

Learning Goals

- Know the foundational principles involved in determining God's will.
- Know the principles of guidance.
- Know the "road-signs" and what bearing they have in determining God's will.

Introduction

As Christians, we will regularly confront difficult decisions. They are difficult because their relationship to God's moral will is not obvious. Some of these decisions will have a major impact in our lives making them even more important.

E.G. -- although it is within his moral framework to marry a Christian, he doesn't specify which one.

E.G. -- he does say we must work in order to provide for our household and share in his work -- he doesn't tell us which job to take.

E.G. -- "Should I go back to school or not?" "Should I buy a new or used car?" "What kind of house should I live in -- where?" are examples where we don't find direct guidance.

Yet, does that mean that God doesn't guide us in these areas? That he has no opinion on the matter? That the decisions we make don't matter? That they can't impact our walk with him in any way?

Tonight we'll be talking about guidelines to help us make these types of difficult decisions.

Examples of different ways God led people (Gideon, the prophets, direct vision of Cornelius, Ethiopian eunuch).

Two Personal Questions:

Are you teachable/leadable? Will you follow God's will once you know it?

Do you believe that God desires to lead you? God will lead if you will follow. See John 10 and Psalm 23 and their depiction of God as a shepherd offering guidance to the sheep.

Three Foundational Considerations

1. God's personal will has 2 dimensions:

- Moral/ Sanctification (**Rom. 12:2***; 8:29; 1 Thess. 4:3)

(Rom. 12:2*) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

God's desire for each of us is our sanctification. He recognizes that each of us is unique and His plan for change will vary individually, but he clearly desires to see us progress spiritually.

(Eph. 2:10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

It's our new identity in Christ that gives us the basis for following his will.

(Rom. 8:29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;

(1 Thess. 4:3) For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

- Ministry Purpose (Col. 1:9,10; Rom. 12:2a,3-8)

(Rom. 12:2a,3-8) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is . . . (3) For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (4) For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, (5) so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (6) And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy. . . (7) if service. . . , or he who teaches. . . (8) or he who exhorts . . . , he who gives . . . , he who leads. . . , he who shows mercy. . .

God has a particular role for us to play in the body of Christ based on the way he gifts each of us. With this role comes the opportunity to exercise our gifts in meaningful and fulfilling ministry. Decision-making for the Christian must bring these factors to bear.

Illustration: Consider each of these as river banks which constrain the flow of the stream. They offer the broad structure and God provides specific guidance.

2. Spiritual maturity brings increasing knowledge of God's will

(Col. 1:9,10) For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God so they can make the right decisions as they face adversity. As Christians mature they grow in a working knowledge of God's will.

(Heb. 5:14)- But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

The author of Hebrews expected the audience to grow in their knowledge of God's word so they would be able to practically apply it to everyday situations.

(Col. 4:12) Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

This prayer recognizes a connection between maturity ("...you may stand perfect") and increasing knowledge of God's will ("...all the will of God.").

3. Sometimes God reveals his will specifically.

Acts 8:26-40 - Philip's call to "go to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." Then later to "go up and join this chariot."

Acts 10 - God reveals his will to Cornelius and Peter

Acts 16:9ff - Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia.

Qualification: This revelation is at God's discretion and not ours. Note that these individuals were aggressively serving God and the more dramatic revelation came.

"I believe God has an individual will for my life and for every life, but its realization depends on a true surrender of *my* will and *your* will to Him for the fulfillment of His plan as and where He sees best. He may, however, leave considerable freedom of choice within His moral will... (J. Oswald Sanders. *Every Life is a Plan of God*. (Discovery House Pub. Grand Rapids. 1992) p. 39.)

Those are 3 "foundational considerations" with which we must always enter into decision-making. Now we will look at Practical Guidelines for discovering God's Will. There are three sections to "practical guidelines": Principles of Guidance, "Road Signs" or Tools that sometimes apply, and Important Qualifications.

Practical Guidelines for Discovering God's Will

Principles of Guidance

a. *Scripture -- Soak your mind in it.*

- Learn what the Bible emphasizes

(Isaiah 55:8,9) "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

We need to be humbly aware that our thinking is much different than God's.

(1 Cor. 2:9-16) but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." (10) For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (11) For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the

Spirit of God. (12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, (13) which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. (14) But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (15) But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. (16) For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

God gives us the Holy Spirit so we may "have the mind of Christ." Having his mind allows to us understand and apply his word (12b-".. things freely given to us by God").

