

*The Christian Essentials*  
**1-Year Study**

# **Essentials**

**For the Christian Life**

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The contents of this study are in accordance with the Statements of Faith of the National Association of Evangelicals (USA) and the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

All testimonies used in the *Christians Essentials* occurred in real life but names have often been changed.

## God's Wills

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How do you know God's will for your life? This is one of the most frequent questions that Christians ask. We do not want to miss God's will in a decision. A bad decision can greatly harm our life. Does God offer us guidance in our decisions? There are two primary approaches to answering these questions:

God only expects us to know and do His moral biblical will.	God also expects us to know an extra-biblical "secret" will, like who He wants us to marry.
God's biblical will is completely revealed in Scripture and we are led in it by the desires of His Spirit in us.	God's extra-biblical will is revealed through "signs," or mental impulses that we must interpret as divine direction.
God's will in extra-biblical matters is to use love and reason to make wise choices.	We can miss God's will in extra-biblical matters because we miss His extra-biblical revelation to us.

The fundamental difference between these views is what they believe about God's will. The mystical view believes God has an "extra-biblical" will for your life. By extra-biblical we do not mean unbiblical, but simply things that Scripture does not specifically tell us to do. Examples include what occupation to choose, where to go to school, where to live, and which Christian to marry.

These are very important decisions in which you do not want to make a mistake. Which is why it is tempting to believe that God has a specific will in them that He is willing to show you outside of Scripture.

Mysticism claims that God has an extra-biblical will for your life that requires Him to give you extra-biblical revelation. Mysticism can be defined as: the belief that God is regularly revealing His extra-biblical will for our lives

through mental telepathy, or our correct interpretation of circumstances. As attractive as this view may be, there is little, if any, biblical support for it.

The topic of God's will, divine guidance, and decision making will take up the next four weeks of the *Essentials*. We will offer biblical answers to such questions as: Does God have a will for my life that I am supposed to know, but is not in Scripture? Does the Holy Spirit want to lead me in extra-biblical decisions? Does God want to give me "signs" to show me what choices to make in extra-biblical matters? How can I make wise decisions?

The best starting point for this topic is to define God's will so that we understand what we are looking for. Essentially, Scripture teaches several different aspects of God's will including: predestined will, prayed-for will, moral will, and free will.

### **The certainty of God's predestined will**

God's predestined will includes those things that God decides and makes certain will happen apart from any decisions or deeds of humans. For example, we read, "The Lord Almighty has sworn, 'Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen'" (Isa 14:24).

It is helpful to distinguish between God's foreknowledge of everything, and His predetermining some things. God knows every possible thing that can happen in the Universe. As He sees all possible events in the future (foreknowledge), He decides to intervene in some to make certain things happen (predestination). This is how God can filter your entire life to ensure that nothing happens to you that will be too difficult for you (1 Cor 10:13; see Week 20).

The Bible indicates that God's predestined will includes: 1) when and where you were born (Acts 17:26); 2) the length of your life (Ps 139:16; Job 14:5); 3) your personality (Ps 139:13, see Week 18); 4) your spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:11).

For example, as explained in Week 42, your spiritual gifts are a very personal revelation of God's specific will in how you serve Him and His people. But He decides what gifts you have. Some would also include your salvation in God's predestined will (Acts 13:48; Eph 1:4-5, 11; Rom 9:10-24; 11:5; 1 Thess 1:4-5). Some speak of a "personal" will of God for your life. God's predestined will is His personal will for your life.

Scripture also reveals rare instances where God predestines someone to fulfill a specific service. Examples include Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, Jonah, Mary, and the Apostles (Matt 16:17-19; John 15:16; Acts 26:16). These people were chosen for specific tasks apart from (and often even against) their own choice. They are clearly part of God's predestined will that He chooses and makes sure will happen. The rarity of such "controlling calls" is demonstrated by their attributes.

First, they only apply to those divinely chosen for very unique and pivotal tasks in the accomplishment of God's plan for His people. Secondly, they are clearly communicated through miraculous means such as an Angel or a vision from God. Thirdly, such "controlling calls" often involve great suffering. Finally, there is no example in Scripture of God miraculously communicating His desire for an individual to fulfill a specific ministry task that was not obeyed and fulfilled.

The mystical view of God's will and guidance suggests that God has a "controlling call" for every Christian. But if He did, then we would all be seeing Angels and visions like those in Scripture. How else could we know such a thing?

The items above are the revealed predestined will of God. Like our spiritual gifts, we normally only know them in hindsight. But there may be other things that God has predetermined to occur in your life that He will not reveal. Accordingly, we will have no certain way of knowing whether such events were the result of natural coincidences, our free choice, or the intervening manipulation of God. But we do not need to know, because God alone will ensure they happen (Esther 4:14; Prov 20:24).

You cannot "miss" God's will in the predestined parts of your life. They will happen regardless of what you know or do or whatever anyone else does. These aspects of your life are relatively rare, but they will affect your life more than anything else.

## **The miracle of the prayed-for will of God**

There are things that God is willing to do in your life and the world, but will not do unless you pray (Jam 4:2). God invites you to pray so that He can make things happen that would not otherwise occur. The prayed-for will of

God is described in 1 John 5:14-15. It says if you pray according to God's will, that He will grant whatever you ask. This was discussed further in Week 35.

### **The clarity of God's moral will**

Far too many Christians are afraid that they will not know God's will for their life. They are concerned if they make the wrong decision, they will be on "Plan B" for their life, instead of God's best plan for their life. If you struggle with this, we have good news for you! The part of God's will for your life that you need to know and follow, is completely revealed in Scripture!

The only "will of God" that He expects you to know and do is his moral will. Moral decisions are between what is righteous and what is sinful. It is only moral decisions that God is holding us accountable for and which we need divine guidance to obey. God's moral will is the only will of God you need to know and do to please God and completely fulfill His plan for your life. This is why He clearly reveals His moral will in Scripture. You do not need to "find" it. It is written clearly in Scripture and desired by God's Spirit in you.

All of this is taught in Romans 12:1-2. God's whole will is that we are morally "holy" and therefore "pleasing to God" (v. 1). All we need to do to be pleasing to God is to be holy. Verse 2 tells us how we to do this. We must renew our mind so we will not follow the sinful beliefs and habits of this world. What is the result of living morally in this world? Then we will know God's good, pleasing, and perfect will for our life. There is no other will of God that we must know to be holy and pleasing to God. And this moral will of God is completely revealed in Scripture and the only will the Spirit desires to lead us in.

How does an understanding of God's moral will relate to our decision making? All of God's will that you need to know and do in any situation is moral and completely communicated in Scripture and desired by God's Spirit in you. For example, God hardly cares what job you choose, but cares much more about how and why you do that job (Col 3:22-24).

If God has a will for you that is other than moral in nature (and therefore not communicated in Scripture), then it is an aspect of His predestined will. In that case, He need not reveal it to you in order for it to be fulfilled. He will fulfill it Himself.

In the rare case that God would choose to reveal to you an extra-biblical will, then He will communicate in miraculous, unmistakable ways such as supernatural visions or personal appearances as He did for those in Scripture. But the rarity of such a will is demonstrated by how rarely such miraculous communication occurs.

