

“Divine Guidance and Principles for Understanding The Will of God”

By

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Text: Romans 12:1-3

- 1 *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.*
- 2 *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.*

Introduction:

In order to understand the will of God the mind which has been programmed by human view-point must be renovated.

The process of renovating the mind is dealt with in a number of key passages in the Bible. Let's look at a few of them.

I. IF WE ARE TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD, WE MUST UNDERSTAND OUR LIMITATIONS:

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." (Romans 1:3)

"For I say"

Paul indicates that he has something to say on this manner.

"through the grace given unto me" Paul understands that his position and ministry is a direct result of God's grace and he wants others to understand that. It is only when we become properly oriented to grace that we are able to function effectively for our Lord.

"to every man that is among you," Paul's message is to every Christian
"panti" = every one...

"not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think;

There is a play on words here in the Greek text. It says,

..not to be thinking more highly of oneself. beyond that which one ought necessarily to be thinking...

This is a reference to being 'Grace Oriented' That is, understanding that who you are, what you are, and what you have is because of the grace of God. You will note that he said, *"...beyond that which one ought necessarily to be thinking...."* It is necessary for us to recognize self-worth and have self-esteem, but worth and esteem because of the grace of God.

We are to recognize the value of our gifts, but not with pride as to it being an achievement on our own.

"but" (alla) - Strongest conjunction on contrast in the Greek BUT...

"to think" (pronein) = to make it a matter of purpose to think with...

the use on the infinitive here denotes a matter of purpose - we are to purpose to think with

"soberly" (sohphronein) a sound mind...

Paul indicates conceit is a form of insanity - a mind that is not sound

"according" – THIS NOT IN THE ORIGINAL TEXT

"to the measure" NO DEFINITE ARTICLE IN THE GREEK = to (the) measure

The absence of the article emphasizes the quality or degree of faith not just faith.

"of faith" (pisteos) = of dependency.....

How do we get faith?

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God..." (Romans 10:17)

You have faith in proportion to your mind which has been renovated by the Word of God. The mechanics in mind renovation are:

1. Communication
2. Comprehension
3. Faith/Transfer

1. One of our problems is that most of us think we are pretty close to what God wants us to be.

2. Conviction is hampered by our human view-point which is based on man's standards.
3. Conviction requires exposure to the Word of God which identifies God's standards.

Therefore, if we are to experience change, we must first develop a proper perception of ourselves:

II. IN ORDER TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD, COMMITMENT BECOMES ESSENTIAL:

"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." (Romans 12:1)

God desires that we present our bodies a living sacrifice - a sacrifice involves commitment. Note the difference between the contribution of the chicken and the hog for a breakfast of eggs and bacon: The chicken made a contribution the hog made a sacrifice.

1. Commitment requires the presentation of our bodies

"I beseech" (parakalo) = I call you to come along side of me

- (a). Present Tense = continuous calling
- (b). Active Voice = Paul does the calling in this text
- (c). Imperative Mood = a command - Paul's call is a command

"you" = Believers

"therefore" = because of what has been said in chapters 6-11.

"by" (dia) + the genitive case = through the instrumentality of

"the mercies" (ton)(oiktirmon) = mercies (grace in action)

"of God" genitive case = from the source of God

"that ye present" (paraste'sai) = that you place at disposal ...

- (a). Repetitive Aorist = repeatedly
- (b). Active Voice = you do it
- (c). Infinitive = denotes purpose

"your bodies" (somata) = your physical bodies

"a living" (dzosan) = present tense emphasizes continual living

"sacrifice" (thusian) = sacrificial offering

"holy" (hagian) = set apart unto God

"acceptable" (euaireston) = well pleasing

"unto God" = unto the God

"which is your reasonable" (logiken) = which keeps on being your logical

"service" (latreian) = Priestly service

A technical word for service connected with the offering of sacrifices in the temple. We are Believer-Priests and the sacrifice we are to offer is our own bodies as instruments of service.

