

The Will of God

INTRODUCTION – God’s will is (or should be) important in our lives.

Claims about God’s will vary from (1) those who **anguish** in thinking they “missed God’s perfect will for them and had to take second best” to (2) those who are **assert that they are anxious** to know God’s will to (3) those who **allege** to have the inside track on it – going so far as to say “God told me...– or led me or showed me –...” or “God laid it upon my heart to”

Many Bible-believers talk about wanting to know God’s will for their life. Yet, do they really seek it consistently and completely – including, for example, stores to shop at, diet, brands, clothing, jewelry, furniture, car model, or toothpaste?

Are we supposed to seek (and find) **God’s will for** us when considering, for example, **TAKING anything** – an aspirin, a bath (or shower), a break (from a task), a bunch of food at a buffet, a chance, a detour, a flight, a friend, a hint, a multi-vitamin, a nap, a phone call, a photo, a ride, a spouse, a step, a taxi, a trip, a turn, an umbrella, a vacation, or a walk?

Countless formulas have come from authors and speakers as to how to find God’s will for your life. For example, Steve Brown has five (Scripture, prayer, circumstances, brothers and sisters in Christ, and God’s direct leading). Robert Jeffress says God reveals his will through the Bible, prayer, special revelation (visions, dreams, miraculous signs), wise counselors, circumstances, and our own desires. Is either man correct (that is, biblical)? In other words, does the Bible anywhere mention even one of these suggestions in connection with finding (or having found) God’s will?

A. Its importance to us – Where you look? How hard? To what Bible passage(s) To whom do you listen?

1. Some say the whole Bible as a whole – anywhere, everywhere – tells God’s will for us (applies today).
2. Others realize that although the whole Bible is God’s Word – not all of it gives direct guidance for today.

B. Its importance for us

1. Entrance into the kingdom of heaven – Only those who do the Father’s will enter His kingdom. (Mt 7:21)
2. Belonging to Jesus – Whoever does God’s will is Jesus’ brother, sister, and mother. (Mk 3:35)
3. Knowledge of the truth – If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine. (Jn 7:17)
4. Eternal life – He who does God’s will abides forever. (1Jn 2:17)

I. God’s words for God’s will (terminology)

A. English

1. “The will of your God” (Ezr 7:18) = “Whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God.” (Artaxerxes to Ezra)
2. “The will of the Lord” (=2x – Ac 21:14; Eph 5:17)
3. “The will of God” (= 23x – Mk 3:35; Ac 13:36; Rom 1:10; 8:27; 12:2; 15:32; 1Co 1:1; 2Co 1:1; 8:5; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:1; 6:6; Col 1:1; 4:12; 1Th 4:3; 5:18; 2Ti 1:1; Heb 10:36; 1Pt 2:15; 3:17; 4:2,19; 1Jn 2:17)
4. “His will” (=12x – Dan 4:35; Lk 12:47; Jn 7:17; 9:31; Ac 22:14; Rom 2:18; 9:19; Eph 1:5,9; Col 1:9; Heb 13:21; 1Jn 5:14)
5. “His own will” (=3x – Eph 1:11; Heb 2:4; Ja 1:18)
6. “Thy will” (=7x – Ps 40:8; 143:10; Mt 6:10; 26:42; Lk 11:2; Heb 10:7,9)

B. Greek – There are two families of words in Greek that express the idea of “will” in the Bible.

1. *boulē, boulēma, and boulomai*

a. *boulē* (12x) – advice, counsel, will

- 1) (5x) Man’s – “counsel” 4x (Lk 7:30; 23:51; Ac 27:12; 1Co 4:5), advised 1x (Ac 27:42)
- 2) (6x) God’s

Ac 2:23 “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”

Ac 4:28 “Thy counsel determined before to be done.”

Ac 13:36 “David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on

Ac 20:27 “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

Eph 1:11 “Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will”

Heb 6:17 “the immutability of His counsel”

sleep.”

- 3) (1x) either – Ac 5:38-39 “If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.”

b. *boulēma* (2x) – Ac 27:43; Rom 9:19

c. *boulomai* (34x)

2. *thelēma*, *thelēsis*, and *thelō*

a. *thelēma* (64x) – desires 1x (Eph 2:3) , pleasure 1x (Rev 4:11), will 62x

b. *thelēsis* (1x) – will Heb 2:4

c. *thelō* (=200x) – will 93x, would 74x, desire/desirous 16x, willing(ly) 6x, listeth 3x, to be pleased 2x, to be forward 1x, had rather 1x, love 1x, mean(eth) 2x, voluntary 1x

II. God's will in God's Word – Some folks have said that they see three categories of God's will in the Bible. It appears, however, that **there are only two distinct ones:**

A. His decreed will (what He decided and determined before Creation to do throughout history and eternity) Many examples could be given, but the following stand out.