God's moral will is different from His predestined will in two ways. First, God does not need to reveal His predestined will because we have no responsibility in fulfilling it. But He clearly reveals His moral will because we are responsible to fulfill it. This is why the part of God's will that you need to know and do will always be clearly revealed. Like any good father, God does not want His children confused about what they are supposed to do.

Secondly, God's moral will is not always fulfilled. It depends on us to obey or disobey. The simple idea that God's will is always done is not true. God's moral will is disobeyed in this world constantly. But His predestined will is always fulfilled.

## **The freedom of free will**

Another biblical aspect of God's will is free will. This includes things in which God really doesn't have a will at all, but gives you the freedom to choose according to your own desires and careful reasoning. The reason for this freedom is that such issues are amoral in nature. That does not mean they are immoral. It simply means you cannot sin or displease God or miss His will in an amoral matter.

A simple example would be choosing what flavor of ice cream you will have for dessert. There are other examples of amoral decisions in which God does not have a specific will, except that we act morally. Such decisions include what occupation to choose, where to go to college, and which Christian to marry. You cannot sin in an amoral decision. God is not interested in telling us what to do in amoral decisions. Any moral guidance has already been clearly provided in Scripture. Beyond that, God wants to give you free will to follow your desires.

A biblical example is God's instruction to Adam and Eve. He said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:16-17). Here we see two different "wills" of God operating. First, He told Adam and Eve what they could not do.

This is an example of His moral will which is always clearly communicated. But God also granted Adam and Eve tremendous freedom to “eat from any [other] tree in the garden” because it was an amoral issue.

Likewise, in every decision, after we have followed God’s moral will, He always wants to give us free will. Beyond telling them what would be sinful, He was not interested in telling them what other fruit to choose. This is because He wanted Adam and Eve to choose other fruit according to their personal likes and dislikes. And the same is true in what occupation you choose, where you live, or what Christian you marry. And like the trees in the Garden of Eden, a lot of different choices are available under free will, and will be equally blessed by God.

Mysticism claims God has a specific will for things that God deems is under free will. God gives you a lot more freedom in your decisions than is taught in mysticism.

If you need to choose between wearing a red shirt or a blue one, should you think God has an opinion? Surely not. What else would you put in this category of decisions that God would simply want you to follow your desires if they are not sinful or otherwise foolish? More than mysticism claims.

Of course, mysticism claims we have free will in some decisions. But it cannot tell us where our free will ends and God’s specific and “secret” will begins. How can you know where free will begins? Remember, the part of God’s moral will that you need to know is completely revealed in Scripture. Therefore, whatever is not addressed in some way by Scripture, is one of those amoral issues that God grants you free will.

If you were to ask God what He wanted you to do in a decision that is not addressed in Scripture, do you know what He would say? “Do what you want, and I will bless it.” Do you believe that? Because if you don’t, you have an unbiblical perspective on God’s will and decision making.

Most of the decisions you make in life come under free will. God does not have any specific direction for every decision in your life. He leaves a great deal of your decisions up to your own personal desires and careful reasoning.

How then does an understanding of free will relate to decision making? It should give us a great deal of relief! So many people have put themselves into unnecessary bondage with the false belief that God has a will for details of their life that are not revealed in Scripture. Then they anxiously pursue all

sorts of mystical and superstitious methods to find this supposed extra-biblical will of God. And they often remain uncertain they have “found” God’s will. This was never God’s intention.

In a nutshell, God’s will for all of your decisions is: 1) Obey Scripture with all your soul and strength, 2) Make wise decisions with your mind, and 3) Follow the desires of your heart.

### **The unbiblical “secret” will of God**

The belief in a “secret” will of God has made the topic of divine guidance more complex and confusing than anything else. This supposed secret will of God is not revealed in Scripture and involves amoral decisions. This aspect of mysticism claims God has one best college for you to attend, one best career for you to choose, or one ideal Christian mate to marry. According to mysticism, if you choose another college, career, or mate, you have missed God’s perfect and secret will for your life.

This idea is attractive because we don’t want to make mistakes in such important decisions. It would be great if God would clearly reveal His perfect, secret will in all the decisions we make. But there is no clear biblical support for such an idea, and it has caused more harm to Christians than many will admit.

What Scriptures are used to support the claim of God’s secret will? As noted above, God had a specific, extra-biblical will for some special people in Scripture. But these “controlling calls” were always communicated clearly and miraculously through Angels, visions, etc. Such unique examples are not evidence that God intends to do the same with us.

The famous verse in Jeremiah 29:11 is also used. But the context has nothing to do with a “secret will” for every Christian. The promise was made to the nation of Israel in their Babylonian Captivity. Therefore, caution should be used in applying it to our own lives. This promise may reveal God’s attitude toward all of His people. But if it does, then it would most clearly apply to God’s predestined will, not a secret will that we must find.

Others point to the example of Isaac and Rebekah as evidence that God has one best person for us to marry. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The idea of a specific secret will of God is attractive. But believing such a thing is unbiblical and harmful. First, it makes the will of God difficult to know. This has been agonizing for many Christians who wonder if they have missed God's will in an extra-biblical amoral decision. Mysticism teaches you can only find this secret will by fervently seeking it outside of Scripture.

Thankfully, Scripture is clear: It is always God's responsibility to clearly communicate His will. There are no biblical examples of a will of God that people needed to know, but was difficult to know. Contrary to mysticism, God makes knowing His will easy. The hard part is doing it.

Secondly, mysticism claims that a Christian must be willing to do anything for God before they can know His supposed secret will for them. But there are no examples of this anywhere in Scripture. God always communicated His will regardless of who was willing to obey it. Not even a wicked unbeliever needs to be willing to obey God in order to know God's moral will from Scripture. Romans 12:1-2 is often used to support this claim. But as noted above, this passage teaches that the reason we will know God's pleasing and perfect will is because we renew our mind with the moral teachings of Scripture.

Thirdly, some believe that if God does not have an extra-biblical will to reveal to them, that He does not love them. But God's word does not say that God demonstrates His love through a secret will, but in sending His Son to die for our sin (Rom 5:8). Mysticism makes God into a controlling father who wants to dictate everything in your life. Would this be loving in our relationship with our earthly father? Would we consider a father who dictated who we would marry and what job we would choose to be more loving than one who told us, "Do what you want without sinning and I'll support you in whatever you decide"?

Like any good father, God does not wish to dictate everything in your life in minute detail. Rather, He wants you to live morally, using your reason to think wisely, and pursue your desires. The fact that in the OT God dictated virtually every aspect of His people's lives reflected their spiritual immaturity. But in the New Covenant you are indwelt with the Holy Spirit so you already know and desire the moral will of God.

Fourth, a belief in an extra-biblical secret will adds a great number of things in which we can sin against God. It makes amoral issues become moral ones because it is claimed God has a specific will in them. This would seem to

violate God's command to not add to His commandments (Deut 4:2). God never reveals direction to someone that is merely His suggestion. To disobey or "miss" a secret will of God that you are supposed to know and do would be rebellious sin. A secret will creates another "Bible" that we must discover and learn to read if we do not wish to be sinful and displeasing to God.

