



Debunking the Myths about Knowing God's Will

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Introduction

How to know God's will is probably one of the most-studied topics for Christians of all ages. It takes the form of the question: "How do I know God's will?" Whether we're talking about the broad scope of "God's will for my life," or the smaller scale of "God's will for me in this situation," the question is asked constantly. And, like all questions, it has innumerable wrong answers, misunderstandings, and skewed viewpoints attached to it. Therefore, we're going to look at five of the biggest and most common myths that people hold about the will of God so we can debunk them and replace them with the truth.

Before you turn the page, take a moment to ask yourself: What do I believe about the will of God? What do I think about the possibility of knowing that will? What do I believe about God in relation to this question?

Myth #1: The Will of God is a Roadmap

First, let's take this common image for the will of God: the will of God is a roadmap. Here's how this looks in someone's thoughts: "In this situation, God's will is either A or B. If his will is A, and I choose A, then everything is fine. If I choose B, then I'm outside of his will."

Most misconceptions have a kernel of truth in them. What is the truth in the above perception of God's will? Consider James 4:17 before you answer.

We run into problems with this point of view, not on the little scale, but on the big scale.

For example, let's say someone holds this point of view. The logical argument looks like this:

- God's will is a roadmap.
- Since God's will is a roadmap, I am supposed to get from point A to point B. The destination is the most important point.
- At every decision point in life, I have to make the right choice in order to stay on the road.
- If I make a mistake, I get off the road.

Let's look more closely at that last point: "If I make a mistake, I get off the road." Some mistakes are correctable, or reversible, and some aren't.

What are some examples of correctable, or reversible mistakes?

What are some examples of uncorrectable, or irreversible mistakes?

The first problem with this myth is found right here: if some mistakes are uncorrectable and irreversible (i.e., they leave lasting consequences and permanently alter the choices you will have in the future), then you could make a mistake that could cause you to miss out on ever arriving at “point B” on God’s roadmap for your life. Therefore, if you assume that God’s will is a roadmap, you’d better make sure you never make a mistake.

What’s the problem with this? Read I John 1:8-10.

God knows that – whether through outright disobedience or honest ignorance – we are going to blow it. We will make mistakes, we will sin, and we will royally screw things up. Therefore, we can make a deduction: *since God knows we will blow it, yet he does call us to know and do his will, his will has to be big enough and full of enough grace to cope with the fact that we are going to make some whopping sins and mistakes.*

Where can we go with this? We see that the roadmap point of view is insufficient. If it were true, we could never hope to “do God’s will.” We’d step out of line, not once, but many times, and lose the possibility forever.

But we know that we can do God’s will. We can live in his will:

- Ephesians 5:17 says, “So then, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”
- Romans 12:2 reminds us to “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.”
- Jesus himself summed it up when he said in Matthew 5:48, “You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

These verses give us a hint as to what God’s will is really about – how we can transform the roadmap myth into something true and right and good.

If we paraphrase the above verses, they would say, “To know and do God’s will be wise ... sanctify your mind ... seek good, acceptable, and perfect things ... be yourself sanctified and holy ... live your life in imitation of Christ.”

Do you notice a word that's missing? The word "choice." It's not there. Instead, all the words are about who we are inside. And that tells us something very key: *God's will is not so much about choice as it is about character.* What God wants most is not that you "arrive" at point B (whether that is a certain career, accomplishment, destination, etc.), but that you *become* who he has called you to *be*.

So let's destroy the myth that God's will is a roadmap. God's will is not primarily about getting us from point A to point B. It's about becoming Christ-like. And that, at its core, is a process. It's daily life – step by step, and day by day. We can therefore transform the myth into the truth: *the will of God is a journey.*

As a journey, the will of God can cope with all the twists and turns of life – good and bad, holy and sinful, wise and foolish. Why? Because God has promised that he can use everything in our lives for our good (Romans 8:28). *Everything* – nothing is excluded. The person who loves God can be assured that he can know and live God's will – no matter what his past is, no matter what sins he has to overcome, no matter how long the process takes – because the will of God at its most basic level is about becoming more like Christ every day.

Have you typically thought of God's will as a matter of choice, or as a matter of character? Why?

Think about some mistakes you've made, and sins you've committed. How does it make you feel to realize that these mistakes and sins cannot keep you from fulfilling the will of God?

