

THE WILL OF GOD

WEEK 2: WHAT ARE THE WRONG METHODS FOR INTERPRETING GOD'S WILL?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this six-week class is to discuss the will of God. We want to take on the subject from as many different angles as possible and discuss what is being taught in the church world today.
- We want you to have a Biblical, theological, and personal understanding of how to know and then pursue the will of God in your own life.
- So, for the next six weeks, we want to explore with you all what the Bible says about the will of God and how we can apply that to our decision making processes.
- Our schedule will look like this:
 - Week 1: What is the will of God?
 - **Week 2: What are the wrong methods of interpreting God's will?**
 - Week 3: What is the Holy Spirit's role in interpreting God's will?
 - Week 4: How do we reconcile evil in the world when God's in control?
 - Week 5: What can we do to know God's revealed will to us?
 - Week 6: What steps can I put into place for proper Biblical decision making?

INTRODUCTION

- In today's class, we are going to go over several ways that people have used, and still use, to try and interpret the will of God. These ways that we are going to go over are wrong.
- You are going to see a common theme in all of these, they are very subjective to the person and not very objective with regards to the Scriptures.
- We want to be able to discern what God has for us, but we do not want to fall into a trap of simply doing what we want to do and then say that it was God who led us to do it.
- If we have nothing to objectively hold our actions against, then we are, in truth, simply doing whatever we want to do.
- I hope at the end of this class there will be some clarity on how *not* so seek out decisions.

REVIEW FROM LAST TIME: DEFINE OUR TERMS

- Before we start talking about different “wills,” I think it is helpful to define our terms. Like anything else, if we are using the same language but it means something different to each of us, we are going to be talking over one another.
- When we use the term “will of God” we use it in 3 different ways:
 - We speak of all things happening according to God’s will
 - We talk about being obedient and doing the will of God
 - We talk about finding the will of God
- We will use the following terms to refer to those 3 different uses of the term “will of God”:
 - **Sovereign will**
 - Also known as His “will of decree” or “decretive will”
 - **Definition:** everything that God ordains to happen
 - **Moral will**
 - This is also known as the “preceptive will” or “will of command” or “will of desire”
 - **Definition:** The commands and principles contained in God’s Word for us to follow
 - **Individual will**
 - We want to know God’s individual, specific plan for our lives...we want to know His direction
- Does God have a sovereign will?
 - Yes, but it’s hidden, and we can’t know it until after it happens
- Does God have a moral will?
 - Yes, it’s found in His Word...Everything God wants us to know about His will is revealed in His Word...As we read His Word, He fills us with the knowledge of His will
- Does God have an individual will that has to be discovered in order to make decisions?
 - No, he does not.
- How do we make decisions then? Who to marry? What job to have? Where to live? Scripture doesn’t say.

10 WRONG METHODS FOR ATTEMPTING TO FIND GOD’S INDIVIDUAL WILL

- Now we are going to take a cursory overview of 10 popular methods we employ in our own lives to find the will of God (Individual will) so that we can strive to make decisions that we think align with what He wants.
- This is not an exhaustive list nor is it to make anyone feel bad for using some of these in their own life.
- It also does not mean that by using these things will always turn out good or bad.

Wrong Method 1: Misusing the Bible (probably the most heinous)

- This comes in a couple forms
- One form is the close eyes, open Bible, and point method. This is probably the most common way of trying to discern what God wants us to do.
 - While you may not actually close your eyes and point, you are reading the Bible with an ear towards wanting a question answered. When you get the response that you want, then it must have been God.
 - Not a good method for discerning God's will...random at best and towards your bias at worse.
- Another form of this is trying to find a passage that tells you what to do in that situation.
 - There is a guy who was trying to decide between the military or taking his father's business
 - Found a reference in the Bible that said "those who went down to the sea in ships"
 - So, he joined the Navy...took that as God speaking to him.
 - Maybe there is a guy who is dating a girl named Rebekah
 - He is considering marriage but he's not sure
 - So, he asks the Lord to direct him in Scripture
 - The day is March 2 and his reading that day in his daily Bible reading is from **Genesis 24**.
 - He read it, gets to the end of the chapter where it says: "...and he married Rebekah. So, she became his wife, and he loved her"
 - The man takes it as a sure word from the Lord to propose to Rebekah
- Scripture gets so easily abused when you use it this way
- **All of the Bible is for us, but not all of the Bible is to us – we can't rip verses out of context so that it fits and suits what we want it to say!**
- It is so important to understand each verse in its context.
- Proper rules of interpretation must be applied (Hermeneutics).
 - There is only 1 right interpretation and then after finding it, there are many applications that come, but we must have the right interpretation.
 - The Bible cannot mean something to us today that the original author did not mean back then. We can certainly apply it differently in our own culture, but it must mean the same thing.
 - If we think the Bible means something different than it did when it was written, then *it has no meaning at all*.
 - This would say that anyone throughout all of time is able to make the Bible mean whatever they want it to, and nobody can tell them differently.
 - There would be no forgiveness of sins, would not really know God, etc.