Expanded Translation of verse 1: *I command you therefore through the instrumentality of the mercies from the source of God that you come along side of me placing at disposal your bodies as a continual living sacrificial offering, set apart, well pleasing to God, which keeps on being your logical priestly service."*

2. Commitment requires that your presentation must be of a **"living sacrifice"** God is looking for a living, not dead, sacrifice - He wants action which produces life in others.
3. Commitment involves a **"holy"** sacrifice. The word **"holy"** is from the Greek word 'hagios' which means 'set apart unto God for service.'
4. Commitment involves an **"acceptable"** sacrifice. Acceptable To God's high standards.
5. Commitment which results in reality is our **"reasonable service"**

III. IF WE ARE TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD, REFORMATION IS DEMANDED:

"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."

"be not conformed" (me) (suchematidzesthe) = and stop making it your purpose to participate in changing your outward appearance to disguise what is on the inside in order to conform.....

- (a). Present Tense = continuous action
- (b). Middle Voice = subject participates in the action and is affected by the result
- (c). Infinitive = denotes purpose

"to this world" (to) (aioni) = to the pattern of this age

"but" (alla) = strongest conjunction of contrast- but....

"be ye transformed" (metamorphousthe) = constantly make it your purpose to allow that which is on the inside to be visible on the outside.

- (a). Present tense = continuous action
- (b). Passive Voice = subject is acted on and makes visible that which is on the inside
- (c). Infinitive = denotes purpose

"by the renewing" (te) (anakainosei) = by means of the renovation....

"of your" = of your

"mind" (noos) = mind....
instrumental case - through the instrument of the mind.

"that" (eis) = unto the end that.....

"ye may prove" (dokimadzein) = you purpose to approve through testing....

- (a). Present tense = continuous action
- (b). Active Voice = subject performs action
- (c). Infinitive = denotes purpose

"what is that" = what it is that is....

"good" (agathon) = which is good in whatever form it is found....
(This is Romans 8:28 stuff)

"acceptable" (euraeston) = allowance that is well pleasing....

"perfect" (teleion) = complete.....

"will" (thelema) = will

"of God" = of God

Resolve does not evoke change - Renovation evokes change.

1. In both resolution and reformation, the focus is in the mind.
2. Resolution is saying in the mind, I'm going to do it!
3. Reformation is reprogramming the mind in order to do it.

4. A mind renovated by the Word of God is the only thing that can bring us to where God wants us. *"...that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."* (Romans 12:2)
5. Renovation requires:
 - A. Tearing down the human view-point
 - B. Replacing that which is torn out with the Word of God
 - (1). Knowing God's Word
 - (2). Mixing knowledge with faith
 - (3). Conscious application of biblical truth

Summary:

"...and be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing [renovation] of your minds...."

"conformed" (susche-matidz-es'-theh) = changing one's outward appearance to disguise what one really is. Stop it!

"transformed" (meta-morph-ous'-theh) = allowing what is on the inside to become visible on the outside.

Expanded Translation of Verse 2: *And stop making it your purpose to change your outward appearance to hide what is on the inside in order to conform to the pattern of this age, But continually make it your purpose to allow that which is on the inside to be visible on the outside, through the means of the renovation of your minds, unto the end that you may approve, through testing, what it is that is the good, well pleasing, and complete, will of God."*

IV. RENOVATION REQUIRES TEARING OUT THE OBSOLETE:

II Corinthians 10:1-5

- 1 *Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence [am] base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:*
- 2 *But I beseech [you], that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.*
- 3 *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:*
- 4 *(For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)*

5 *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*

Most of our inability to live the life we desire to live is due to our thought pattern. We are able to control most of the overt activities most of the time and look fairly good to those that are around us. We are able to accomplish this through self-discipline motivated by a desire to appear OK. But our real problem is on the inside - it is what we think. Of course, problems in our thought pattern vary according to the lust pattern of our Old Sin Natures.