1. David's kingship – Ac 13:36
2. Jesus' death to deliver believers – Ac 2:23; 4:28; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:5,9,11
3. Paul's apostleship – 1Co 1:1; 2 Co 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2Ti 1:1
4. Paul's travel – Ac 18:21; Rom 1:10; 15:32
5. Paul's safety – Ac 21:14
6. Churches in Macedonia giving to Paul according God's will – 2Co 8:5
7. The fact that it's better, if it's God's will, to suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. – 1Pt 3:17; 4:19
8. God's plan for our lives – Ja 4:15

B. His demanded will (what He's declared for His creatures in general and for His chosen ones in particular to do)

1. Specified – giving God thanks in everything (1Th 5:18), being good citizens (1Pt 2:13-17), even being good slaves (Eph 6:6), abstaining from fornication (1Th 4:3)

2. General – Rom 12:2; Eph 5:17; Col 1:9-12; 4:12; Heb 10:36; 1Pt 4:2; 1Jn 5:14

C. Other ideas – Some Christian leaders have suggested other ideas that are not clearly distinct from the above two.

1. His desired will – This is not clearly distinct the from the previous two. In fact, it actually overlaps God's decreed and His demanded will. What God desires (and what pleases Him) He does; that's His decreed will. What He desires for those who believe in Him is actually His demanded will – what He declares and expects of them.

2. His declared will – This, again, includes and overlaps God's decreed will and His demanded will. What God has declared or revealed in Scripture includes much (but not all) of what He has planned (or decreed), but it does include all that He demanded of Israel in the past and what He expects of us in the present age.

3. His permissive will – This is usually said to be all that God allows but has not decreed. Biblically, this is **false doctrine**, since ALL that takes place is decreed (not just allowed) by God. His plan for history is all-inclusive.

4. His circumstantial will (what He wants us to do when we mess things up) – proposed by Charles Stanley

5. His immediate will (what God wants us to do now, today) – again, proposed by Charles Stanley

III. God's Word and our walk – Are there any passages that tell us how to find God's will for us?

A. God's silence – **We look in vain to find any promises** that God will guide individual believers' decisions in their daily lives or in their lifetime decisions; nor (apart from the records in Acts of God's leading of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and Silas) are there any **incidents** recorded of this happening, nor any **lists** of steps to find His will, nor any **exhortations** to seek God's will for life's decisions, nor any **commendations** for doing that or **rebukes** for not doing it. Never are mentioned any of the common ways numerous pastors and authors claim to find God's will (whether by prayer, feelings, Bible reading through the year, nor, of course, via daily devotionals, articles, books, church, Sunday School, fortune cookies, tarot cards, astrology, seances). This silence includes minor and major decisions.

1. "Minor" decisions – Does Bible give any examples or exhortations of God's leading in the following?

- a. Food – type or amount of foods mentioned in the Bible (bread, corn, fish, fruit, grapes, honey, lamb, nuts, olives, onions, raisins) or those not in the Bible (COFFEE, cereal, chocolate, chili, crackers, condiments)
- b. Clothes – cost, color, style, and quantity of togas, sandals, veils, formal wear, casual wear, sports wear
- c. Appliances or tools to use
- d. Transportation – what chariot or cart or camel to ride, cars, bikes, boats, bus, train, plane, ship
- e. Trips (how many vacations a year, where to go, how much to spend, with whom to go)

2. Major decisions– **There are at least 7 areas where we have major CHOICES [acrostic ▼] to make.**

a. **C**ombination – whom to marry (and when)

So many believers profess to want to do God's will – but when it comes to marriage, they use the teenagers' favorite word ("whatever"). God's Word specifically forbids marrying the unsaved (2Co 6:14). Do we take that literally?