Wrong Method 2: Circumstances

- Many Christians use circumstances to help them make decisions
- They say that because there is no such thing as coincidence and that nothing happens by chance
- God is the sovereign ruler over all things including the circumstances which surround the decisions we have to make
- People believe that God will bring circumstances together with precise timing to reveal His will
- Henry Blackaby in his book *Experiencing God* has promoted this view
- Example: someone who prays, “Lord if you want us to sell our home, please have someone inquire about it next week without our advertising.”
- Someone inquires next week about their house... Therefore, God must want us to sell our house
- Many Christians would take that as a sign that they should sell their house because the circumstances worked out that way
- But circumstances do not reveal God’s will – circumstances don’t convince us to make a certain decision
- All circumstances have to be evaluated in light of Scriptures
- “Circumstances only provide occasions (not guidance) for basic decision making.” Jay Adams
- Let me give you a personal example of this way of thinking.
- We moved back from South Africa, and I was offered a senior pastor job at a local church and then a church planting position in the Detroit area.
- The senior pastor job was in an area where we own land and could have built a house.
- The church planting position was in an area where some friends have a house that they were not living in and we could have stayed there for free.
- If we were just looking at circumstances, then either one of those would have been the best choice. But we rather chose option 3, coming to MBC and starting seminary and being part of the body here.

Wrong Method 3: Open and closed doors (similar to #2)

- Christians often speak of an open door from the Lord and then assume God is showing them His will through opening that door
- Conversely, Christians often speak of a closed door from the Lord meaning that God is showing that’s not His will
- **Now let me be clear:** God does open and close doors – He does provide opportunities...everything that comes our way is a result of God’s sovereignty
- But the Bible does not tell us to look for open or closed doors as a way of determining God’s will
- It doesn’t tell us to read those open doors as a means of deciding what to do

- There can be many possible “meanings” to those open and closed doors
- **Example:** Missionaries applying for visas to go into a foreign country.
- What if they are turned down for those visas?
- What should they conclude?
 - God does not want them to be missionaries?
 - God does not want them to be missionaries in that place?
 - God does not want them to be missionaries now?
 - God is testing them to see if they are really serious about it?
- There could be many possible “meanings” to that closed door
- Jonah had an open door to go to Tarshish
- Went down to Joppa, found a boat going down to Tarshish
- Was it right for him to conclude that it was God’s will for him to go to Tarshish because a boat happened to be there?
- Of course not, he was being disobedient!
- You shouldn’t read into the open and closed doors to find out what God wants you to do
- **“A lot of open doors lead to elevator shafts.” Jay Adams**
- Don’t assume that an open or closed door is God’s way of telling you to do one thing or the other
- By the way, the term “open door” is only used in Scripture for evangelism.... never decision making
- **Acts 14:27** ~ When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and **how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.**
- **2 Cor 2:12** ~ Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and **when a door was opened for me** in the Lord
- **Col 4:3** ~ praying at the same time for us as well, **that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ,** for which I have also been imprisoned
- *The term “open door” in Scripture always refers to getting the gospel out not decision making*

Wrong Method 4: Setting up conditions (aka The Fleece)

- Who hasn’t tried this one? It is essentially making a deal with God.
- We want to follow Gideon’s example of laying out the fleece
- You remember the story – asked God to give him a sign that God would go with him
- Asked that the fleece be wet and the ground dry
- Then he asked that the fleece be dry and the ground wet
- That’s what happened

- And many well-meaning Christians have followed Gideon’s example by setting out their own fleece
- Be very cautious about this because it comes dangerously close to the command in Scripture to not put the Lord to the test
- *By the way, Gideon’s use of the fleece was more an indication that he was acting cowardly and in unbelief than he was being wise in his decision making.*

