

Decision Making and the Will of God¹

by

G. Harry Leafe, Th.M., D.Min.

God's Will is an important subject, to be sure, because as believers we desperately want to have reasonable assurance that the decisions we are making are properly related to it. But for most Christians the matter of God's Will has been understood in a somewhat mystical way. Some, misunderstanding the use of a fleece by Gideon in Judges, Chapter Six, have sought to find direction in life – and therefore discover God's will – by asking God for some sign – *putting out a fleece*. The problem is that Gideon's use of a fleece was not to determine what God wanted him to do; rather, it was a sign of his unbelief – to get God to *prove* that He was really going to do what He had said He would do!

Another common approach is the open or closed-door method. In this approach one would look for some indicator within the circumstances of their life that to them would indicate a particular direction that they should go or some decision they should make.

The basic problem with this approach is that we don't see any examples of it in the Scriptures. For believers, doors are used in the Bible in one of three ways: to indicate a literal door (see John 20:26); to indicate the place of entrance into the Kingdom of God (see Matt. 25:10; Luke 13:24, 25); or as an opportunity for the ministry of the Word (see 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:8). Not once is a door ever used to indicate the direction a person should take in decision making!

Every Christian has a system or process that he or she uses in making decisions. Most cannot explain their system, but they have one. But whatever process or system that someone may use, it must first answer the kind of questions that follow:

- Does God have a specific plan for my life? Most would agree that this is true.
- How much of my life is included in God's plan? Are the small details included, or just the major ones?
- Is there anywhere in the Bible where I told what the details of this plan are? The answer is, no.
- Is there anyplace in the Bible where I am told to try to find out what the details of this plan are? The answer again is, no.
- If I make a choice that does not conform to a detail of the plan, am I "out of the will of God?" Many think so.

¹ Adapted from *Decision Making and the Will of God*, Garry Friesen, Multnomah Press, 1978.

- Is being “out of the will of God” sin? This would certainly follow if we agree with the answer above.
- Is there a way to know for sure what the details of God’s plan for my life are *before* I make a decision? Yes and no. We will discover the answer in this seminar.
- On a practical, day-to-day basis, how often, when making decisions, do I ask myself this question: “*Is this God's will for me?*” For example: Should I have toast with my eggs for breakfast? Should I wear this dress or suite today? Should I send this letter first or third class?

These question – and this is certainly not an exhaustive list – are intended to cause us to think through more carefully what we actually believe about decision making and the will of God. But now, we need to get on to what the Bible actually says about this important subject!

I. THE WILL OF GOD -- TWO ASPECTS.

A. Sovereign.

1. It is certain (it cannot be “missed”).
2. It is secret (it cannot be learned in advance).
Two exceptions: 1. Prophecy; 2. Eternal destiny of the saved and lost.
3. It is exhaustive (it includes everything that shall ever come to pass).
4. It is perfect (our perfect God is the originator).

B. Moral.

1. It is the expression of God's character (in behavioral terms).
2. It touches every aspect of life: motives (attitudes), thinking, emotions, and actions.
3. It is fully revealed in the Bible.
4. It is able to equip believers for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:2-4).

II. NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF DECISION MAKING.

A. The Thessalonian concern.

The church was founded in Acts 17:1-8. Persecution of Paul followed and he left (Berea, Athens). Paul knew the believers in Thessalonica would be persecuted (1 Thess. 3:4), and they had no experienced leadership to guide them (1 Thess. 3:5). Paul, Silas and Timothy agreed on a plan whereby the church could be encouraged and strengthened (1 Thess. 3:1

2). Their determination is expressed in the words, *"We thought it good"* (1 Thess. 3:1). As far as they could tell, sending Timothy was the best means to accomplish their spiritual goals.

B. Paul going with the offering to Jerusalem.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that a group of men would be coming to Corinth to pick up their gift for the saints at Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4). Paul's decision as to whether or not he himself would make the trip would be made on the basis of *"if it is fitting"* (1 Cor. 16:4).

C. Care for widows.

A major disruption occurred in the church at Jerusalem over the care of widows. The non-Hebrew speaking Jews (Hellenists) complained that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food (the Hebrew speaking widows were being shown preference). The Apostles met to resolve the issue, and their decision is expressed in the words, *"It is not desirable..."* (Acts 6:1-6).

D. The Jerusalem Council.

As gentiles began to trust in Christ as their savior, a major question arose among the Jews: Must the gentiles become Jews and be made to keep the Law, etc.? The decision of the church at Jerusalem was one of the most important decisions that have ever been made by the Church. The meeting is recorded in Acts 15:1-29. After much discussion and debate by the apostles, elders and others, their decision was reached on the basis of *"it pleased..."* (15:22). Note also the statement of James in verse 19: *"Therefore I judge...."*

III. WISDOM AS A DESIRED QUALITY. A. 1 Cor. 6:1-6 (v.5).

B. Eph. 5:15-16.

C. Col. 4:5.

D. Proverbs 8.

IV. WISDOM COMES FROM GOD.

A. He grants wisdom to those who manifest certain spiritual characteristics: 1.

Reverence (Prov. 9:10).

2. Humility (Prov. 11:2).

3. Teachableness (Prov. 9:9; 15:31; 19:20).

4. Diligence (Prov. 8:17).

5. Uprightness (Prov. 2:7).

6. Faith (James 1:5-8).

B. How we get wisdom.

1. Ask God for it. (James 1:5-6).

It does not come from putting out a fleece, an injection of some sort, open or closed doors, or some mystical experience or feeling.

2. God gives it (and we must seek it) through four (4) basic channels:

a. Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16).

But remember that even though "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable,*" not all Scripture is written to me directly -- neither does it address every non-moral issue that we will face (e.g., should I wear tie A or B?).

b. Wise counselors (Prov. 11:14).

Ask questions:

1). To those with spiritual insight: "Are you aware of any biblical principle(s) that applies to the area of my decision?"

2). To those who have gone through relevant experiences: "When you went through a similar experience, did you gain any insights that would be of value to me?"

c. Personal research (Lk. 14:25-33).

d. Life experiences (Prov. 24:30-34).

Obviously, obtaining (growing in) wisdom is progressive -- as is all growth. Remember, too, that possessing wisdom does not guarantee that one will always make wise choices (Solomon is the prime example).

V. PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING WISE DECISIONS (THE WAY OF WISDOM).

A. In those areas specifically addressed by the Bible, the revealed commands and principles of God are to be obeyed (His *moral* will).

B. In those areas where the Bible gives no command or principle (non-moral decisions), the believer is free and responsible to choose his own course of action. Any decision made within the moral will of God is acceptable to God (e.g., clothes, auto, job, where to live, etc.). He will work through our decisions to accomplish His purposes in our lives (cf. Prov. 16:9; Acts 2:22-24; 4:27-28).

Try not to see your decisions as being either right or wrong. Unless you are dealing with moral issues, the question is not right or wrong, but wise or unwise -- or, more or less wise.

- C. In non-moral decisions, the objective of the believer is to make wise decisions on the basis of spiritual expediency.
1. *Spiritual* means the ends in view as well as the means to those ends are governed by the moral will of God. (Non-moral decisions made to please Him).
 2. *Expediency* refers to the quality of being suitable or advantageous to the end in view. It means: what works best to get the job done!