

The Fellowship Files (5) – God’s Will

God’s Word is His will and His will is the believer’s way. Sometimes as Christians we are guilty of using the Bible as a tool in order to make God a tool to do our will, but God wants the Bible to make us a tool to do His will. God’s will isn’t about getting there faster and avoiding all disaster. Think about John the Baptist, the Apostle Paul, and our Lord Jesus, and think about what it means to be in God’s will because they were definitely doing it. Sometimes we want some specific directional things when we aren’t even facing in the right direction in the first place.

You are not likely to discern the specific call of God unless you are obeying the general commands of God. If you are paying attention to godliness, obedience, avoiding worldliness, and attempting to live a scriptural life, then you are in a position to discern the call of God on your life. If you are disobeying what God has told everybody to do, it is doubtful that you know what God specifically wants you to do.

We can speak of God’s will in three ways. First there is His ***will of decree***, the way things will be. It is something He ordains that will happen, such as what we see in Acts 2:23 (compatibility between sovereignty of God and responsibility of man) / 4:27-28 (Herod, Pilate, Jews, Roman soldiers: all different intentions, and each will be judged on the basis of their intentions but they all did what God had predestined to occur) / Isaiah 46:9-10 / Romans 8:28-30 / Ephesians 1:11.

Second, we speak of God’s ***will of desire***, those things He wants for our life but is up to us to pursue (cf. Matthew 7:21 / Hebrews 13:20-21). God’s will of decree is what will happen, but God’s stated will of desire can be resisted, ignored, disregarded. People who aren’t Christians are doing that all the time and Christians do it too. Learning and living to actually do God’s will, to trust Him and obey His commands is called sanctification, as we discussed last session.

The third way we speak of God’s will, and what we most often mean when we say that we want to know God’s will, is that we are looking for God’s ***will of direction***. We want some individual specific plan for some specific thing we aren’t sure about, and we might even call it the center of God’s will or His perfect will. The impulse that wants to do what is right is good of course, and we don’t want to go against the way God is guiding us. But too often we are waiting for some unmistakable impression, some crystal clear direction outside of biblical principles, a biblically informed conscience, and the freedom we have as believers.

God does have a plan for each of our lives, and we can and should ask for wisdom, but most often we find ourselves after the fact tracing His hand of providence back through the events that led up to where we are. Even when we cannot trace His hand we can still trust His heart.

God cares about our future, He does help us make decisions, He does direct our lives, and He does give us wisdom. He does want us to pray about it. There is no doubt God sometimes guides us in such a strong way that we have no doubt about the direction we should go, but we shouldn’t always seek that, or wait for it, even with the biggest decisions we face. We can be frozen in fear, or superstition, and yet think we are being spiritual. God does not want us burdened about discovering some hidden pathway when He has already made the main path crystal clear. **We find His will of direction as we follow His will of desire.**

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – This passage points us in the right direction. If we will do these three things that the text instructs us to do, and be concerned with developing them as holy habits in our lives, then we will be doing God’s will and be walking God’s way. Then as we move on, the path will become clearer, and we won’t have to be so worried about asking for directions, we will be headed to the right place already.

Now Paul gives us instruction about God’s will also in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6, and so do the other books of the New Testament, and so on and so forth. Yet this text is especially important to the subject because it is the framework of how we should be focused when seeking, doing, and living in God’s will. This passage grounds and guides us to be doing His will on our way.

This text is one sentence; these three things are all bound together as the framework for doing God’s will. In other words, when we are in the process of seeking, doing, and living in God’s will, if we do these three things our ambition will be directed towards God. When we are living out the will of God wherever the path takes us, we will be on the right path.

Rejoice always – Philippians 4:4 (in the Lord, and our justification) / James 1:2-4 (in our fashioning, our sanctification) / 1 Peter 1:3-9 (in our future, our glorification)

Pray without ceasing – Luke 18:1 / 2 Corinthians 1:11 – a prayerful attitude, atmosphere, a willing sense of God’s presence, everywhere is a sanctuary

Give thanks in all circumstances – Ephesians 5:20 – “always” means timing – “everything” means events – in all circumstances not for all circumstances – in everything God is there.