Finally, what if someone believes they have found God's "secret" will for the job, college, or spouse they were supposed to choose. But then they encounter great problems because of their decision. What will they think? They must have missed God's plan? They were not humble or godly enough to "hear" God? They are now stuck in "plan B" for their life? Mysticism sets you up for such lies, and they will make hard situations even more painful.

Belief in a secret will makes God's will into a narrow, difficult-to-find path that we must find or hurt our life. But the real wills of God cover every aspect of your life. In the Bible, the only "secret" will of God is under His predestined will that He will make sure happens. His moral will enables you to know God's pleasing and perfect will and it is written in Scripture. Free will makes your extra-biblical decisions a rather wide and delightful path with several options, all of which your Dad is willing to bless in your life. And God's prayed-for-will gives you the opportunity to ask God to make all kinds of things His will for your life.

**Practical application:** What is something you want to bring into the prayed-for will of God? Keep asking until God grants it, or makes it clear that He has something better for you.

In your small group meeting this week, share praises and prayer requests and then discuss these questions:

- 1) What are the two primary views about divine guidance in decision making?  
How do they differ?
- 2) What does "extra-biblical" mean? What kinds of decisions does this describe?
- 3) What is God's predestined will? What are biblical examples?
- 4) Mysticism claims God has a "controlling call" for every Christian. Why do its biblical attributes make this unlikely?

- 5) What is exciting about the potential of the prayed-for will of God? How can this encourage you in prayer?
- 6) We claim that the part of God's will for your life that you need to know and follow, is completely revealed in Scripture. What do we base this claim on? What do you think?
- 7) If God has a will for you that is other than moral in nature, then it is a part of what aspect of His will?
- 8) When God had an extra-biblical will for those in Scripture, how did He reveal it to them? Why does this suggest that such a thing is very rare?
- 9) What does amoral mean? Why does God grant free will in such things?
- 10) What do we claim God would say, if you could ask Him what He wanted you to do in a decision, that is not addressed in Scripture? How might this be encouraging?
- 11) What is the supposed "secret" will of God? What are supposed examples?
- 12) We claim there are no biblical examples of a will of God that people needed to know, but was difficult to know. Why could this be encouraging?
- 13) What are the problems caused by believing in a "secret will" of God?
- 14) What was most meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

## The Wills of God

	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples in Scripture</b>
<b><i>Predestined &amp; Personal</i></b>	Things that God decides and makes certain will happen apart from any decisions or deeds of humans. Usually unrevealed to the person until it occurs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Place &amp; time of birth (Acts 17:26)</li> <li>● Spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7, 11)</li> <li>● Some callings from God (Moses, Jonah, Paul)</li> </ul>
<b><i>Moral</i></b>	Reveals what is holy or sinful. Completely revealed in Scripture and confirmed by the desires of the Holy Spirit. Its fulfillment is dependent on your choice to obey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Loving God and people (Matt 7:12; 22: 40; Phil 1:9-10)</li> <li>● Being holy (1 Thess 4:3; 1 Pet 1:16)</li> <li>● Faithful with gifts (1 Pet 4:10)</li> </ul>
<b><i>Free</i></b>	Led by personal desires & careful reasoning. No additional revelation or divine guidance needed apart from Scripture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Which Christian person you marry (1 Cor 7:1-38)</li> <li>● Which honorable occupation you choose (Col 3:23).</li> <li>● What good church to join.</li> </ul>

<p><b><i>Prayed-for</i></b></p>	<p>Makes miraculous things happen that would not otherwise occur when God grants our requests.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hezekiah's healing (2 Kgs 20:1-5)</li> <li>● Miraculous deliverances (2 Kgs 18:13-19:37; Acts 12:1-18)</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Unbiblical Secret</i></b></p>	<p>Extra-biblical and unknown until we somehow discern it apart from Scripture.</p>	<p>Nothing in Scripture about it. Any secret will of God apart from Scripture will be a part of His predestined will and will occur no matter what.</p>

## Mysticism

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### The silence of Scripture on Mysticism

Mysticism has been defined as: the belief that God is regularly revealing His extra-biblical will for our lives through mental telepathy, or our correct interpretation of circumstances. Mental telepathy is direct communication from one mind to another apart from any physical means (e.g. seeing or hearing). Mysticism claims that God directly plants extra-biblical direction in your mind that you must recognize as His will. Or correctly interpret “signs” in your circumstances to know His extra-biblical will.

But there are many biblical problems with mysticism. First, there are no biblical promises, examples, or instruction for what mysticism claims. God never promises to speak to us apart from Scripture. There is no instruction in the Bible on how to recognize when God is speaking to us apart from Scripture. There is not a single example in Scripture of God ever guiding one of His people by planting thoughts in their head that they were supposed to recognize as revelation. There is no instruction in Scripture on how to correctly interpret your circumstances as God’s guidance for decision making.

If mysticism claimed that we should expect God to speak to us through a donkey (Num 22:28-30), it would have more biblical support than claiming God speaks to us through mental telepathy. There is no evidence that even Jesus received His revelations through mystical means. On the contrary, Jesus spoke repeatedly of receiving divine revelation by what He physically “saw” and “heard,” not just what He thought (Matt 3:17; 17:5; John 3:11; 3:31-32; 5:19-20, 30; 8:26, 28, 38, 40; 12:28-29).

If God was communicating to Christians in a mystical way, it would be the most important thing happening in our daily lives. And we would expect a great deal of biblical promises, commands, examples, and instruction on how God communicates to us apart from Scripture. But there are none of these things.

This is why mystical teachers have to give us their personal examples of God putting thoughts in their mind to guide them. There are no examples of

this in Scripture. Likewise, people have written books to give instruction on discerning the extra-biblical will of God because there is no instruction for this in Scripture.

Scripture teaches that when God wanted to communicate apart from His written word, He personally appeared or spoke through visions, Angels, or other physical and undeniable ways. There are no exceptions of this in Scripture. Which is why it is rather unbiblical for people to claim God speaks to them through some sort of “still small voice” that they really do not hear with their ears. There are no promises or examples of such a thing happening to God’s people in Scripture.

### **Refuting biblical support for mysticism**

One of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible is James 1:5-8. Many interpret this as a promise that if we have a question or need direction that is not available in Scripture, then we can simply ask God and He will guide us. Many believe such guidance would come through an immediate and strong thought in our mind, which would be mental telepathy. Thankfully, this is not true.

Why do we say, “thankfully”? Because the text demands that you do not doubt or question whatever thoughts or “answer” comes to your mind. “When you ask” for wisdom “you must believe and not doubt” that God will “speak” to you. If you doubt this, then you are a sinful, unbelieving person who “should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.” So, if you ask for wisdom on an extra-biblical issue, can you trust without a doubt, whatever thoughts, intuitions, or “answers” come to mind as revelation from God? Humble people will admit they cannot.

So, what is the text in James saying? The answer is to correctly define the “wisdom” that is being referred to. It is not extra-biblical wisdom for making all kinds of decisions. The wisdom you can confidently and always get from God is moral wisdom. Specifically, what is morally right or wrong in difficult circumstances (James 1:2-4). The “wisdom” promised in James 1 is defined in James 3: The wisdom from God is first of all morally pure, loves peace, and is considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good moral fruit, impartial and sincere (3:17). According to James, the wisdom God is willing to provide is

moral: telling us what is evil or righteous in any given situation. And you confidently possess this wisdom in Scripture.