For those whose lust pattern is “materialism” - the problems relate to a dissatisfaction with one’s circumstances - this results in jealousy and greediness. For those whose lust pattern is “ego” - the problems relate to self-centeredness - this results in putting down others and being judgmental even to the point of verbal or physical abuse. For those whose pattern is “sensuality” - the problems relate to immorality - this results in sensual abuses.

All of these originate in the mind - they begin with mental attitudes. Thus, in order to change our behavior we must change our mental attitude. We have to change what we really think about sin and disobedience. I used to say there were two types of weather I did not like - cold and wind. Then God moved me to South Dakota! In order to have any contentment; I had to change my mental attitude. The same thing is true a thousand times over concerning our contentment in the Christian life. Our natural tendency to excuse sin and bounce back with I John 1:9 must be replaced with what God thinks about sin. We think sin will bring satisfaction - at least temporarily. But, God designed us and He knows what will provide satisfaction. Therefore we must renovate our minds - replacing human view point with divine view point. II Corinthians 10:1-5 provides some guidelines.

Paul’s dealings with the Corinthian Church provide the background for our better understanding of the mechanics in the renovating our minds. Let’s look at it.

Verse 1:

Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence [am] base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:

“Now I Paul myself beseech you” Notice that Paul himself calls the Corinthian believers to his position and attitude

“beseech” is from the Greek word “parakaleo.” It means to call to one’s side or position in agreement...

“by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.”

Paul indicates that he is in fellowship. Paul calls them to his position “*by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.*” This is an attitude of grace. *Meekness* is the result of a proper orientation to grace. *Gentleness* is the outward manifestation of a proper orientation to grace. Paul is gracing them. They have been critical of Paul and he is addressing them in this attitude of grace.

“who in presence [am] base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:”

This is what the Corinthian believers have been saying about Paul. They were saying Paul was two-faced - a hypocrite.

This is an example for us. When others mistreat us or are critical of us we need to grace them - that needs to be our attitude. If we are properly oriented to grace and we are in fellowship - we will treat them with gentleness.

Verse 2:

But I beseech [you], that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

Paul is telling them that he can get tough with them when he is there if he has to. They have criticized Paul for being dogmatic. Paul has treated them with “gentleness” (epi-ei-kei-as) This word means indicates a moderation and fairness - Not responding from a human or legalistic viewpoint.

“...wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.”

They are saying that Paul is conducting himself according to the norms and standards of the flesh. He answers this in verse 3

Verse 3:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

Paul uses a play on their words here. He says that although we *walk in the flesh* - a reference to our physical lives here on planet earth, *we do not war after the flesh*. Paul indicates that while we must continue to live in these bodies of flesh and blood, we must not rely on physical tools for spiritual warfare. *We do not war after the flesh* that is, according to the norms and standards of the flesh.

Our inability to resist the devil and live the life God has designed for us is closely linked to our attempts to use human techniques and weaponry in our spiritual warfare. Paul explains the means by which we are able to achieve victory in our

daily living in verses 4 and 5.

Verse 4:

(For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

We are involved in spiritual warfare. In order to live successful Christian lives we must use the proper weapons. Paul says weapons of warfare were not carnal - that is of the flesh.

“weapons” (hopla) weapons....This is the Greek word used for military weapons. We need to understand that this is a real war in which we are involved.

Ephesians 6:12 says,

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places].

Our battles are not with those who oppose or aggravate us. Our battle is with those who inspire and motivate them to attack us. So the first thing we learn is that we must use spiritual weapons not weapons of the flesh.

We are not told here in the context what the weapons are which we have with which to fight but as we harmonize Scripture we know of three weapons that stand out, and are identified for us in Ephesians 6:17-18

“... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,”

- **The Holy Spirit**

We must understand that we are in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit. I Corinthians 6:19-20 says,

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [which is] in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

The Holy Spirit is present to guide, reprove, rebuke, convict, and empower us.