How does it make you feel to realize that, according to Romans 8:28, God can actually redeem these mistakes and sins in order to accomplish his purpose in your life – a purpose that is for your good?

Myth #2: The Will of God is Distasteful

One myth down, four to go. Next up, the frequently held notion that the will of God is distasteful. It is most characteristically phrased this way, "I don't want to go to Africa to be a missionary, so that must be where God wants me to go."

Somewhere along the way, we got the twisted notion that God wants us to do things that we don't want to do. People often think of God as a killjoy. No fun. No laughter. No merriment. Those things have no place in God – God is somber, solemn, and serious, and we should be, too.

What insight do the following verses give us on this point? Psalm 100:1-2, Zephaniah 3:17, Galatians 5:22-23

So what was the origin of this myth? Like the first one, it has a badly twisted kernel of truth. That truth is that the will of God often includes difficulties, trials, and even persecution. The will of God is not all cotton candy and roses, and we are foolish to think so. All we need do is look at the garden of Gethsemane and the cross on Calvary to know that the will of God may call us to the hardest things we could ever dream of.

But that is not the same as saying that the will of God is distasteful. Hebrews 12:2 reminds us to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." And Jesus himself said in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work."

Was Calvary agony? Yes. But was it also, in a fashion deeper than the agony, a joy? Yes. Jesus delighted to do the will of God, even though it cost him death on the cross.

So what is basically wrong with the notion that the will of God is distasteful? It assumes that God wants us to be miserable. And that assumes that God is cruel.

That is a lie. John 10:10 states that Jesus came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. The fruits of the Spirit include love, joy, and peace. Heaven is described as a place of unending joy and worship.

Let's destroy this myth entirely. God wants us to have love, joy, and peace. A full, rich, and abundant life. Does that sound distasteful? No – just the opposite. In fact, the truth is, *the will of God is fulfillment.*

Have you ever believed the lie that God was a divine killjoy? If you did, why did you believe that? And what effect has it had on your life?

How would it change your life if you truly believed that God's will meant fulfillment, completion, and wholeness for your entire person?

How would it change your attitude if you truly believed that trials and hard times were bringing about positive change and the accomplishment of the will of God in your life? Consider James 1:2-4, II Corinthians 4:7-18.

Myth #3: The Will of God is Concealed

Third, let's look at the myth that the will of God is concealed. This one is the attitude that God's will is hard to find. You can search for it, but you're really lucky or really holy if you find it.

The problem with this myth is that it makes a few very un-biblical assumptions. First, it assumes that God commands us to do his will, but then hides the specifics from us. So we can't possibly do what he wants. That sounds pretty nasty to me.

Second, it assumes that only very holy people ("holy" here being mis-defined as "someone much better than me") can find God's will. So 90% of us are left out in the rain. Too bad.

Third, it assumes that God is detached and distant from us. After all, if God was near and personal, why would he hide things from us? If he hides them, he must not really care, or really be close by. He's "out there" ... somewhere.

The Bible is chock-full of counter-punches to this particular myth. Consider the following:

- Proverbs 3:6 states, "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."
- James 1:5 encourages us that, "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."
- Isaiah 30:21 comforts us that, "Your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left."

Put simply, God isn't in the business of concealing his will. The truth is that *the will of God is revealed*. Through the Bible, God has shown us that he is in the business of revealing himself to us. The ultimate revelation of himself was in Jesus Christ, his Son. Surely it stands to reason that the God who wants to know us intimately, and who wants us to know him intimately, will not conceal his will from us. He will reveal himself and his will to all who earnestly seek him.

Have you ever felt that God was hiding his will from you? When? Why did you feel that way?

How does it change your perspective to realize that God has promised to guide us in his will?

Myth #4: The Will of God is Abdicating Responsibility

Next, there is the myth that the will of God is abdicating responsibility. Here are some of the ways it appears in people's thoughts and attitudes:

- I shouldn't make choices "on my own."
- Everything I do, say, and think must be specifically directed from God.

This myth makes us puppets pulled by strings. We dance to the tune played by a divine Piper. When God says to jump, we say "How high?"

The misunderstanding here is that *submission to the will of God does not mean abdicating my personal responsibility*. Does the Bible teach that we should submit to the will of God? Of course, and no more clearly than in James 4:7, "Submit therefore to God." But we also have personal responsibility. It is our responsibility to use what God has given us – and that includes using our minds to think, judge, and discern. As Romans 12:2 says, we are to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." And Hebrews 5:14 affirms that "solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Should our minds be submitted to Christ? Yes – submitted so that we use our minds to actively make wise, godly decisions.