Another promise often misunderstood is when Christ told His Apostles that the Spirit would guide them in the truth (John 16:12-13). Is this a promise that the Spirit will guide you in extra-biblical decisions? On the contrary, this was a unique promise to the Apostles promising them revelation to write NT Scripture, including prophecy about the future. This promise was fulfilled in the Apostle John's writing of his Gospel and the Revelation. Likewise, the Gospel of Matthew is a fulfillment of Christ's promise that the Holy Spirit would enable the Apostles to remember all that He said (John 14:25-26). If these promises were for all Christians, then why would we believe the Apostles were uniquely equipped to write Scripture?

Others misunderstand the descriptions of the Holy Spirit as our *paraklēton* (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). Some translations interpret this word as "Counselor" and one who speaks to you. However, the correct interpretation is "Advocate," or one who speaks for you. This meaning is clear in 1 John 2:1 and described in Rom 8:26-27.

The reference to the Father drawing people to Him (John 6:44) refers to God pulling people to Him for salvation, not the Spirit prompting us in extra-biblical direction.

When Jesus spoke of His sheep hearing His voice (John 10:27), He was speaking of their salvation and conversion experience, not extra-biblical revelation.

Christ's promises of direct revelation in the context of Apostles, speaking before pagan leaders during a period of great persecution (Luke 12:11-12; cf. Luke 21:14-15; Matt 10:19-20; Mark 13:11), is quite different from the claim of mystical guidance for extra-biblical decisions in everyday life.

The Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit guiding the early Church in specific decisions (Acts 13:1-2; 15: 2, 6-7, 28). But the direction was spoken through the miraculously inspired and authenticated Prophets or Apostles who were present.

There are several Bible verses describing God leading us in "the way." These refer to a moral lifestyle, not specific divine direction on "the way" a person should choose in an extra-biblical decision. The Hebrew word *derek* used in many of these passages refers to the moral actions of men who either

follow the way of righteousness or wickedness. (1 Kgs 2:2-3; 16:26; Ps 1:1-2, 6; 5:8; 23:3; 25:4-5, 8-10, 12; 27:11; 31:3; 32:8; 51:12-13; 86:11; 139:23-24; 143:8, 10; Prov 4:14, 19, 26-7; 8:20; 11:5; 12:26; 15:9-10; 22:6; Isa 2:3; 30:19-21; 48:17-18; 55:7; Jer 12:1; 36:3).

This helps us to understand Proverbs 3:5-6 which is commonly interpreted in a mystical way. The literal Hebrew of verse 6 reads “He will make your paths straight.” The verses mentioned above about “the way” in Scripture demonstrate that the “straight” way in the OT refers to moral living by obeying God’s commands. This interpretation of Proverbs 3:5-6 is supported by verse 7 which instructs us to fear the Lord and turn away from evil. A mystical interpretation of this verse leads us to depend on our feelings to guide us. But trusting the Lord, not leaning on our own understanding, and acknowledging God in all of our decisions is nothing more (or less!) than depending on Scripture.

## **The problem of signs**

Many Christians seek for miraculous “signs” from God to guide them in decision making. Some claim that we are to follow the method used by Abraham’s servant to find a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:12-21). Does God intend this to be instruction on how to find the perfect wife? The answer is “no” for at least 2 reasons.

First, Abraham’s servant was given a very unique promise. The Prophet Abraham told him the Lord would send an Angel to ensure his success (Gen 24:40). This man was promised divine guidance and intervention from an Angel. If a real Prophet of God like Abraham could tell you the same thing, then perhaps there would be instruction here for how you can find a wife. But there are no Prophets like Abraham today, and it is unlikely that you will be promised guidance from an Angel to find a wife.

Another reason not to accept this passage as instruction on how to get guidance from God is that it would be foolish to do so. Imagine trying to actually apply it to your life. You could hire a dating agency to find a wife for your son. The agent could drive into a gas station, pray a prayer, and choose the first woman who comes along and fills his water jug.

Some have used the example of “Gideon’s fleece” (Judg 6:11-40) as a model of asking God for signs to guide them. What people forget is that

Gideon saw and spoke with an Angel! The purpose of “Gideon’s fleeces” was to prove the Angel was from God, not to authenticate a decision. There is nothing to apply to decision making in Gideon’s story, unless an Angel appears to you too. And if God wants you to lead and risk the lives of 300 men in battle against a huge army, maybe He will.

Of course, God may “open doors” of opportunity for us. But there is no way for us to be certain such things are from God. Notice how even the Apostle Paul responded to an “opened door” he knew was from “the Lord” (2 Cor 2:12-13). Paul did not view an “open door,” even for preaching the Gospel, as a clear command of God.

God rarely, if ever, intends your circumstances to be a divine revelation of guidance to do something. This is why there is absolutely no instruction in Scripture on how to correctly interpret your circumstances as God’s guidance for decision making.

## **Other problems with mysticism**

We understand that some may be offended by what is being taught in these chapters about knowing God’s will. The belief that God is speaking directly to people apart from Scripture can be very precious to them. But understanding the completeness and authority of Scripture will protect you from the potential dangers of mysticism. All kinds of Christians justify foolish and even sinful decisions by claiming God told them to do something. Other Christians live in great turmoil, trying to find the will of God apart from Scripture. Christian, everything God needs or desires to say to you is written in Scripture.

Remember, false Christianity is often trying to convince you that you need something that God has already given you. As a false teaching, mysticism denies that God has already given you a clear revelation of His will and how to please Him.

Mysticism is intimidating when others are claiming that God is regularly “speaking” to them and guiding them apart from Scripture. These claims create a great deal of disappointment and envy among Christians. When God does not “speak” or “guide” as miraculously and personally as He is supposedly doing for others, we will wonder why. You might falsely conclude it is because you are sinning, or God does not care

about you, or you are not spiritual enough to receive these supposed “messages” from God.

Unfortunately, mystics are rarely honest enough to confess the multitude of times they thought God was telling them to do something, and they were wrong.

The popularity of mysticism among Christians is a subtle attack on the authority of Scripture. It repeatedly complains that God’s word is not specific enough in telling us what to do, and we therefore need extra-biblical revelation to know God’s will. But such a claim is worthless. No human can confidently know what extra-biblical thoughts would be revelation from God. If God just put a thought in your mind to move to Africa, how could you possibly know it was from Him?

In this life you can rarely be sure of any source of guidance apart from Scripture. No matter how good or gripping a thought, idea, or desire may be, if there is not a specific verse of Scripture that would verify it as God’s will, then we must always admit that it may only be our own human, and possibly mistaken thought. And if we cannot trust our thoughts beyond clear statements of Scripture, then we are back to the fact that the only divine direction we can fully trust is the written Word of God.

Finally, in many cases, mysticism leads to the sin of divination. Divination is interpreting signs, dreams, “fleeces,” circumstances, and omens as revelation from God. In mysticism, superstition and divination become divine revelation. God said such pagan practices were detestable to Him (Deut 18:10-14). Are you sure that your approach to knowing God’s will is not the sin of divination?

**Practical application:** Seriously, take a moment to answer that question. Apply what you have learned in these chapters to evaluate how you make decisions and discern God’s will.

