

# THE WILL OF GOD

## WEEK 3: WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ROLE IN INTERPRETING GOD'S WILL?

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- 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

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- Many Christians resort to faulty methods of finding God's will because they don't understand how the Holy Spirit leads and guides.
- Like we talked about last week, many Christians assume that God speaks to them individually, that God talks to them in a still small voice, that the Holy Spirit prompts their heart, that they receive impressions from the Holy Spirit that they are to pay attention to in making decisions.
- They believe that they heard a word from the Lord, or God told them, or that God spoke to them or gave them a sign and they take those as indications from the Lord as to what He wants them to do.
- **The Holy Spirit guides us and leads us...God does guide us in our decision making...He is personally interested in our decisions...as believers, we do have a personal intimate relationship with the Lord**

- But we need to understand *how* he does that through the Holy Spirit.
- This morning I want to help us think rightly about those little voices in our heads.
- All of us experience constant voices within our minds.
  - Driving in your car, a thought pops into your mind to call someone.
  - At the grocery store, a voice inside that says: “Share the Gospel with the cashier.”
  - Thought comes into your mind about a certain person and you pray for them.
  - Thoughts comes into your mind about a career change, what church to attend, what car to buy, etc.
- *What are these? Are these all the voice of God?*
  - What are we to do with these subjective voices, impressions and feelings?
- We need to understand clearly what to do with all these voices floating around in our head.
- A misunderstanding of the role of the Holy Spirit can quickly lead to subjectivism and mysticism.
- We are going to start by discussing the dangers of misunderstanding how the Holy Spirit works and then we are going to see from Scripture how the Holy Spirit does work.

## **DANGERS WITH MISUNDERSTANDING HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS**

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### **Subjectivism**

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- This is subjectivism: A reliance on personal experiences, feelings, impressions for validating truth.
  - It views the source of truth or reality to be inside a person.
- It involves the rejection of all objective standards such that truth or reality is not able to be verified by external validation.
- It results in a “truth is what is true for me” mentality because all that matters is personal experience.
- One person’s experience is as valid as another’s, even if those experiences of truth and reality contradict each other because all that matters is what the persons thinks, feels, etc.
- *Subjectivism, when it is applied to the spiritual realm, is known as mysticism.*

### **Mysticism**

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- Mysticism is the pursuit of a subjective religious experience.
- This is the belief that spiritual realities are verified by inward feelings, hunches, or experiences. It is also the belief that one has a special receiving line or method of communication from God.
- It looks for truth inside via feelings, intuition, imagination, personal visions, inner voices, etc. rather than outside via the objective Word of God.
- It is the idea that spiritual truth is found by looking inward.
  - The problem with mysticism is that there is no way to objectively verify whether it is true or not.

- Mystical experiences are unique only to the person who experiences them so they cannot be tested.
- Mysticism is antithetical to discernment; it bypasses the intellect and goes for the experience and emotion.
- This has caused many Christians to conclude that God’s most powerful work is done **not** through His Word but through their emotions and experiences.
- It generally results in a low view of God’s Word because their experiences and inner impressions come to have greater weight than the Scriptures.
- They are convinced that they heard a voice, convinced that God gave them a sign, or gave them an impression and no matter what you say they are still going to cling to their subjective experience.
  - I know what I’ve seen ... I know what I’ve heard...Don’t you tell me I didn’t hear it...I know what God told me...I know what I felt...I know that God gave me a sign...I know that voice I heard is from God...God revealed this to me...
- Their theology is grounded in their personal experience, and it is generally impossible to reason with them because for them their experience has convinced them of what is true.<sup>1</sup>
- **Here’s the problem:**
  - Many Christians are making decisions on the basis of subjective, mystical impressions.
  - They will argue that God has spoken individually to them, and they are hearing voices and becoming convinced of things that are clearly not true...this is obviously a dangerous practice
  - “The idea of a life in which the inward voice of the Spirit decides and directs everything sounds most attractive, for it seems to exalt the Spirit’s ministry and to promise the closest intimacy with God; but in practice this quest for super spirituality leads only to frantic bewilderment or lunacy.”  
J.I. Packer, Knowing God, 235.
- Many people have done something because they were convinced God told them to do it. Only to be hurt greatly because it was not God. This is the danger of mysticism and that is why Scripture condemns it.
- This is nothing new, it was happening in the early church too. This issue is the Colossian heresy.
- **Colossians 2:8-23**...a false teaching in Colossae that Christ was not sufficient – needed more than Christ.
  - Christ plus philosophy (2:8)
  - Christ plus legalism (2:16-17)
  - Christ plus mysticism (2:18-19) - False teachers claimed a mystical union with God
  - Christ plus asceticism (2:20-23)
- Paul pens Colossians in response, saying Christ is sufficient and they should not follow those false teachers.
  - Because they were claiming that you needed to worship angels to really experience truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Even outside of God’s will, this is an epidemic in churches as people interpret the Bible per their experience.

