

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PATTERN OF GOD'S WILL

OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this chapter you will be able to:

- Write the Key Verses from memory.
- List basic facts concerning the will of God.
- Identify two major divisions of God's will.
- Use God's written Word to make decisions in life situations.
- Explain the pattern of God's will.
- Identify an illustration of the believer's developing conformity to God's will.
- Do further study of the revealed will of God in the written Word.

KEY VERSES:

Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to the good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself;

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him;

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. (Ephesians 1:9-11)

INTRODUCTION

Before you examine the methods God uses to speak to man to reveal His will, you must have some basic knowledge about the will of God. Previous chapters defined what is meant by "the will of God" and identified ways of seeking guidance which are wrong.

This chapter presents basic facts about the will of God, explains two major divisions of that will, examines the pattern of God's will, and discusses the believer's development in knowing the voice of God.

FACTS ABOUT GOD'S WILL

Here are some basic facts about God's will:

GOD WANTS YOU TO KNOW HIS WILL:

Faith that it is possible to know God's voice rests on two foundational facts:

- First: The belief that God has a plan for you.
- Second: The ability of God to communicate to you.

The following two chapters explain methods by which God communicates with man. As we mentioned in a previous lesson, God wants to communicate to man so much that He actually used a donkey to speak to a prophet on one occasion (Numbers 22).

The Bible commands:

**Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.
(Ephesians 5:17)**

Paul wrote the Colossians:

**For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you,
and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all
wisdom and spiritual understanding. (Colossians 1:9)**

In Acts Paul spoke to one man and said:

**. . . The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His
will, and see that Just one, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth.
(Acts 22:14)**

In addition to these verses, God has given many promises of guidance in His written Word. (You will study some of these later). On the basis of these Scriptures it can be concluded that God wants you to know His will.

GOD'S WILL IS PLANNED:

God is working in this world to bring to pass all things on the basis of His plan:

**In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated
according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of
His own will. (Ephesians 1:11)**

God has an overall plan for the universe which He is working out. We call this His master plan. He also has an individual plan for each person. Those plans fall within this sovereign plan and His moral will.

GOD'S PLAN IS INDIVIDUAL AND PERSONAL:

God's will for each individual includes His sovereign plan of redemption:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)

But God's plan goes beyond the revelation of His sovereign and moral wills. God has an individual plan for each person which He seeks to communicate. The Bible confirms this by many stories of God at work in the lives of individuals. He placed men in specific situations at exact times for special purposes. Each of the life stories recorded in the Bible is unique.

God told the Prophet Jeremiah:

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest out of the womb, I sanctified thee and ordained thee. (Jeremiah 1:5)

What greater witness is there to the personal plan of God for an individual?

When the Apostle Peter was overly concerned about what ministry John was to have, Jesus said to him. . .

. . . If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. (John 21:22)

Jesus had different plans for the lives of Peter and John.

Everywhere we look in the universe intelligent planning is apparent. The arrangement of planets, the stars, and the individual designs of each snowflake and flower reflect this planning. Given this evidence, we must conclude that the divine Creator also has an individual plan for man, the highest of His created beings.

God promised:

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. (Psalms 32:8)

An individual pathway is indicated in this verse.

Psalms 37 states that every step of a righteous man is ordered by the Lord:

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. (Psalms 37:23)

The same word used here for "ordered" is used in Psalms 8:3 in relation to the moon and stars which God created. The science of astronomy has recorded the amazing precision of the movement of heavenly bodies.

The same precision that has scheduled the movement of the planets orders the steps of believers. He promised:

Thine ear shall hear a word behind thee, saying This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:21)

God orders not just the big events of life, but each step.

GOD'S WILL IS NOT MAN'S WAY:

God's will is often contrary to the ways of man:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

God's will is not always the path you would naturally select. This is why it is important to recognize the voice of God. But this does not mean the will of God is something which will bring unhappiness, as the next point reveals.

GOD'S WILL IS GOOD:

The Bible teaches that God's will is always good. Although His way may not be the one you would select, God knows what is best. Psalms 37:23 states you will delight in the way ordered by the Lord.