In your small group meeting this week, share praises and prayer requests and then discuss these questions:

- 1) How do we define mysticism?
- 2) What is “mental telepathy”? How does this apply to mysticism?
- 3) What is the biggest biblical problem with mysticism?

- 4) In the Bible, what did God always do if He wanted to communicate to someone apart from His written word?
- 5) What is a common interpretation of James 1:5-8? How does James 3:17 help us correctly interpret this?
- 6) What is the literal translation of Proverbs 3:6? What is the suggested interpretation of this? What do you think?
- 7) Does God intend the method used by Abraham's servant to find a wife for Isaac, to be instruction on how to find the perfect wife? What are two reasons suggested for denying this? What do you think?
- 8) Why is "Gideon's fleece" not a good example of looking for signs to get God's direction?
- 9) How did the Apostle Paul respond to an "open door" in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13? What does this tell us about such things?
- 10) What are several harmful things about mysticism? Have you personally experienced any of these?
- 11) What is divination? How can mysticism lead to this?
- 12) What was most meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

## God's Guidance I: Scripture, Spirit, Authority & Conscience

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### God's guidance through Scripture

The Bible says, "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim 3:16). By "Scripture" the Apostle meant direct revelation from God that has been recorded in writing (Deut 31:19; 1 Sam 10:25; Isa 30:8; Jer 30:2; Ezek 43:11; Eph 3:2-5; 2 Pet 3:15-16).

The Greek word translated "inspired" (*theopneustos*) literally means "God-breathed." Most NT scholars agree that Paul is referring to "the creative activity of God." The Bible is another creation of God through the creative breath of God (Gen 2:7; Ps 33:6). This is why Scripture is supernatural and properly called "God's word," not just the writing of men. "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim 3:16).

How did this inspiration occur? Through men who were chosen by God to receive divine revelation. These men were the OT Prophets, the NT Apostles, and Jesus Christ. This is why Scripture says God's Church is built on the foundation of these men (Eph 2:19-20). They gave us the revelation we needed. How do we know that? Because, as explained in Week 40, they were authenticated by working miracles.

You desperately need the truth. If you do not know the truth or where to find it, you cannot be secure in a world full of lies. The vital question then is this: Where can you confidently find the words God has for you? Only in Scripture.

The words in Scripture are not merely human words, but the words of God. To disobey, distort, dilute, degrade, alter, or misuse the words in the Bible is nothing less than an arrogant insult to the Author of those words. Anything less than the highest honor and obedience to Scripture is simply sin against God.

Trusting Scripture is trusting God. More than that, loving Scripture is loving God. In fact, you do not love or trust God any more than you love and

trust Scripture. While Scripture is not the Person of God, it is the Word of God. Therefore, Scripture is where we hear and meet God.

## **The completeness of Scripture**

The Corinthians were tempted to find the word and authority of God apart from Scripture. They followed men rather than God (1 Cor 1:10-13; 3:1-4). They valued worldly wisdom (1:18-24). They were vulnerable to false revelations (12:2-3; 14:29).

To Christians who looked for the word and will of God apart from Scripture, the Apostle Paul told them, “Learn from us the meaning of the saying, ‘Do not go beyond what is written’” (1 Cor 4:6). Paul was repeating a common saying in the early Church that encouraged Christians to only hear God in Scripture. This is because God’s will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture.

The only authoritative revelation on Earth from God is written Scripture. This is why the Protestant Reformation had a saying: “Scripture Alone.” This is why the ancient church had a saying: “Do not go beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6). Nobody and nothing speaks for God to direct your life apart from Scripture.

God believes Scripture is the only word of God we need. Do you believe that? This belief has historically been called “the sufficiency of Scripture.” It seems more accurate to call it “the completeness of Scripture.” This essentially means that Scripture contains everything God needs to communicate in order for us to know and obey His will. God’s will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture. If something is not spoken of in Scripture, then God does not have an opinion on it. God’s repeated command to not add or subtract anything from Scripture, illustrates the “completeness of Scripture” (Deut 12:32; Rev 22:18-19).

Jesus illustrated His belief in the “completeness of Scripture” when He defeated all temptations from the Devil by simply quoting what “Scripture says” (Matt 4:4, 7, 10). If God’s written word was good enough for Jesus to defeat the Devil, then it is good enough for us. Likewise, God’s advice to Joshua to be “successful” in all the challenges facing him was to simply obey written Scripture (Josh 1:7).

The Bible says God's will for your is to be holy (1 Thess 4:3). That gives you a lot of divine guidance for your life. Likewise, God tells you in Scripture to glorify Him in everything you do (1 Cor 10:31). These biblical commands tell us how to make God-pleasing decisions.

Why is Scripture such a complete revelation of God's will for your life? Because the commands to love God and people are such a complete revelation of God's will for your life (Matt 7:12; 22:37-40; Phil 1:9-10; 1 Thess 4:3). If you want to obey God perfectly, you only need to do these two things: Love God and people. What else is there?

Mysticism claims that God will lead us to love certain people at certain times in certain ways. But we don't need such guidance because Scripture tells us to love all people at all times. It is as if God is saying, "Needs that you see are a nudge from Me." This is not some sort of mystical revelation, but rather, obeying biblical commands. If you just love, you will be doing essentially all of God's will for your life in essentially every circumstance.

## **God's guidance through the Spirit**

The Bible says that when God's Spirit comes to live inside of us, we have a "new self" already created to be like God (Eph 4:24). We have God living in us. Which is why we can "put on" Christ (Rom 13:14) and "imitate God" in everything we do (Eph 5:1). Obviously, having God live in you will help you know and do God's will. The Bible repeatedly speaks of us being "led by the Spirit" (Rom 8:12-14; Gal 5:16-18, 22-23). How does this happen?

God's Spirit in us knows God's will in every situation. When He controls us, we will desire and do God's will. This is how God is working in you to desire and act according to His will (Phil 2:13). David described being indwelled with God's Spirit as having God's law in your heart (Ps 37:31; Jer 31:33). God promised that when He put a "new spirit" in us, it would cause us to know and obey His written commands (Ezek 36:26-27). Why? Because His written commands reveal the will of God for your life.

This reminds us of the relationship between God's word and God's Spirit. God's Spirit inspired the Word of God. God's Spirit leads us to desire and obey the Word of God. This agreement between what God's Word commands, and what God's Spirit desires is a confirmation of God's will for us. Both God's Word and God's Spirit testify to the moral biblical will of God, which confirms

its truth (Deut 19:15; Matt 18:16). For example, the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22) is the love and holiness commanded in Scripture.

To be “led by the Spirit” means to experience “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:16-23) and the gifts of the Spirit. You read in Week 42 that your spiritual gifts are among the most specific direction God will give you for your life.

When God’s Spirit controls us, we will know and do the will of God in every situation. This is why John said that those who have the Holy Spirit do not need human teachers to tell them what is morally right. God’s Spirit leads us in these things (1 John 2:27).

Virtually none of the Christians living in the first 200 years of Christianity possessed a NT. Yet even in the face of great persecution, they influenced the Roman Empire to become essentially a Christian empire. Why were Christians who possessed no NT so godly, loving, and powerful? Because God’s Spirit in them enabled them to know and do God’s will.