- They pursued visions and sought revelation from God outside of Scripture.
- They pursued a mystical union with God through inner experiences, feelings, and hunches.
- Paul writes Colossians to tell the believers there that they are complete in Christ.
- **Colossians 2:10** “...and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.”
- Paul addresses mysticism in **Colossians 2:18-19** “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”
- **Paul’s point is: NO! Don’t fall prey to mysticism...** Don’t be intimidated by those false teachers
  - Don’t be duped into thinking you need those subjective, mystical experiences when you have Christ who is completely sufficient for all your needs!
  - Don’t get sucked into angel worship, into seeking spiritual reality through visions, extrabiblical revelation, or mystical experiences!
- **Why is Paul warning them?**
  - The consequences of mysticism are in **verses 18b-19** “...inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”
- When you pursue mystical experiences like visions, seeking revelation from God outside His Word, you become prideful (inflated without cause).
- You cut yourself off from the head who is Christ, and You are no longer tied into the source that supplies your discernment and you are cut off from that which causes your growth.
- That’s the danger of mysticism – you end up pursuing inner impressions, emotions, feelings, hunches, promptings thinking those are the marks of true spirituality and intimacy with the Lord.
- But in the process, you actually cut yourself off from Christ and stagnate spiritually.
  - That is exactly what we see happening today – there is an attempt to shift the focus from Christ to experience in their decision making and Christians are looking for signs from God.
  - They believe God told them to do something or that they had an impression or prompting from God.
- We need to be very wary when someone says “the Lord spoke to me and said to do...”<sup>2</sup>
- **I’m not saying God doesn’t speak to us – He does...through His Word**
- **I’m not saying the Holy Spirit is not active in leading and guiding us – He is**

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<sup>2</sup> Many best-selling Christian books are founded upon what God spoke to the author.

- But as I said previously, the issue is *how* He does that
- These results have come from a misunderstanding of the role of the Holy Spirit and how He leads us.
- So, for the rest of the time, I want to explain what the role of the Holy Spirit is and what we are to make of those impressions, promptings, etc.

## **How the Holy Spirit Works**

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- **John 16:13** “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”
- This is an often-misunderstood verse and taken to mean more than what Jesus intended.
- Many Christians take this verse as a promise that the Holy Spirit will guide you in making your decisions
- After all it promises that the Holy Spirit will:
  - Guide you into truth...Speak...Disclose to you what is to come
- They assume that this is a biblical promise that the Holy Spirit will help individuals with decision making in the routine areas of life.
- But that’s not what it’s talking about here:
  - The “you” is the Disciples not us.
  - Who is Jesus talking to...the 12 Apostles.
  - It’s not you and me – this is where paying attention to the context is very important.
  - The “you” is not universal.
  - Jesus is promising them that the Holy Spirit will come to help them to write Scripture.
  - The context is about them writing Scripture.
  - Jesus is telling the disciples that the Holy Spirit who will give them New Testament revelation.
  - Much of what He taught was beyond their comprehension.
  - They needed a Helper who would assist them by bringing those things Jesus taught back to their remembrance and even guide them into new revelation.
  - Jesus is talking about the method by which the Lord would transmit NT truth to the church.
  - This is about how the Bible was written...the role of the Holy Spirit in the production of the Bible.
  - It’s not about personal decision making.
- **Romans 8:14** “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”
  - This is another passage that is often misunderstood. It is Christians being led by the Holy Spirit
  - So many Christians assume that the job of the Holy Spirit is to lead believers in every area of life including personal decisions.

- They assume that they should be receiving signs, visions, inner impressions and promptings, hunches from the Holy Spirit because his job is to lead believers.<sup>3</sup>
- The reference to “being led by the Spirit” does not relate to voices or experiences for decision making.
- That’s not the context of this passage.
- This passage is all about sanctification – **about mortifying sin and not living after the flesh!**
- That’s the role of the Holy Spirit – to lead us out of sin and into righteousness, holiness, and godliness
- How do you know? Context...Context...Context... look at the verses around it
- **Verses 2-5** “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”
- **Verses. 12-13** “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”
- The whole context is about how the believer lives according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh.
- This is a sanctification passage, not a decision-making passage...the context is about holy living.
- The role of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin and help us living righteously.
- That’s what He is most interested in, not to help us make decisions about the everyday issues of life.
- That’s why Scripture is silent on many of those issues.
  - The Bible simply does not address every decision we make; but gives us discernment.
- Why? Because those are non-moral issues that, for the most part, don’t have a moral component.
- I’m not saying God is not interested in the details of your life...God does care about those decisions in the sense that He cares for us down to the smallest detail.
  - But those are not the things the Holy Spirit is most concerned about in your life.
  - The most important issues to the Holy Spirit are our sanctification, our holiness, our godliness, our mortification of sin. These are His big concerns
- His primary role is to lead us in those areas...and that’s the point of **Romans 8:14**.
- **Galatians 5:18** “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.”

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<sup>3</sup> Very popular among Pentecostals is to live and always be looking for signs everywhere.