Wrong Method 5: Inner Peace

- “Will you serve at church...I just don’t have peace about that”
- They use **Colossians 3:15** ~ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”
 - They say: I have peace in my heart about this decision
 - Here’s the problem, that’s a misinterpretation of that verse
 - It has nothing to do with inner peace in making decisions
 - It’s about peaceful relationships between believers in the body of Christ
 - “The entire passage speaks of corporate relations among the members of the church. Peace is the "umpire" for the interpersonal relations of the parts of the body to the whole. This is peace in the church; there is nothing about guidance in this passage.” Jay Adams
- Peace in Scripture
 - Objective – Peace with God (saved)
 - Subjective – Anxious
 - Collective – Between believers
- Not used for personal decision making
- Now what if you don’t have peace about something that you have observed?”
 - “I don’t have peace about so and so being an elder”
 - “Why? I’ve seen him treat his wife and kids harshly”
 - That’s different than internal feelings of peace

Wrong Method 6: Devices (aka Pro vs. Con list)

- Most common form of devices is the Pros and Cons list
- Could be many pros – guy is nice, he really loves me, his parents are nice, we really get along well together, we have a lot of common interests, he is great with kids, etc.
- Could be 1 con – not a believer
- This is a list that is left up to our own personal desires and hopes.
- Our own lists are going to be tainted and biased towards what we really want...not what God wants.

Wrong Method 7: Dreams

- Yes, God did use dreams in the Bible to communicate and given revelation
- Just because God did before, does not mean He does now (we are not in the age of revelation)
- Trying to decide what to do – have a dream about it so it must be God’s will
- Should I change jobs?
 - Had a dream about changing job and going to work for a new company
 - So, it must be God’s will
- “Your dreams are just your imagination morbidly active.” Spurgeon

Wrong Method 8: Waiting on the Lord

- Those who use this method, just say they are waiting on the Lord for Him to move
- They let go and let God (sound really pious but it is really an excuse for laziness and/or fear)
- Maybe a guy is just waiting on the Lord to bring him a wife?
- Someone just waits at home for God to bring them a job.
- This is a wrong understanding of waiting on the Lord
- Waiting is not doing anything and waiting for God to work
- **Isaiah 40:30-31** ~ “Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord Will gain new strength; ***They will mount up*** with wings like eagles, ***they will run*** and not get tired, ***they will walk*** and not become weary.”
- Biblical waiting is trusting, depending on the Lord, and it is active in nature.

Wrong Method 9: Prayer

- Looking for God to speak to you in prayer (listening to God’s voice during prayer)
- Prayer in Scripture is not for receiving new revelation or answers...Prayer is you talking to God in order for you to show your dependence upon Him and have your will aligned with His.
- Prayer is 1 directional (you are praising, thanking, presenting requests to God)
- God speaks to us through the Word – 1 directional
- We speak to God through prayer – 1 directional

Wrong Method 10: Inner voices, impressions, hunches, feelings

- Often Christians make decisions based on a feeling or intuition or an impression of what we are to do.
- “God impressed on my heart” or “I had an impression from the Lord”
- ***We have impressions all the time***
- No way of knowing those inner hunches, impressions are from the Lord

- Could be from any number of sources: God, Satan, angel, human emotions, hormonal imbalance, insomnia, medication, upset stomach...Can't be sure where those impressions come from
- Have no way of knowing those are from God
- **2 Samuel 7:1-3** ~ Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." Nathan said to the king, "Go, **do all that is in your mind**, for the Lord is with you."
- We might be able to say that David had an impression.... a good desire to build the temple
- Nathan told him to do what was impressed on his heart
- **Problem** → **2 Sam 7:4-5** ~ But in the same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?"
- But David is not the man, nor is it the time... Nathan didn't check with God
- David had an impression, but that's all it was... That's all impressions are – just impressions
- Don't confuse impressions, hunches, and subjective feelings with certain words from the Lord
- Even if a thought or impression pops into your head while you are reading Scripture, don't automatically assume it is a voice from God
- This also comes in the form of the "still small voice...God told me"
- This comes from **1 Kings 19**... Why do we not seek this today? No way to verify it's God

CONCLUSION

- Why do Christians turn to these methods when they are unreliable?
- Many Christians use these methods because they don't want to do the hard work of studying God's Word.
- We also are prone to look for something that we like and each of these methods will give us what we want to hear anyway. It is more confirmation with our own hearts than affirmation of what God wants.
- We must come to a place where God's Word is sufficient
- The only way we know God is communicating is through Word!
- As we go through this series, my goal is to elevate the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures in your decision making!