How is this biblical view of the Spirit’s guidance different from the mystical view? Mysticism claims that God’s Spirit regularly reveals extra-biblical things through planting extra-biblical thoughts in our mind. What is a biblical response to this?

First, God’s Spirit is not in the habit of giving us direction and desires that go beyond God’s written word. His purpose is to help us understand and obey God’s written word, not give us more revelation apart from God’s word. Everything the Spirit would prompt us to do is moral in nature and can be found as a clear command in Scripture. Mysticism wants to separate the revelation of God’s Word from God’s Spirit. God always wants those things to be united together.

Secondly, the real leading of God’s Spirit can always be tested with the commands of Scripture. But the extra-biblical direction claimed in mysticism cannot. If the Spirit leads you to love someone, Scripture can confirm this. But if you think God’s Spirit is leading you to move to Australia, God’s word cannot confirm this.

Finally, the divine revelation provided by God’s Spirit is a Person, not mere inspirations, impressions and impulses telling us to do things beyond what Scripture says. God has given us a “new self created to be like God” (Eph 4:24), not an oracle to whom we can ask extrabiblical questions about our decisions. We don’t need God to “whisper” to us. He lives inside of us and can control us.

The Spirit's leading does not normally occur from getting messages from Him. Rather, the leading of the Holy Spirit is a Person living through you! His leading comes from an incarnation within us, not an inspiration from outside of us.

We know the answer to "What would Jesus do?," not because we are having a continual conversation with God. Rather, because we are controlled by God's Spirit within us, we will think, act, and talk like Christ. The Spirit's primary ministry in our lives is not to provide us with new revelations, but a "new self" that instinctively knows what God's will is.

### **God's guidance through human authorities**

Human authorities are another source of knowing God's will that is often overlooked. The Bible says we are to obey the following human authorities: 1) husbands (Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-6); 2) parents (Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20); 3) pastors (Heb 13:17; Tit 2:15); 4) government officials (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17); and 5) employers (Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:22-24; 1 Pet 2:18). God has delegated His authority to such people and desires for us to know and do His will through them.

We will discuss the limits of human authority in a moment. But first, do not miss how specifically God wants to direct your life through your human authorities. The mere preferences of a human authority are the commands of God. Scripture tells children to "obey your parents in everything" (Col 3:20), and "wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Eph 5:24), and employees should obey their employers "in everything" (Col 3:22). Therefore, the mere preferences of a human authority are the commands of God.

Even the petty desires of parents, husbands, presidents, employers, and pastors are to be heeded as God's specific will for any situation within their God-given sphere of responsibility. Accordingly, otherwise amoral issues become moral ones in which sin can occur.

For example, it would normally be an extra-biblical issue as to where a family would live, and one that not even God would have an opinion on. However, if for whatever reason the husband and father of a family decides to choose a particular place for the family to live, then it does become God's will, something that He cares about, and a moral issue in which the rest of the family could sin against God if they do not respect the man's decision.

When we understand the amount of authority God has given to some of the people in our life, we recognize how much specific guidance God is providing through them. Christians want to know how to please God in every situation. One important way is to please your human authorities.

If a child wants to please God, then they will do “everything” their parents tell them to do. If a wife wants to please God, she will do “everything” her husband tells her, as if Christ Himself were commanding it. If an employee wants to please God, then they will do their best to do everything their employer tells them to do. To do otherwise in any of these situations will displease God.

Why has God ordained that even the preferences of human authorities are to be obeyed? Because God desires unity and order and dislikes chaos and conflict. God is not a God of disorder and confusion, but a God of peace (1 Cor 14:33). Many group decisions come down to preferences. If everyone’s preference is given equal value, chaos will result and no united decision will be able to be made.

Therefore, it is very helpful if there is a mutual understanding that the preferences of the person in authority (parent, husband, pastors, etc.) are to be prioritized. Unity, peace, and progress are all easier in a marriage, family, business, and church if human authorities are respected.

What has been the result of Christians abandoning God’s desire to provide specific guidance of His will through human authorities? They have lost their confidence in knowing God’s will. They have pursued mystical teaching that claims God wants to lead us independently through impressions and “signs.”

But God wants us guided by the mere preferences of our authorities more often than many think. It is foolish for a Christian to expect any further guidance from God (let alone blessing), unless they are honoring and obeying their God-given authorities. Many of those who complain of a lack of specific divine guidance for their lives are the very ones who do not properly respect their God-given authorities, thus forsaking an essential means of knowing God’s will.

Of course, there are limits to the divine authority of any human authorities. When their direction violates Scripture, their authority ceases, and we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). God never wants us to do

something immoral or unbiblical. There are other limits as well on human authorities.

If a husband is emotionally or sexually abusing his wife, God wants her to get help from other authorities, including pastors.

God does not expect us to follow pastors we do not trust. Rather, He wants us to find spiritual leaders who earn our respect because of their character (1 Pet 5:2-3; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9).

We are drawing principles for employees from the Bible's instruction to slaves (Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:22-24; 1 Pet 2:18). However, unlike first-century slaves, most employees today have the God-given freedom to leave an employer they do not like.

Obviously, God always wants us to respect and honor our parents. But there comes a point when He no longer expects us to obey their preferences in everything. It can be suggested that a child is no longer under the authority of their parents when they get married or become financially independent (Gen 2:24). However, as long as a person is dependent on the finances of their parents, then it would seem they remain under their authority.

There are limits to human authority. But it is easy for us to make excuses for not respecting them simply because we do not like the direction they are giving us. There is a difference between an unbiblical authority, and a difficult and unwise one. We need not obey the former, but must obey the latter if we want to please God.

This is why the Apostles addressed the need to fully respect difficult husbands (1 Pet 3:1-6) or harsh employers (1 Pet 2:18-21). Their lack of skill or character is not an automatic excuse in God's eyes to disrespect or disobey the authorities in our life. He wants us to know His specific will through the preferences of our human authorities. He wants us to please Him by pleasing them.

## **God's guidance through conscience**

God has delegated authority to the human conscience. Like God's Word and Spirit, it is a guide to what is right and wrong. Paul equated its moral authority to the OT Scriptures (Rom 2:14-15). The conscience is another way God's Spirit guides us (Rom 9:1). It confirms the morality of Scripture (2 Cor 1:12). The conscience can be a helpful guide in areas the Bible does not

specifically speak. We may not have a specific verse for all the “right” decisions we make, but our conscience provides the confidence that we are indeed doing the right thing.

Perhaps it is only the right thing for us. People’s consciences rightly differ on many things. And if Scripture is not clear on such things, God wants us to follow our conscience (Rom 14:2-6). This is why there are repeated encouragements in Scripture to obey our conscience. When we do, we will have a “clear” or peaceful conscience and be in God’s will (Job 27:6; Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3; Heb 13:18).

Correction from others is often valuable. But only our conscience can tell us if their criticism is legitimate (Job 27:5-6; 2 Cor 1:12; 1 Pet 3:16).

God gives our conscience a lot of authority in our lives. This is demonstrated by Paul’s instruction about “acceptable” matters of conscience. Simply put, an “acceptable” conviction is one that 1) ignores clear biblical teaching, but 2) does not involve an issue that is automatically harmful to people. This is the major topic of Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10.