Paul confirms God's will is good:

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

GOD'S PLAN IS PROGRESSIVE:

Ephesians 2:10 states "we are His workmanship." The word "are" is the present tense. God is constantly working in your life. It is a continuing, progressive process of revealing His will.

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

Paul wrote to the Hebrew believers that it was God's desire to. . .

Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory for ever and ever. (Hebrews 13:21)

"Working" is in the present tense. God is continually guiding, developing, and speaking to you regarding His plan. You are promised continual guidance:

The Lord shall guide thee continually. (Isaiah 58:11)

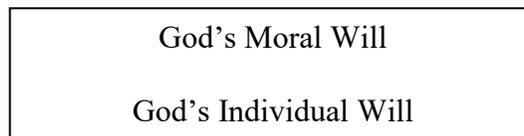
TWO DIVISIONS OF GOD'S WILL

When we speak of knowing God's voice, we must understand there are two basic divisions of the will of God. Each division is in harmony with the other:

FIRST: THAT REVEALED IN HIS WRITTEN WORD:

The first division of the will of God is that which is specifically revealed in the Bible. In a previous chapter we discussed the three meanings of "the will of God." We learned there is a sovereign, individual, and moral will of God. These are shown on the following diagram.

God's Sovereign Will



As the diagram shows, the will of God for each individual always falls within His sovereign and moral will as revealed in His written Word. The written Word of God includes the complete revelation of God's moral will. This includes all the commandments as to how you should live. As you can see on the diagram, God's sovereign will includes His moral will. It is His sovereign will that each man and woman live within the moral standards of His written Word. The written

Word of God includes portions of His sovereign will which He has chosen to reveal to us and includes the general outline of His master plan for the world and man in general.

The best summary of this plan is the Key Verses for this chapter:

Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to the good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself;

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him;

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. (Ephesians 1:9-11)

In the "For Further Study" section of this chapter we have listed specific references which are examples of God's will as revealed in His written Word.

SECOND: THAT NOT REVEALED IN HIS WORD:

The second division of God's will is that which is not revealed in His Word. This includes the individual life plan for each believer. God's Word does not reveal your specific life ministry or occupation, what church you are to attend, who you are to marry, where you are to live, etc. Yet each of these decisions are important. It is for decisions like these that you must seek God's will and be able to hear His voice when He speaks to you.

THE TWO COMPARED:

When desiring to know God's will in regards to a certain life situation, first study the Scriptures to see if specific guidance is given in the written Word of God. There is no need to "seek God's will" or ask for confirmation of His will when He has already spoken in His written Word. Examine the Scriptures carefully for specific guidance already given. Accept the written Word as God's voice speaking to you. If you refuse the guidance God has given in His written Word, you open yourself up to deception.

In many situations the Bible provides general principles--which when understood and applied--will lead to a decision consistent with God's will. These principles apply to a variety of specific situations. For example, Paul warns:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

And what concord hath Christ with Belial (Satan)? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? (II Corinthians 6:14-15)

Here the Bible gives a general principle that believers and unbelievers should not be yoked together. This principle can be applied to many life situations: Being married to an unbeliever, going into business partnership with an unbeliever, making unbelievers your closest friends, etc.

Search the Scriptures for biographical examples which apply to your situation. Study the lives of Biblical characters to see what decisions they made in similar situations and if such decisions were in harmony with the will of God.

In matters where guidance is not given in the written Word of God, the Lord has other methods by which He speaks to man. We will examine these in the following two chapters. But remember: Guidance for individual life situations always will agree with the written Word of God. God's voice leads within the limits of the written Word. The following chart summarizes the two divisions of God's will just discussed:

TWO DIVISIONS OF GOD'S WILL	
That Revealed (Written Word)	That Not Revealed
Moral and sovereign will revealed in His written Word.	The individual life plan for each believer.
Includes His general will for all mankind and His master plan for the world.	Includes specific decisions such as life work, ministry, residence, education, marriage, and guidance in other specific situations.
Includes specific commandments and promises to govern living.	
Includes general principles upon which specific decisions can be based.	Some individual decisions can be made upon the basis of general principles, examples, and specific commands revealed in God's Word.