b. **H**abitation – when/where to move, to rent or buy (condo, house, villa), near to what, what to pay
 c. **O**ccupation – which type of work fits me best as to my AEIOU (**A**bility, **E**xpertise/experience, **I**nterest, **O**penings/need, **U**nderstanding/counsel of others from their experience and romknowledge of the world and of me?
 d. **I**ncubation (or adoption) – how many children to have (if any), how far apart, how soon to start
 e. **C**ongregation – What’s the nearest Bible-teaching church that’s best in doctrine, where I can serve the Lord best?
 f. **E**ducation – secular school, Christian school, trade school, armed forces, scholarship, loan, job
 g. **S**ocialization – where to make true friends (church, neighborhood, clubs, parks, Facebook)

B. God’s statements – God has clearly given much truth that He wants us to have and to hold – too much to mention here. It is His will for us to know it and trust it and cherish it – in three general categories:

1. Theology (belief) – Allow me to simply remind us of the major areas of doctrine or theology that pastors need to be expounding to their congregations – truth about God (called theology proper), angels (angelology), the Bible (bibliology), sin (hamartiology), the person and work of Jesus Christ (Christology), salvation (soteriology), the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), the Church (ecclesiology), and the end times (eschatology).
2. Morality (behavior) – the principles of right and wrong, good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness
3. Civility – The Scriptures (especially the NT Epistles) say much about our dealings in various areas – marriage, parenting, employment (employers/employees, masters/slaves), neighbors and visitors, and government.

IV. God’s principles for living – Note just some of the more prominent principles God has given for believers to live by.

A. Goals (ends)

1. Glorification of God (Rom 15:6,9; 1Co 10:31)
2. Edification of others (Rom 14:19; 1Co 10:23)
3. Sanctification of you (1Th 4:3; 5:23)

B. Guidelines (17 principles to implement in making decisions = THE WILL OF GOD FOR US [acrostic▼])

1. **T**ruth (2Ti 3:17-17) Does it violate any Bible truth for the Body of Christ?
2. **H**eaven (Col 3:1-3) Does it reflect earthly/worldly or heavenly/godly values?
3. **E**ternity (2Co 4:17-18; 5:1; 1Pt 5:10) Will it be profitable for eternity or just for time?
4. **W**ithdrawal (2Co 6:14-18) Does it help distinguish and distant me from the sinful anti-Bible world?
5. **I**ntercession (Php 4:6-7) Is it something I can ask God to prosper?
6. **L**ove (1Th 3:12) Does it demonstrate true love?
7. **L**iberty in Christ (Gal 5:1,13) Is it a way to show the freedom Christ bought for us or does it spoil it?
8. **O**utreach (1Th 1:8-10) Does it help get the true gospel out to as many as possible as soon as possible?
9. **F**itness (1Co 10:23) Is this the expedient – the most practical and prudent – thing to do?
10. **G**ratitude (1Th 5:18) Can I sincerely thank God for it?
11. **O**mniscience of God (Ps 139:1-12) Does this recognize God’s watching – and watching out for – me?
12. **D**evelopment (Eph 4:12-14) Will it help me mature in my Christian life?
13. **F**aith (2Co 5:7) Does it show that I am trusting and resting in God?
14. **O**vercoming (Rom 12:21; 1Jn 2:13-14) Does it help me to have more victory over sin and Satan?
15. **R**eason (Rom 12:1-2; Php 4:8) Is this the most rational, sensible thing to do?
16. **U**noffending (Rom 14:15; 1Co 8:9-13) Will it hurt a fellow-believer’s life?
17. **S**owing and reaping (Gal 6:7-9) Are the results or consequences what will please God?

CONCLUSIONS

A. According to the Bible, there are just two aspects of God’s will: **(1) what He decrees (determines)** to take place and **(2) what He demands (desires and requires)** of His people).

B. God’s decrees will never change, since He never changes His mind; He is immutable, and nothing takes Him by surprise (Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8; Ja 1:17). God requires different things of mankind in general and of his chosen peoples (Israel before Pentecost and the Church after Pentecost), but what He has demanded has not changed within each dispensation.

C. **His desired will** is essentially a combination of all that takes place (His decreed will – since God has done and continues to do “whatsoever” He “pleased” – Ps 115:3; 135:6; Isa 53:10; Jonah 1:14; Mt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; 1Co 1:21) and His demanded will – allegiance and obedience, believing correctly (doctrine) and behaving correctly (precepts & principles).

D. What is true of His will for each individual life and also His will for all of history is that it is what takes place; if it does not take place, it was and is not His decreed will.

E. It is God’s will that believers be taught His Word clearly and correctly so that they know the truth that He has revealed for them and also know the principles and precepts by which He expects them to live and make their decisions.