Some with “weak” consciences believed it was sinned to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols, drink wine, or disregard the Sabbath and other Jewish holidays. But the Bible clearly teaches these are not sins (Mark 7:18-19; Rom 14:14; 1 Cor 10:25; 1 Tim 5:23; Rom 14:5). But again, God has given the conscience a lot of authority. Therefore, God wants those with a “weak” or misinformed conscience on “acceptable” matters to obey their conscience (Rom 14:14, 23; 1 Cor 8:7).

Likewise, it is sin to try to change someone’s conscience in “acceptable” matters (Rom 14:13, 15, 20, 22; 1 Cor 8:9-12). The only way to move a conscience against itself is to destroy it. God deems the conscience as a sacred thing that should be followed like a personal “Bible.”

However, this does not mean the conscience is always correct. A “weak” conscience is not fully informed of God’s grace in certain areas. Someone’s conscience can be “wrong” due to incorrect training. Therefore, the Christian must admit that their conscience is not perfect (1 Cor 4:3-5; 1 Tim 4:2; Tit 1:15).

**Practical application:** Who is a God-ordained authority in your life that you could respect and please more? Decide how to do this and begin doing it.

In your small group meeting this week, share praises and prayer requests and then discuss these questions:

- 1) How do we know the Bible is the word of God?
- 2) Why did the Apostle Paul write 1 Corinthians 4:6 to this church? How does it apply to your life?
- 3) What do we mean by the “completeness of Scripture”?
- 4) Why is Scripture such a complete revelation of God’s will for your life?
- 5) What is the relationship between God’s word and God’s Spirit? How do they confirm one another?
- 6) Why were the first Christians so godly, loving, and powerful, even though they did not possess a NT?
- 7) What are some unique things about the Christians living in the first 200 years of Christianity? How could they do this?
- 8) What are problems with the mystical view of the Holy Spirit’s work in our life?
- 9) What do we mean by saying that the Holy Spirit’s leading comes from an incarnation within us, not an inspiration from outside of us?
- 10) We claim that the mere preferences of a human authority are the commands of God. What do you think?
- 11) What is at least one reason God wants us to respect the preferences of our human authorities?
- 12) What are some limits to human authority?
- 13) Why is our conscience an important guide to knowing God’s will in our decisions?
- 14) What was most meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

## God's Guidance II: Reason, Desires & Decisions

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### God's gift of reason

Nothing is more important for humans than decision making, and nothing is more important for decision making than reason. This is reflected throughout Scripture. In the OT God gave instruction on how to decide if a town was practicing idolatry and needed to be completely destroyed (Deut 13:12-15). He did not promise miraculous revelation for such an important decision. Rather, He instructed them to investigate the situation, weigh the evidence, and by using reason, decide if everyone in the town should be killed.

The Book of Proverbs repeatedly encourages the use of reason to make wise decisions (1:1-4; 13:16; 14:8, 15; 22:3).

The Apostle Paul describes making very important decisions with reason, not miraculous revelation (Acts 15:36; 20:3, 16; Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 16:4-9; 2 Cor 1:15-16, 23; Phil 2:25; 1 Thess 3:1). Many believe we need some sort of miraculous or mystical guidance from God for such decisions. But even Paul usually made his own travel and missionary plans with careful reasoning.

The Apostle expected mature believers to use their reason in deciding court cases among them, with no need of divine revelation implied (1 Cor 6:1-5). He encouraged the use of reason to act wise toward unbelievers and to decide how to make the most of every opportunity to influence them (Col 4:5). He commanded us to think carefully so we would live wisely instead of foolishly (Eph 5:15-17).

Some assume that when we become Christians that the way we make decisions will be radically different. But the vast majority of personal decisions described in the NT were made using simple logic. God gave each of us a brain, and He expects us to use it.

Scripture repeatedly encourages us to get counsel and advice for making decisions (Prov 1:5; 11:14; 12:15; 13:10; 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; 24:6). Why? Because counsel is simply multiplied reasoning. It collects the wisdom of more than one person. And counsel often helps us think more deeply and clearly about a decision. Far too many Christians refuse to get counsel on important

decisions for foolish or even sinful reasons. Be humble and wise and find godly, wise, and smart people for advice. Following God's will in this will bless your life.

The Bible is clear that careful and wise reasoning is essential to a blessed, productive, and God-glorifying Christian life. Therefore, one of the Holy Spirit's functions is to free our reasoning from the control of sin. This is the great difference between the reason of believers and unbelievers. God's Spirit has dethroned sin as the dominated influence in our life so we can choose godly reasoning.

The "peace of God" in decision making is not something mystical or miraculous. It is the natural result of following good moral reasoning (conscience) which resolves guilt, and correct logical reasoning which removes doubt.

The God-given authority of human reason is demonstrated by the fact that only when He provides miraculous revelation are we to go against it. It would have been foolish and sinful for Gideon to lead 300 warriors into battle against a vast army (Judg 6-7). Except God sent an Angel to tell him to do something "foolish." Likewise, God never wants us to go against good and wise reasoning unless He gives us a miraculous revelation to do otherwise.

Our dependence on reason is so God-ordained, that it requires nothing less than a miraculous revelation from God for us to righteously and wisely go against it. Of course, some will claim they have received such revelations through feelings or "signs." But this will probably amount to human foolishness rather than biblical faith.

Obviously, people seek divine revelation instead of human reason because the latter can make mistakes. Where revelation stops, reason begins, and certainty ends. When we have a decision that is not discussed in Scripture, we are expected to use our own human, and potentially fallible wisdom. And this makes our decision making uncertain. But God has put us in a world where we can make mistakes, even serious ones. And He is not in the habit of providing extra-biblical miraculous revelation to change this. Which is why He tells us in Scripture to make careful decisions and seek wise counsel.

## **God's freedom through desires**

Your Dad in Heaven loves you. Like any good dad He loves to give you your desires. He treats His children as individuals, recognizing they have unique desires. He wants you to pursue your unique desire in ministry, vocation, and which good Christian person to marry. The freedom that God gives you in decision making is immense. As He told His first children: “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden” (Gen 2:16-17) except the one that would destroy them.

Unfortunately, mysticism denies that you have this kind of freedom in life. It claims there is one best decision that is God’s perfect will in all of these things. And if you miss finding that perfect will in these extra-biblical things, then you will miss God’s best.

Other Christians believe that God’s will is exactly the opposite of what they really want to do. They assume their desires must be wrong or wicked, and God wants to test their sincerity by making them do something they do not want to do. Or that they at least must be willing to choose the least desirable path in order to know God’s perfect will.

Fortunately, none of these popular ideas are true. Do you remember how we started this section? Your Dad in Heaven loves you. Like any good dad He loves to give you your desires. The work of God’s Spirit is to make your desires moral, not dictate extra-biblical direction through some sort of extra-biblical revelation. God certainly allows difficult things to happen in our life. But He wants us to pursue our desires in everything and anything as long as they are moral and wise.

In other words, God wants us to imitate Him in following our desires. Why did God choose and implement His plan of salvation? Because He wanted to (Eph 1:3-12).

