

PART 2: HOW TO DISCERN THE WILL OF GOD

ACTS 1:12-26

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MAIN IDEA

Following Jesus' ascension, the eleven disciples were faced with replacing Judas as a disciple. This passage shows how they made this significant decision.

- The replacement had to be someone who had been with these disciples all the time that they were with the Lord Jesus (1:21)
- It was made after a long session of prayer (1:24)
- It was made after God showed them which of the two men to choose (1:24, 26)¹

I. CHOOSING JUDAS'S REPLACEMENT (1:12-26)

Shortly after Jesus' ascension at Mount of Olives, the eleven disciples returned to Jerusalem, where they gathered in an upper room to choose a replacement for Judas, who committed suicide after he betrayed Jesus. The choice was between

¹ The casting of lots was a common OT method of determining God's will (cf. Lev. 16:8-10) and was the last time the Bible mentions this practice before the Holy Spirit came and the NT was written.

two men who had been with Jesus the whole time, Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. After much prayer, Matthias was chosen.

II. MAKE DECISIONS IN VIEW OF GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION

A. WHAT ARE THE IMMEDIATE RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE GOSPEL?

- When making decisions, we are to ask how any might affect the advancement of the gospel
- When making choices with our time, talents, and treasures, we are to ask if any of them might be used to advance the gospel
- When giving our tithes and offerings, we are to make sure they are being used to directly or indirectly advance the gospel and bring people into God's Kingdom

B. WHAT ARE THE ETERNAL RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE GOSPEL?

- When making decisions, we are to ask if they will have eternal value vs. temporal value (Matt. 6:19-20)

III. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GOD'S REVEALED WILL AND GOD'S CONCEALED WILL

A. DEFINITIONS

- God's revealed will: His will as shown in the Scriptures (e.g., God's commandments)
- God's concealed will: His will in matters not explicitly recorded in the Bible (e.g., choosing Matthias to replace Judas, whom to marry, which church to attend, etc.)

B. BIBLICAL FACTS ABOUT GOD'S WILL

- God's will is to be pursued (Psalm 143:8-10).
- God's will is continuous, ongoing, and not sporadic (Isaiah 58:11).
- God's will can be resisted (Jonah 1:3).
- God can overcome resistance to His will (Jonah 3:1-3).
- God wants you to know His will (Acts 22:14).
- God's will is always good, always pleasing, and always perfect (Romans 12:2).
- God's will can be understood (Ephesians 5:15-17).

C. WHY DOES GOD WANT YOU TO KNOW HIS WILL?

- Because He wants you to understand His priorities (Matt. 6:33)

- Because He wants to be free from worry about the future (Matt. 6:34)
- Because He wants you to understand and know Him (Jer. 9:24).
- Because He wants you to depend on Him (1 Pet. 5:7)
- Because He wants you to experience His goodness (Jas 1:17).

D. OBSTACLES TO KNOWING GOD'S WILL

- **Fear of consequences**. The believer may not want to know God's will for fear that God will impose something terrible on him.
- **Lack of knowledge**. The believer may not know how to discern God's will (Proverbs 19:2a).
- **Impatience**. Not waiting for God but acting too quickly on your own (Proverbs 19:2b).
- **Emergency-only thinking**. Thinking that God reveals His will only when we face big or critical decisions.
- **Paralysis-by-analysis**. Thinking that we must understand all the details of God's direction (Proverbs 3:5, 6; Isaiah 55:8, 9).

IV. START WITH GOD'S REVEALED WILL

A. TRUST THE BIBLE AS YOUR AUTHORITY.

- Because of its fulfilled prophecies
- Because of its amazing unity
- Because of its historical accuracy
- Because of its transforming power
- Because of its miraculous preservation
- Because of its propagation
- Because the Holy Spirit speaks to me through it

B. LET THE BIBLE INTERPRET YOUR LIFE

- *The Bible*. While the Bible does not reveal God's individual will for every decision the believer makes, whom to marry, what career to pursue, etc., it shows God's moral will.
- Within God's moral will, we are free to make choices.

C. DO WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

- God wants us to give first priority and attention to what he has revealed in his Word
- In the Bible, he has instructed us to live holy lives, to participate in and contribute to the life of the church, and to love and serve our spouses and our families

V. LOOK FOR GOD'S CONCEALED WILL THROUGH THE LENS OF GOD'S REVEALED WILL

- **Circumstances.** Open and closed doors are two most obvious ways that God uses to reveal His will for you. For instance, if you apply for a job, and several turn down your application, you should probably conclude that God is closing doors and saying, 'No.'
- **Inner Witness.** The inner witness is that ministry of the Holy Spirit in which He guides the believer through personal impressions and inner peace within the heart to reveal God's individual will.
- **Mature Council.** God's individual will can be revealed through other mature, Bible-believing Christians whose walk is consistent with God's Word. However, the Holy Spirit is to be the final Counselor.
- **Personal Desires.** Our natural desires will correspond perfectly to His will when we are living in obedience to His Word.
- **Common Sense.** Sometimes you may feel that you are being led to do something that doesn't make sense. Guidance, which appears to go against common sense, should be followed only if the Lord gives you very clear and definite leading.
- **Special Supernatural Guidance.** This type of guidance can come through an audible voice, an angel, a vision, a trance, a dream, a prophecy, or a miracle. The book of Acts records only a handful of such experiences (Acts 8:26; 9:3-6; 10:3, 10; 13:2; 16:9-10). With the completed Word of God, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, a strong case can be made that such guidance is no longer needed; however, we should not say that this type of guidance never occurs.

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