THE PATTERN OF GOD'S WILL

The first chapter of this course focused on Romans 12:1-2:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

We asked the question, "What is meant by the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God?" We will now deal with that question, and in doing so discover the pattern of God's will.

THE PERFECT WILL OF GOD:

The perfect will of God is accomplished when a believer is in harmony with the moral, sovereign, and individual wills of God for his life.

The believer has accepted the sovereign plan of God for his salvation through the new birth experience. He is in harmony with the moral commandments of God's written Word. He also has determined God's specific guidance for his individual life plan.

THE GOOD WILL OF GOD:

In the good will of God, the believer is not in the perfect plan for his life but he is within God's sovereign will and moral will. He is not disobedient to God's revealed will, and he is still seeking to find that perfect individual plan of God for His life.

THE ACCEPTABLE WILL OF GOD:

This believer is missing the perfect will of God for his life but is still in an acceptable area. He is living in the permissive will of God. He may not even be concerned about God's perfect will for His life. God is permitting him to live in this area, although it is not God's perfect will for him.

OUTSIDE THE WILL OF GOD:

The believer in this realm is in direct disobedience to God's revealed will.

AN EXAMPLE FROM SCRIPTURE

The story of Balaam in Numbers chapter 22 illustrates these realms of God's will. Read the story before you continue with this lesson. Some men from Moab asked a prophet of God named

Balaam to go with them and prophesy against God's people, Israel. God spoke to Balaam and told him not to go:

And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed. (Numbers 22:12)

It was the perfect will of God for Balaam NOT to go with the men of Moab. But Balaam disobeyed God's voice and went with the men. When he did, he was functioning in disobedience outside the revealed will of God.

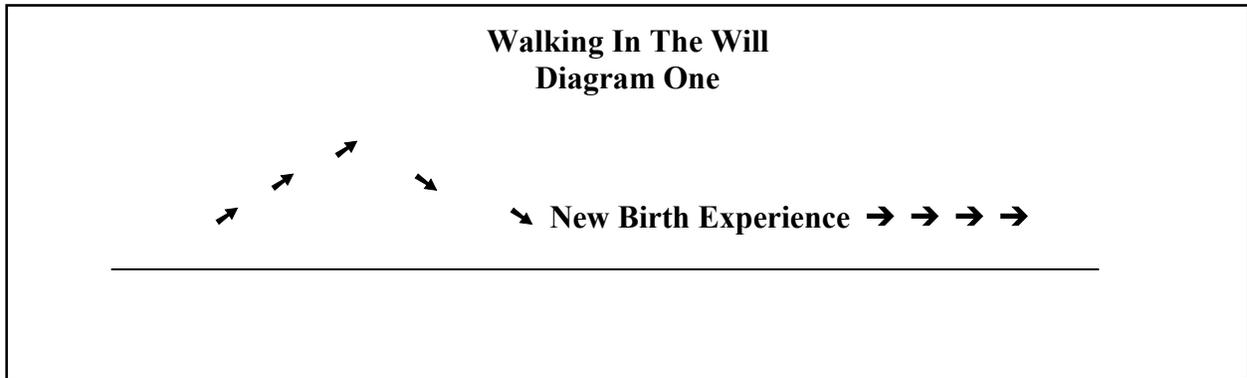
God desired so much for Balaam to know His will that He used a donkey to speak to him and convict him of his sin. After this God permitted Balaam to continue on with the men of Moab with orders that he was to bless rather than curse the Israelites. Balaam was now functioning in the permissive will of God.

The journey resulted in a series of trying encounters with a man named Balak. These could have been avoided if Balaam had obeyed the voice of God and never gone in the first place.