The writings of the Apostle Paul are filled with decisions he made according to his personal desires. He wanted to go to Rome because of his own ambition and longing, not because of a miraculous revelation (Rom 15:19-20, 22, 24). Likewise, Paul encouraged Christians to evaluate special days, and decide the amount of a gift, according to their own desires (Rom 14:5; 2 Cor 9:7). God’s word speaks a lot about His desire to bless your desires (Ps 20:4; 37:4; 145:19; Matt 6:33).

We will repeat something you read in Week 44 on the freedom of free will from God. If you were to ask God what He wanted you to do in a decision that

is not addressed in Scripture, do you know what He would say? “Do what you want, and I will bless it.” Do you believe that? Because if you don’t, you have an unbiblical perspective on God’s will and decision making.

In a nutshell, God’s will for all of your decisions is: 1) Obey Scripture with all your soul and strength, 2) Make wise decisions with your mind, and 3) Follow the desires of your heart.

Do you doubt the immensity of your free will? Does not God give you the freedom to choose what you will eat today, what you will wear today, and how you will spend your free time today? Yes! Indeed, the scope of the free will God gives you is great. And do not ignore how much God desires to bless His children.

You read the following in Week 21. Hard things will happen, but the overall experience of a child of God is tremendous blessings. The honest confession of any sincere Christian at the end of their life will be: “God was good to me.” This is because of who your Dad is. He is a very generous Dad who greatly enjoys blessing His sons and daughters.

God wants to generously bless your life in all kinds of ways. David proclaimed from his experience with God that He is the One, “who satisfies your desires with good things” (Ps 103:5). God is good and intends to be good to you.

You may struggle to believe this because you know you do not deserve such generosity. No one deserves the blessings or kindness of God. But God loves to give His children much more than they deserve (Ps 103:10). He, “gives generously to all without finding fault” (Jam 1:5). Your Dad’s blessings are not dependent on your performance. He likes to bless you even when you do not deserve it.

Your Dad in Heaven supports what you want to do more than you might imagine.

## **Decision Making**

Decision making is hard! Mistakes can be painful. This is why mysticism is attractive. It promises direct guidance from God for all of your important decisions. But we will repeat, there are no biblical promises, examples, or instructions for a miraculous approach to decision making.

In fact, mysticism often leads people into wrong and painful decisions. Expecting some “revelation” from God tempts people to ignore the careful research and reasoning often needed for a wise decision. Mysticism’s emphasis on feelings leads people to decisions based on emotion instead of reason.

Contrary to mysticism, a lack of “peace” about a decision is not some sort of direct revelation from God. It could simply be the result of not having enough good reasons for your decision, or doing something against your conscience, or even violating Scripture.

Do not be so afraid of making decisions. Christians are often overly anxious about avoiding mistakes and become paralyzed about life. But knowing that your Almighty Dad is for you and is always working to bless you, will help you feel more freedom in your decision making.

You need to rely more on your Dad’s desire and ability to bless your decisions, rather than striving so hard to make perfect decisions. Again, your Dad is willing and able to bless all sorts of options! Remember, “God is for us” (Rom 8:31). The reason that some people look for mystical signs and feelings to make the “perfect” decision is because they do not trust in God’s ability and desire to bless a variety of options they choose. Do not rely on making a “perfect” decision more than your Dad’s love for you. Instead of asking for miraculous signs or revelation from God to make decisions, it would be more biblical and helpful to ask him to bless your decisions. God’s blessing is what is most important for the success of any decisions you make.

A vital motto of the Christian life is this: “Do your best and trust God to bless the rest.” Do your best to make good and God-honoring decisions, and trust God to bless what will often be imperfect decisions.

Of course, even godly and wise Christians make mistakes in important decisions. It is a part of being human and God has not promised us the ability to make perfect decisions. But we can always act morally in all our decisions and please God. We can trust that He is in ultimate control of everything in our life, even our bad decisions. Our Dad will love us in and through whatever happens in our life.

### **The example of getting married**

We will summarize what you have learned the last several weeks with the example of a decision to get married. First, does God’s predestined will have

anything to do with this decision? In Week 44 we described things that Scripture says God decides and does for us. Getting married and finding us a spouse are not among them. However, Jesus and Paul seem to say there is a supernatural ability to remain unmarried and undistracted (1 Cor 7:2, 6-7, 36-38; Matt 19:12). If God has given a person a supernatural ability to not desire marriage, then the Bible encourages them not to (1 Cor 7:28, 32-35). But if God has not given you such a gift, then you can assume He wants you to be married.

What aspects of God's moral will are involved in the marriage decision? First, God commands that a Christian marries a Christian (1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14-18). Far too many Christians knowingly ignore this clear command and suffer the consequences. Second, God commands that a Christian marry someone of the opposite gender (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-7; 1 Cor 6:9-10). Thirdly, a previously married person must have biblical reasons for that marriage to be dissolved. The biblical teaching on this topic deserves more discussion than we can give here. Two rather clear examples would be if a spouse dies (Rom 7:2-3; 1 Cor 7:39), or a spouse is sexually unfaithful (Matt 5:32; 19:9). In such cases the other spouse is free before God to remarry.

Also, God's prayed-for will applies. We can ask God to miraculously intervene to help us be married. He probably does not need to, but we can always ask.

How do other sources of guidance help us in the decision to be married? As noted last week, a father would seem to have authority over a daughter who is financially dependent on him. Therefore, his desires should be honored in such a decision. Also, wise and careful reasoning, counsel, and advice should be pursued. This would include asking others if they think you are ready to be married. Or evaluating sufficient agreement on faith, finances, and how to raise children.

After all of these things are considered, the decision of who to marry comes down to free will and your personal desires. God wants you to marry if you want to be married. God wants you to marry who you want to marry. He wants you to love them, but He also wants you to like them.

What is not a part of the marriage decision is a secret will in which we could "miss God's best" by choosing one of two equally good candidates for marriage. Mysticism claims there is only one "perfect" person for you to be

married to, or that you need some sort of miraculous looking “sign” to feel free to marry and to choose a particular person.

In 1 Corinthians 7, the Apostle Paul was giving instruction on how to make one of the most important decisions of your life: who to marry. If God was going to promise and provide some kind of “signs” or guidance for extra-biblical decisions, this would be it. But Paul says nothing of the kind. He simply says, if a person wants to be married, and has settled the matter in their own mind, then they should get married (1 Cor 7:36-37).

Many understandably want divine guidance in such an important decision. But your Dad has already given it to you in Scripture. Marry a Christian you like, and love them. Then you will be following God’s will in getting married. The key to a happy marriage is not how perfect your spouse is, but how much you love one another.

**Practical application:** Consider an important decision you need to make in the future. Apply the principles you have learned about decision making to this decision.

In your small group meeting this week, share praises and prayer requests and then discuss these questions:

- 1) What are some Scriptures that support the use of reason for good decision making?
- 2) Why is counsel so valuable for decision making?
- 3) How can good reasoning explain a “peace” about our decisions?
- 4) What must God do for us to know He wants us to go against good reason?  
How is Gideon an example of this?
- 5) Why does God give us freedom to choose a lot of things according to our personal and unique desires?
- 6) What three things make up God’s will in your decision?
- 7) What is the most important thing for the success of your decisions? How does this make decisions easier?
- 8) How can we always please God in every decision?
- 9) What aspects of God’s moral will are involved in the marriage decision?
- 10) What was most meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?