess all relevant factors with the mind of Christ, and discern what God is calling us to do. This is very different from constantly trying to hear God’s voice saying do this and do that. People who try to lead their lives by hearing voices are not in sync with Romans 12:2. There is a world of difference between praying and laboring for a renewed mind that discerns how to apply God’s Word, on the one hand, and the habit of asking God to give you new revelation of what to do, on the other hand. Divination does not require transformation. God’s aim is a new mind, a new way of thinking and judging, not just new information. His aim is that we be transformed, sanctified, freed by the truth of his revealed Word (John 8:32; 17:17). So the second stage of God’s will of command is the discerning application of the Scriptures to new situations in life by means of a renewed mind.

Finally, the third stage of God’s will of command is the vast majority of living where there is no conscious reflection before we act. I venture to say that a good 95% of your behavior you do not premeditate. That is, most of your thoughts, attitudes, and actions are spontaneous. They are just spillover from what’s inside. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matthew 12:34-36).

Why do I call this part of God’s will of command? For one reason. Because God commands things like: Don’t be angry. Don’t be prideful. Don’t covet. Don’t be anxious. Don’t be jealous. Don’t envy. And none of those actions are premeditated. Anger, pride, covetousness, anxiety, jealousy, envy—they all just rise up out of the heart with no conscious reflection or intention. And we are guilty because of them. They break the commandment of God.

Is it not plain therefore that there is one great task of the Christian life: Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. We need new hearts and new minds. Make the tree good and the fruit will be good (Matthew 12:33). That’s the great challenge. That is what God calls you to. You can’t do it on your own. You need Christ, who died for your sins. And you need the Holy Spirit to lead you into Christ-exalting truth and work in you truth-embracing humility.” *John Piper*