Now compare this story to the diagram of the "Pattern Of God's Will." The perfect will of God was that Balaam not go with the men of Moab. Balaam disobeyed and moved outside of the will of God. He was not in the good will of God where the believer is missing the perfect will but seeking it. He was in complete disobedience to the voice of God. The acceptable or permissive will of God permitted Balaam to continue on the journey even though it was not God's perfect will for him.

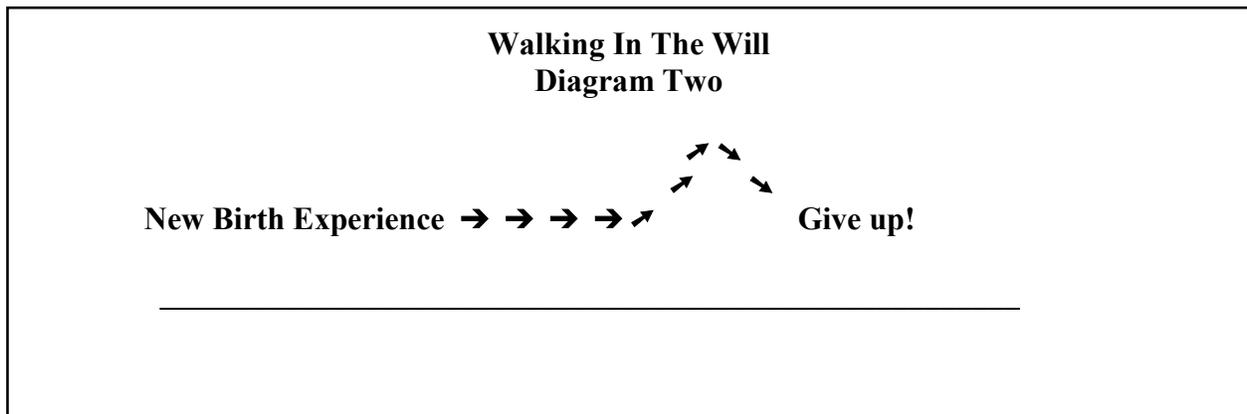
WALKING IN THE WILL

Following the born-again experience and motivated by love for God, the goal of the believer is to walk in harmony with the will of God. Often, the pattern of the believer's conformity to God's will is thought of in terms of the following diagram:



God's will is represented in this diagram by a straight unbroken line (_____).
The walk of man in relation to that will is represented by arrows.

Before the born-again experience man walks in His own way which is exactly opposite of the will of God. After the new birth experience, a believer often anticipates walking in complete harmony with God's will. Since he is a new creature in Christ, he expects to be able to conform exactly to God's will. But in the reality of daily life, his pattern of conformity looks more like this:



Instead of exact conformity to God's will, the believer has an "up and down" experience. Sometimes he hears God's voice and does His will. Other times he does not. He becomes greatly discouraged when he makes mistakes and misses God's will. Some even give up in their quest to hear God's voice.

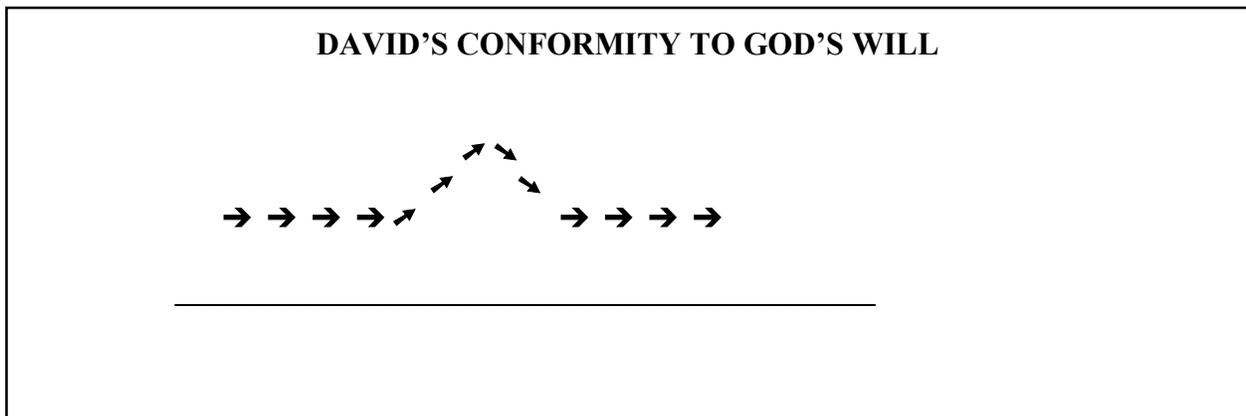
But look at this diagram again. We missed something important! While it is true that sometimes the believer misses God's will, note that the overall direction of the dotted line representing his life walk is upward. Although he may fall short of the will of God at times, the overall pattern is one of progress.