(Rom. 12:2a) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is . . .

- Memorize scripture
"The Spirit cannot recall what the mind has not installed."
(Col. 3:16)- Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
- Apply Scripture
(James 1:22) - But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.
Qualification: *God leads through Scripture. He will never lead us to go outside scripture (Jeremiah 14:14,23:32 ,23:35,36)*

b. *Willing--Be willing to do God's will before you know it.*

John 7:17*; James 1:5ff

(John 7:17*) "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself."

(James 1:5ff, 6-8) But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith without any doubting, . . (7) For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Unwillingness to do this betrays an unbelief in God's goodness for you, which must be resolved first. Many times, you must struggle before God in prayer to admit that you don't have this attitude and then adopt it.

c. *Acting - Act on God's moral will that you know.*

Mt. 13:12*; Heb. 3:7-19; Jesus in Gethsemane (" . . . not my will, but your will be done . . . ")

(Mt. 13:12*) "For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

Are you in revolt in an area already revealed? God will often withhold further guidance until you end this controversy. EXAMPLE: Fornicator wanting guidance on where to go to school.

Positive point: Are you committed to sanctification and serving God in ministry as your highest priorities? Without these priorities, you probably won't get a whole lot of guidance, because God wants to guide you primarily in these 2 paths (see above)! If you are committed to these two priorities, you can rest assured that God will guide you and not leave you in the dark.

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' ...No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened." (C.S. Lewis. *The Great Divorce*. (MacMillan Pub. Co. New York. 1946) p.72)

d. *Praying--Pray regularly for God's guidance*

"Faced with a pile of problems, we may say with our lips that only prayer can solve them, yet we talk more than pray, worry more than pray, and scheme more than pray. In sum, we put

everything before prayer; other things are placed in prominent positions while prayer is relegated to last place; it is the only thing which is not so important." --Watchman Nee
Beware of creeping autonomous DEISM (Prov 3:5,6)!

(Prov. 3:5,6) Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. 6
In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

Read Hybels, *Too Busy Not To Pray*, pp. 117-121.

Conclusion: If these "principles of guidance" are habits in your Christian life, you won't stray far. For most of us, the absence of one or more of these principles is the reason why we are experiencing confusion.

"Road Signs" - Tools that *sometimes* reveal God's will. (2nd section on Practical Guidelines)

a. *Common Sense*: The ability to consider different courses of action and the likely implications of each.

"Spiritual expedience" is applying common sense within a framework of biblical *values* and *priorities*.

"What course of action will enable me to most effectively achieve biblical values and priorities?"

"Look before you leap." Don't be a fool--leaping before you look.

(Titus 1:8)... but hospitable, loving what is good, **sensible**, just, devout, self-controlled...

This kind of common sense is a qualification for eldership (*phroneo* - sensible).

QUALIFICATION: Avoid using this to rationalize fearfulness. Do you have a category for scary/costly steps of faith? We are promised adversity in our service of Christ and therefore should expect it.

Use a "Pro's and Con's" list--BUT be sure to prioritize the "pro's" and "con's" in the light of scripture.

b. *Spiritual counsel*

Wise counsel can give you additional light on Scripture and common sense/ spiritual expedience.

"Have you considered this implication?"

Prov. 11:14; 24:6 "In the abundance of counselors is victory."

Prov. 12:15; 13:10,18 "The wise man listens to advice."

Prov. 15:22 "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed."

Prov. 19:20 "Listen to advice."

Prov. 20:5 "A plan in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding draws it out."

Prov. 20:18 "Plans are established by counsel"

Prov. 27:17 "Iron sharpens iron"

QUALIFICATION: Seek *mature* counsel (grounded in the Word and/or previous experience) from people who know you well.

- Give them *full* information--not partial.

- Seek counsel from several mature Christians.

- Avoid people who *you* know will only see it your way ("ear ticklers").

REMEMBER: The advisor is not responsible for the decision.

advisors beware: some people like others to make their decisions for them. ("What would you do?")

c. *Personal Desires*

Avoid the extremes of:

asceticism ("Whatever I want, the opposite is God's will") or

selfishness ("If I want it this badly, it must be God's will").