It is a very subtle lure of Satan to give up our responsibility. "I shouldn't choose anything. I shouldn't make a judgment on anything. I shouldn't even want anything." We don't want to take responsibility, because it means accepting the consequences of our actions. We don't want to take responsibility, because it requires us to think carefully, weigh pros and cons, and take action. We don't want to take responsibility because it is so much easier and simpler to have someone tell us what to do. But the last I knew, the person who was always told what to do was called a slave.

Jesus rebukes this myth when he said in John 15:15, "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." Therefore, since we are friends of God himself, we must shoulder our responsibilities.

Someone has said that if your child grew up and at twenty still asked you what he should wear and what he should eat and whether he should go out with this friend or the other one, you would have a completely immature and dysfunctional person on your hands. Instead, maturing involves taking increasing responsibility for yourself – and God's will is that we grow and become mature in him (Eph. 4:13). Submit, therefore to God: by taking responsibility to live a holy life in him.

Are there any situations in which you have wanted to abdicate your responsibility, and not wanted to make a decision? What were the circumstances? Why did you not want to make a decision?

How does it make you feel to realize that God wants you to take responsibility in your life for making good and wise decisions? (Remember James 1:5!)

Myth #5: The Will of God is Answers

Finally, let's address the myth that the will of God is answers. I call this the stone tablet in the mail theory. If I want to know the will of God, I ask him to send me a stone tablet in the mail with all the details spelled out.

The problem here is that we have confused answers with wisdom. The will of God is not about answers. The truth is that *the will of God is about wisdom*.

Think of it this way: you have a teenager. She asks you whether she should go to a certain party. You can say, "Yes" or "No." That's an answer. Instead, you ask her what she thinks about it. She's not sure. You begin questioning her about who will be there and what will be done. She mentions that several people will be attending who are pressuring her to smoke. And that the parents will not be in the house. And that several others are heavy drinkers. She weighs these things against having a good time with the few people there she really likes and who don't drink or smoke, but decides that it is not a good idea to go because of the peer pressure that will be there, and very possibly the danger caused by excessive drinking. That's wisdom.

This myth is another form of abdicating responsibility. We don't want to think things through. We want someone to tell us what to do. But God isn't about that. He doesn't say in James 1:5, "If any of you needs an *answer*, let him ask God." He says, "If any of you lacks *wisdom*, let him ask of God." In Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman crying in the streets, begging people to listen to her and learn wisdom and godliness – for wisdom and godliness are inextricably intertwined.

It's hard to give up praying for answers, yet, in most cases I think it is very important to do so. Don't pray, "Should I buy this house?" But turn it into, "Help me to make a wise decision about this house." Don't pray, "Should I take this job?" But pray, "Would this job be pleasing to you? Would I be able to minister in this job? Help me to understand these things in order to make a wise decision."

The break is hard; no question. We want answers handed to us on a silver platter. But, ultimately, praying for wisdom is (forgive me!) wiser. We learn to think. We make sound judgments. We become skilled at discerning between good and evil. We take responsibility. We live up to our full potential. We mature. We grow in Christ. We seek after God. God's will is not about answers. Answers don't involve character. God's will is about wisdom. It's about becoming like him, the One who is Eternal Wisdom.

Have you ever been frustrated because you were praying for an answer and God seemed silent? What were the circumstances? What happened? How could you have prayed differently?

How might it change your perspective, prayers, and actions if you really believed that God would give you the wisdom to make good decisions?

Conclusion

So we have taken a brief look at what God's will isn't, and what it is.

- God's will is not a roadmap – it's a journey
- God's will is not distasteful – it's fulfilling
- God's will is not concealed – it's revealed
- God's will is not abdicating responsibility – it's taking responsibility
- God's will is not about answers – it's about wisdom

Think about your life, your character, and your current circumstances. How will these truths change the way you believe, think, pray, and act?

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De-Bunking the Myths about Knowing God's Will

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Truth: The Will of God is _____

Myth #2: The Will of God is _____

Truth: The Will of God is _____

Myth #3: The Will of God is _____

Truth: The Will of God is _____

Myth #4: The Will of God is _____

Truth: The Will of God is _____

Myth #5: The Will of God is _____

Truth: The Will of God is _____