The dotted line shows how he strays from the will of God, realizes it, learns from the experience, and comes back into conformity to God's plan. Through failure as well as success, the believer is learning to hear God's voice. Through both positive and negative experiences he is continuing his growth in understanding the principles of a God-directed life.

When the will of God is perceived in this manner, it becomes a liberating relationship with Him in which you are privileged to live. The will of God ceases to become just restrictions or commandments. It becomes a challenge of learning to align your life with His plan.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

Consider the example of King David. During his early life a diagram of his conformity to the will of God might have looked something like this:



When David first became king, he walked in conformity to the will of God. God even called David a man after His own heart. But then David sinned with another man's wife who gave birth to an illegitimate child. This was in direct disobedience to God's written Word. David came before the Lord in repentance, was forgiven, and came back in line with God's will.

As we examine the ways God speaks to men in the next two chapters keep Diagram Two in mind. It is the overall pattern of your conformity to God's will that is important.

Through every experience of learning to know God's voice, both positive and negative, you can continue to advance in your ability to discern God's perfect will. Continue to strive for conformity despite occasional failures. Don't ever give up!

SELF-TEST

1. Write the Key Verses from memory.

2. Complete the following sentence by filling in the missing words in the blanks provided:

The two divisions of God's will discussed in this chapter were that which is revealed in

_____ and that which is not revealed in _____.

3. Give a Biblical principle that would apply to the following life situation:

"I am engaged to an unsaved man. He is kind, courteous, and has high moral standards. Although I am a believer and he is not, he said it would be all right for me to attend church after we are married and that he might even go with me. I am praying for God's will to be done in regards to our proposed marriage."

The Biblical principle that applies is. . .

4. List six facts about God's will which were discussed in this chapter:

5. Is this statement true or false: If God has revealed His will regarding a certain matter in His Word you should still seek Him for confirmation. The statement is _____.
6. Which of the following diagrams is the more realistic in showing the believer's actual conformity to the will of God:

Diagram A



Diagram B



7. What are the four areas presented as the pattern of God's will in this chapter?

(Answers to tests are provided at the conclusion of the final chapter in this manual.)

FOR FURTHER STUDY

There are general principles and examples in God's written Word through which He communicates His will to man. There are also specific instructions in God's written Word which reveal His will in many matters. These include all the promises and commandments of the Bible. In some verses, God is so specific He actually states "This is my will for you. . ." These references are listed for you to study. You can add to this list from your own study of God's Word.

What are some of the things God has revealed as His will for you? Study the following references:

HIS PLAN FOR YOU:

And this is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:40)

And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. (John 6:39)

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. (John 6:37)

Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father. (Galatians 1:4)

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. . .

Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself:

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him;

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. (Ephesians 1, 5, 9-11)

Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. (James 1:18)

HIS WILL FOR YOUR LOVED ONES:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)

HIS WILL CONCERNING YOUR SANCTIFICATION:

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication. (I Thessalonians 4:3)

HIS WILL REGARDING PRAYER AND THANKSGIVING:

Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. (I Thessalonians 5:17-18)

And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

HIS WILL REGARDING YOUR LIFESTYLE:

For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. (I Peter 2:15)

HIS WILL FOR YOU REGARDING THE HOLY SPIRIT:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit: and they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18)

HIS WILL REGARDING YOUR CHRISTIAN WITNESS:

And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men. (Mark 1:17)

But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)