For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you – When we are in the process of seeking, doing, and living in God’s will, we do it this way: we keep a joyful disposition, maintain a constant, consistent prayer life and cultivate a thankful attitude. When we will be developing these three holy habits, God will fashion us as a tool, as the instrument of His will. Be a tool in God’s hands and He will make sure you do His will.

Having gone through this textual template, let’s now give a brief summary of how you would go about ascertaining the will of God for a specific matter in your life.

Pray in submission – His will for you is to submit your will to His. In many cases, finding out the will of God is not the problem. Being willing to obey the will of God is the problem. Sometimes people just want God *to* bless their plans, instead of wanting to bless God *with* their plans. However, there is a great difference between selfishly looking for God’s will, and submissively looking for God’s will. Our first action in prayer is to submit to God, and then when our heart is ready and willing to obey, then we may ask God to reveal His will to us. If you want to know *His* will, you have to submit *your* will.

Prepare for service – You will never know *where* or *how* God wants you to serve until you know *that* God wants you to serve. You can have all your plans mapped out, and it may all work out the way you planned, and you can thank God for that. But the truth is that you can never truly know the will of God in advance until you settle the issue of being a servant in advance. His will

for your life is to serve Him, to please Him, and this is done most often by serving others, and it is never done by just serving yourself. If we are not prepared to serve God, we are not prepared to find or to do His will.

Ponder the principles – The application of God’s Word is the attitude of God’s servant. Our search for the will of God is not faithful unless it is in connection with the Word of God. He doesn’t tell us the whole plan He just lays out the path. Psalm 119:105 – The Word of God is a *lamp to our feet*, it shows us what we are walking on, and it is a *light to our path*, it shows us where we are headed to. Proverbs 6:23 – *For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life*. Studying God’s Word brings illumination: God’s Word will speak to you directly if you are following His will of direction.

Pay attention to Providence – The circumstances of life may bring light to the path. Such things can be a confirming source of God’s will, but they are not a single, revealing source. As well, seeking the counsel of your spiritual leaders and others is wise, but God’s people should not take precedent over God’s Word. Remember Psalm 119:24 – *Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors*. If we are submitted, serving, and studying, we will be sensitive to God’s leading through occasions and through others. We must also remember that God is working in more than one person at a time. When you respond as a prepared person you will often respond to a prepared person (cf. Mark 11:1-6, 14:13-16).

Principles for Prudence

No one needs to ask if it is okay to commit adultery, steal, cheat, or lie, but what about those things that the Bible seems to be silent about? What is the right balance? What kind of music should I listen to? Can I go see a movie? Can I go to a “sports bar” to watch the game with friends? What can or should I wear? What can I do on Sunday? Things can in themselves be indifferent, or neutral, but for the Christian it is a matter of the right use of matters indifferent.

1 Corinthians gives us seven principles that will help us to allow our freedom in Christ to glorify God. This isn’t about new laws; it is about principles that will keep us from falling into trouble, and helping others not to stumble at our liberty. These aren’t universal rules for you to impose on others; they are guidelines for *you* to regulate *your* decision-making. Prudence is about making mature decisions, the wise exercise of our freedom in Christ. This is all about renewing your mind (Romans 12:1-2 / Ephesians 4:22-24).

#1 – will this bring me into bondage? 1 Corinthians 6:12
Ephesians 4:27 / Romans 13:14 / 2 Peter 2:19 / Titus 1:15-16, 2:11-12

#2 – will this defile God’s temple? 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
Psalm 101:3 / 2 Corinthians 7:1 / 2 Corinthians 10:12 – Compare yourself to God, not yourself, or others. Not about smoking or drinking, per se, but about getting drunk, altered states, gluttony, etc. It’s about morals and motivations here.