- Same issue as **Romans 8:14**...based on this passage many Christians assume the role of the Holy Spirit is to guide them in decisions; but that's not the context...these are not decision-making verses.
  - They are sanctification verses just like **Romans 8**.
- Look at the context, we see the same thing as **Romans 8**.
- **Galatians 5:16-17** “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”
- **Galatians 5:19** “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident...”
- **Galatians 5:22** “But the fruit of the Spirit is....”
- The role of the Holy Spirit is to guide us into holiness and away from sin.
- The Spirit's guidance is to convict and compel us to live godly lives.
- To say that these passages are about inner voices or impressions we have that help us in decision making is to miss the context of those passages.
- He leads us away from sin and into holiness...not to what job we are to take or what house we buy.
- **How does He do that? Through the Word**
- The work of the Holy Spirit is not to reveal new truth to us but to illumine our hearts and minds to the truth already revealed in Scripture
- That's the point of the parallel passages **Ephesians 5:18** and **Colossians 3:16**.
- **Ephesians 5:18** “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”
- The results are listed in the following verses:
  - 5:19 ~ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs
  - 5:20 ~ always giving thanks
  - 5:22 ~ wives be subject
  - 5:25 ~ husbands love your wives
  - 6:1 ~ children obey your parents in the Lord
  - 6:4 ~ fathers, do not provoke your children to anger
  - 6:5 ~ slaves obey your masters
- Compare with **Colossians 3:16** “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”
- The results are listed in the following verses:
  - 3:16 ~ admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs

- 3:16 ~ singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
- 3:18 ~ wives, be subject to your husbands
- 3:19 ~ husbands love your wives
- 3:20 ~ children be obedient to your parents
- 3:21 ~ fathers do not exasperate your children
- 3:22 ~ slaves obey your masters
- Those are parallel passages...the way you are filled with the Holy Spirit is to let the Word of Christ dwell richly within you. This is how the Holy Spirit leads and guides us.
- And this way alone...not through impressions, dreams, hunches, or promptings.
- The main role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life is to guide us in the process of applying Scripture.
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit is inextricably linked to the Word of God.
- "The true way to honor the Holy Spirit as our guide is to honor the holy Scriptures through which he guides us. The fundamental guidance which God gives to shape our lives...is not a matter of inward promptings apart from the Word but of the pressure on our consciences of the portrayal of God's character and will in the Word, which the Spirit enlightens us to understand and apply to ourselves." Packer, *Knowing God*, 236
- That's Paul's point in **1 Corinthians 2:14-15** "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one."
- The role of the Holy Spirit is to help believers appraise the truth of God's Word.
- This is the doctrine of illumination – He helps believers understand and apply Scripture to their lives.
- The Spirit never works apart from the Bible, and He always works in and through the Word.
- So, according to the Scriptures the role of the Holy Spirit is not to give new, individual revelation to believers through hunches and impression to help them make decisions.
  - His role is to convict believers of sin and lead them into righteousness through the Word of God.
- Now, here is the question you all are wondering...what are those impressions? Where do they come from?
- When someone pops into you mind...When you feel the urge to pray for someone...When sense God telling you to do something...What is all of that?
- In our Christian lives, I believe this is where the rubber meets the road on this issue.
- Based on what we just said about the role of the Holy Spirit, we can confidently say that the Holy Spirit uses the Word to teach and convict us. That is His job
- If I get angry with my kids and I am convicted about that and I start thinking I need to repent and ask them to forgive me, we can confidently say that is from the Holy Spirit.



- If I am unloving to my wife and speak harshly to her and I start thinking I need to repent and ask her to forgive me, we can confidently say that's from the Holy Spirit.
- How do we know? There is Scripture to back those up and the Spirit leads within the limits of the Word.
- I can tie those thoughts to the Word of God and to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- Beyond that, we cannot say anything other than those impressions, are just simply impressions.
- The Holy Spirit does not lead beyond the limits of Scripture.
- *In those scenarios when someone pops into your mind or when you feel the urge to pray for someone or when sense God telling you to do something, all you can say is that they are impressions if you can't tie it to the Word of God, it has no authority.*

## CONCLUSION

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- "How can I tell whether these impressions are from God or from some other source? This is a critical question. For impressions could be produced by any number of sources: God, Satan, an angel, a demon, human emotions (such as fear or ecstasy), hormonal imbalance, insomnia, medication, or an upset stomach. Sinful impressions (temptations) may be exposed for what they are by the Spirit-sensitized conscience and the Word of God. But beyond that, one encounters a subjective quagmire of uncertainty. For in nonmoral areas, Scripture gives no guidelines for distinguishing the voice of the Spirit from the voice of self – or any other potential voice." *Decision Making and the Will of God*, Friessen, 130-131.
- That's my hope through this series...that you begin to see the superiority of the objective Word of God over subjective experiences.
- When it comes to making decisions, we should not be looking for information from God outside His Word.
- We should not be seeking new revelation or personal revelation from God.
- We should be immersing ourselves in the Scriptures and depending on the Lord.
- I am not saying that's not personal...I'm not saying God does not speak to us.
- I am saying that God speaks through His Word, and only through His Word.
- And when the Spirit of God uses His Word to teach us, convict us, and comfort us that is very personal.