Which do you tend towards? Lean the other way!

EXAMPLE: Enjoying an area of *ministry* often indicates gifting or burden (E.G. "I really like working with kids.")

d. *Gifts/ ministry burdens*

As we grow in our gifting/ministry we gain clarity about God's will (e.g. type of personal ministry you should take on).

e. *Intuition*

This includes leadings, prompting, impressions spontaneously emerging in our mind, especially during prayer.

If they are from God, they will be consistent with the Word, with who you are (Hybels questions, pp. 134-137) and with an attitude of servanthood.

When they line up this way, assume they are from God and follow them. You'll often be amazed at how fruitful they are!

The more you are in the Word, understand your ministry role, and are committed to servanthood, the more this area will come into play.

ALSO: The more regularly you spend time alone with God, the more aware of these through the day you will tend to be.

f. *Inner peace*

This is a certain kind of intuition, deep seated calmness from God about a direction you've chosen to take.

When this is present it confirms and strengthens our resolve to follow God's will.

QUALIFICATIONS: We are not talking about a constantly tranquil state. Our emotional fallenness, the fact that we're in a battle, and taking scary steps of faith will produce inner turmoil sometimes.

When peace is absent, re-evaluate your decision (i.e. especially in moral areas or matters of conscience).

Also, consider: "Is this decision giving me inner peace because I am getting away from a painful situation, or [as it should be] is it giving me inner peace because God is using the decision to move me toward a great situation."

g. *Follow delegated authorities*

This includes parents, husband, state, employer, church leaders.

EXAMPLE: You are musically inclined and believe you have been led by God to be involved in that type of ministry in your home group. You ask your home group leaders if you can provide some music for the group. They think about it, and say "No, thanks."

Now you wonder what to do? Should you continue to press them because you really feel led by God? Should you rally the troops to see if there is a consensus?

NO--you should submit. You also should find an outlet for your burden and skills.

QUALIFICATIONS: We do outgrow authority or change them at times. We may have to disobey if against the written word of God (not against your feelings, or "what you believe in your heart").

Question yourself: "Why am I leaving this delegated authority?" Are you aware of any character issues that God is teaching you through this person? Have you learned the lesson? Can you cite changes in your character? If you can't specifically note the progress God has made in your life through the situation, then you're probably on the run.

Please note: there are more papers on this subject on the web and it is covered thoroughly in Servanthood class.

h. *Circumstances*

Circumstances play a relatively minor role in major complex decisions. They explain the options presently available. They play a major role in confirming after a decision is made.

Fleecing (see Gideon). Note that God had already told Gideon his will. This was for confirmation and encouragement. This is not the norm, so don't expect God to do it for you.

It is generally more helpful when negative, because it narrows the range of options.

Open or closed doors do not necessarily mean "YES" or "NO." With Paul, they were not all yes/no (2 Cor 2:12,13; 1 Cor 16:8,9).

Consider earlier teachings of this quarter on the schemes of Satan to side-track us. Be cautious in reading too much into circumstances or timing of circumstances.

i. *Results*

What *kind* of results were they? Biblical or carnal?

QUALIFICATION: Results don't in themselves confirm or deny the wisdom of the decision (pragmatics are not the only considerations).

- Biblically correct decisions may not yield immediate or external results.
- Results which followed past decisions do not guarantee the same results from similar decisions now (e.g., church growth methods).

Learn from the results! *Why* did the decision lead to good/bad results?

Results are helpful in determining gifted areas.

How often do you thank God when you get guidance (10 lepers - Lk 17)? If you don't mark God's leadership with gratitude you end up forgetting what he has done in the past and you aren't as likely to look for his leadership in the future.

[Teacher: if time, have them discuss the order of priority on the Road Signs]

Important Qualifications

- Avoid the extremes of Christian Deism vs. "super-spirituality."

Some tend toward an excessively subjective view--and unhealthy emphasis on feelings and experience. Others tend toward a view that makes virtually no room for God's personal guidance. This promotes a more impersonal and less prayerful relationship with God. Know your tendency, lean the other way, and teach others to do the same.

"There are two things to be leaned against simultaneously: the first is living as though God did not exist and as though He could not or would not lead us; the second is living as though God's leading were almost magic without any use of the mind." (Francis Schaeffer. *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer*. (Crossway Books. Westchester, IL. 1985) p. 163.)