#3 – will this cause anyone to stumble? 1 Corinthians 8:8-9
Romans 14:20-21 / Philippians 2:3-4 / Romans 12:10

#4 – will this edify me and/or others? 1 Corinthians 10:23

Galatians 5:22-23 / Ephesians 4:29 / 1 Peter 4:10-11 – Don't be aggressive with our liberty

#5 – will this violate my conscience? 1 Corinthians 10:25-29

Romans 14:23 – Some things that will tempt me will not tempt others / James 4:17

#6 – will this bring glory to God? 1 Corinthians 10:31

Ephesians 5:15-20 / Colossians 3:17, 23

#7 – will this hurt my witness? 1 Corinthians 10:32-33

Matthew 5:16 / 1 Thessalonians 5:22 / Ephesians 5:3-8 / Philippians 2:15 / Colossians 4:5

The whole section from 1 Corinthians 8-10 is a lesson in God's will regarding our freedom. The principle is that love limits liberty. Doug Wilson hits the target: "The way others are to view your liberty is not the same way that you should view your liberty. Other Christians should let you do what you want unless the Bible forbids it. That's how we guard against legalism. But you should use your liberty differently – you should be asking what the reasons are for doing it, and not what the reasons are for prohibiting it. Liberty is intended by God for you to use as an instrument for loving others (Gal. 5:13), and not as an instrument for suiting yourself."

Don't Do It – Romans 14:22-23 – if you are in doubt about whether or not something is a sin, you put the matter on hold until you can determine biblically whether or not it is or isn't sin. What if it isn't sin? At this point, that doesn't matter. Until you determine from the Bible (not from feelings) that it isn't sin, you shouldn't do it. Of course, if you determine it is sin, then that settles the matter. But if you're not sure, you shouldn't go ahead, because if you do, you are doing something that you think might be sin. To do what you think might be sin (even if it really isn't) *is* sin on your part because if you would be willing to do something that you thought might be sin – *that* is a sinful attitude. So even if the act isn't sin, your attitude in doing it *is* sin.

Pleasing God should be our primary motive. Christians are born again into God's kingdom so that we would live for Him (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:15). The New Testament is filled with encouragements, examples, and exhortations about living a life that is pleasing to God.

- 2 Corinthians 5:9
- Ephesians 5:10
- Colossians 1:10
- 1 Thessalonians 2:4
- 1 Thessalonians 4:1
- 2 Timothy 2:3-4
- Hebrews 13:16
- John 8:29

Well, here comes a controversial subject, but it takes the principles we have learned so far and puts them into real world practice. Notice how this person is not told yes or no, but what to do before a decision is made.

Tattoo Q & A

This was a real question and response involving Pastor J.D. and an anonymous comment left on the sermon “*A Revelation of Real Religion*” @ SermonAudio.com.

Anon (3/4/2013) from FL – “Sanctification” – I love ink (tattoos). Since I’ve become a Christian, I only get biblical scripture or pictures, but have been told I am still just feeding my “fleshly desires”. Do you agree with what I’ve been told?

Pastor J.D. Hatfield (3/5/13) – Dear Anon,

I do not know you or your motives. I cannot read your heart or your mind. However, I can read your words, and I do think that they tell us some important things.

First, you are concerned about pleasing God – you entitled your comment “*sanctification*”.

Second, you are passionate about the issue – you say, “*I love ink (tattoos)*”.

Third, this is something you loved before you became a Christian – “*Since I’ve become a Christian, I only get biblical scripture or pictures*”.

Fourth, although you have continued the practice since becoming a Christian, you are unsure about it – “*but have been told I am still just feeding my “fleshly desires”. Do you agree with what I’ve been told?*”

To the first point: Good, pleasing God should be our prime motive (cf. 2 Cor. 5:9).

To the second point: This is a matter for prayer and personal inventory. Becoming a Christian means we have to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus. Our allegiance to Christ will cost us things. I am not saying that tattoos are something you need to drop, but think about your pattern of life. How has it changed; what have you left behind? When you say I “*love*”, that is a strong statement. Would you be willing to give it up if God wanted you to?

To the third point: this is a matter of pastoral counsel. If you do not have a pastor, that would be a problem right there. I would ask if it is justifiable to continue being inked just because you now “*only get biblical scripture or pictures*”. I would question the notion of taking things we used to or still “*love*” and simply thinking that we can “*baptize them into sanctity*”.

To the fourth point: Romans 14:22-23 – if you are in doubt about whether or not something is sin, you shouldn’t go ahead, because if you do, you are doing something that you think might be sin. And that is a sinful attitude in itself.

God bless you as you seek to please Him.

Anon (3/6/2013) from FL – “Thank you” – Thank you for responding to my question. I guess God and I have some talking to do.