Example of Christian Deism: Joshua 7:2-13. A negative example of super spirituality: Colossians 2:16-23.

The key is knowing how to use them (feelings, experience)--what they can and can't do for you.

- We can never be as certain about God's personal leading in our lives as we can be about scripture.

We may be mistaken about God's subjective leading, but the objective Word is essentially clear in its guidance.

Saul ignored God's law and acted anyway. 1 Sam. 13:12ff; 1 Chron. 10:14.

Read *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer*, p. 163.

Another thing to lean against is [the idea]...that we can know God's leading with the same finality that we have concerning the teaching of Scripture, for example, about the deity of Christ. When we are led, we must acknowledge that since we are both finite and sinful we can be mistaken. Thus, the Lord can lead us so clearly [in a particular moment], and yet we can never say at that moment that we personally know this to be truth on the same level as Scripture.

When the Lord led my wife and myself to begin L'Abri, the leading was so clear that not to have moved forward would have been disobedience. And yet if you had asked me at that time if I was as sure of this as I was that which Scripture taught, I could not have said yes. But as the years have passed there is no doubt that we did understand the leading of the Lord [in beginning L'Abri]. (Francis Schaeffer. *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer*. (Crossway Books. Westchester, IL. 1985) p. 163.)

- God does not lead mechanically.

Because God is personal and we are personal, he leads us personally, not mechanically.

Therefore we should avoid any such attempt to find a formula, and be open to let God lead us in the way he chooses.

Because God guided me in a certain way does not mean that he will always guide me that way, nor that he will guide other Christians in that same way.

Apply this to yourself and in working w/ others.

Read *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer*, p. 164.

Thus we face a balance--by living in a personal relationship to God, and by not living as if God were not there. But this does not mean that I must find God's leading in a mechanical and legalistic way, and perfectly in every case, or God will cast me off.

I personally could not live for twenty-four hours without looking to the leading of the Lord, and this is how I live my life, not in theory, but in practice. But I also know the freedom I have of knowing there is no mechanical formula given in the Scripture, but that it must be a day-by-day closeness to God...And I have the freedom of knowing that if I honestly miss this way somewhere, God will still deal with me gently." (Francis Schaeffer. *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer*. (Crossway Books. Westchester, IL. 1985) p. 164.)

- God's leading may **not** be obvious **before** we decide.

Many times we can perceive his guidance before the situation. At other times, we may be able to look back in retrospect and see his guidance. During those times when we must make a decision even though God's leading is not clear, we can be confident that because we have presented ourselves to him to be used as his instruments (Rom 6:13), he *is* guiding and leading our lives.

This is an important perspective to maintain, because it guards against destructive introspection and/or indecisiveness when God's guidance is not clearly perceived in advance of a decision. Since we have presented ourselves to God, and since we know that he is guiding us, we can step out in faith when the situation calls for a decision.

Joseph made many decisions without anything but moral guidance and only understood retrospectively what God intended (Gen. 39-50, especially 50:20).

Conclusion

Teach others the importance of personally discerning God's will for their lives--DON'T TEACH THEM TO FOLLOW YOU!

This principle is important to observe in our work with younger Christians if they are to become "independently dependent on the Lord." When discussing important life decisions, it is important to tell them that God can guide them if they ask for his guidance and if they have the willingness to do his will even before they know what it is. In this way, we teach them to do what they do out of conviction that it is God's will, not merely because we told them to do it.

Avoid the extremes of "paralysis by analysis" (e.g. - people making decisions about home group or ministry involvement) vs. "Husky Dog" just lunging forward without consideration. (Ps. 32:8,9 -- "I will instruct you and guide you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Do not be as the horse or the mule with no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check.")

Remember to apply God's grace.

While disregarding God's leadership may result in loss, we should never feel that our lives are destroyed. God is a God of grace, and this means that when we turn back to him, he will continue to lead us from there and to bless us and use us. (*Letters of Francis Schaeffer*, pp. 163-164).

Memory

Rom. 12:2* God's will for our life revolves around our sanctification and his role for our lives in his purpose here on earth.

Jn. 7:17* Learning God's will is predicated upon our first being willing to do his will, even before knowing what it is.

Matt. 13:12* As we are responsive to God's will in our lives, he will continue to unfold his will in the other areas. The reverse is also true.