- **The Word of God**

We have the Word of God! The Mind of Christ! It is the tool Jesus used in his dealing with temptation. Hebrews 4:12 says,

For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and

spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

We are to *receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.* (James 1:21)

NOTICE!~ It is with *“meekness”* that we are to receive the *“engrafted”* word. *“meekness”* indicates, with an orientation to grace, in which we understand and accept that what God has prepared for us and tells us, is better than anything we could reason for ourselves. The *“engrafted word”* refers to the Word we have comprehended and transferred to our right frontal lobe accepting God’s Word as our norm and standard.

- **Prayer**

Prayer is a means of summoning help! It is dialogue between a person and God. James 5:13 says,

“...Is any among you afflicted? let him pray....”

We have the weaponry to defeat the enemy. Now, Paul continues to characterize our weapons and to identify what we are to do with those weapons in II Corinthians 10:4....

“but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;”

“mighty” (dunata) having natural inherent power... This is representative of the natural inherent power of the Holy Spirit operating in the believer that is in fellowship.

“through God” (toh)(Theoh) = to the God

“to the pulling down” (ka-thai-re-sin) = tearing down

There can be no renovation without tearing down the obsolete. We have been programmed from birth by human view-point. It is logical to us - but God’s ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

You can’t leave the old structure of human viewpoint in there and just add some Bible doctrine. That old human thinking has to be torn out! We have to identify it as “Stinking Thinking” and deny it as being valid. That is the problem of most Christians. We go along adding new rooms and building additions to our thought pattern through the Word of God - BUT, we leave the old stuff there and the old stuff is where we are the most comfortable - it just feels good. WE HAVE TO TEAR IT DOWN!

“of strong holds” (o-chu-roh-ma-tohn) fortresses

We have to tear down those old fortresses in which we trusted. A fortress is

designed to protect us and give us security. But the fortresses of human logic are not dependable. we lived in them in the past - Now, we need to tear down the “Old Fort” and Build a New Fort based on the design found in the Word of God.

The first phrase in II Corinthians ten verse 5 is part of verse 4 in the Greek text and identifies the fortresses of which he is speaking.

“Casting down imaginations” (lo-gis-mous)(ka-thai-roun-tes) = logic or reasoning tearing down completely....

Human logic and reasoning have to be torn out of our minds. You see, human logic and reasoning run counterpart to grace and divine viewpoint. Human logic and reason tell us that everyone must pay his own way. Human logic and reason require expectations of others. Human logic and reason tells us we deserve better. Human logic and reason tells us if it feels good - do it.

Look at Human logic and reasoning in relation to the three patterns of lust found in I John 2:16. I repeat them here because of their importance.

“For all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

“the lust of the flesh” This phrase identifies the lust pattern of sensuality - the satisfaction of the senses. We have five senses - the sense of sight, the sense of touch, the sense of hearing, the sense of taste, the sense of smell. Human logic and reasoning tells us to embrace and practice those things that give us pleasure. But the Word of God tells us the pursuit of these will end in destruction and death. *“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end [is] destruction, whose God [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame, who mind earthly things.) For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: (Philippians 3:17-20)*

“the lust of the eyes” This phrase identifies the lust pattern of materialism. Solomon pursued this as a goal to happiness, but it was empty. *“I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all [kind of] fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got [me] servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, [as] musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and*

increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all [was] vanity and vexation of spirit, and [there was] no profit under the sun. Solomon concluded, He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this [is] also vanity. (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11; 5:10)

I know! I hear you! You would rather be miserable with money than be miserable and homeless. But, we don't have to be miserable at all. Paul declared in Philippians 4:11-13,

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, [therewith] to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

With proper biblical orientation you could be both homeless and content.

“the pride of life” This phrase identifies the lust pattern of ego - pride. This is number one on God's “Hit List.”

Proverbs 6:16-19 says,

These six [things] doth the LORD hate: yea, seven [are] an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness [that] speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Pride was the sin of Satan and is in all reality man's attempt to be God. Pride is the basis for acting independent of God. Isn't it true that we think we know, better than God does, what will bring us pleasure or contentment? It is that thinking which causes us to conduct our lives in contradiction to His will. Then, of course, there is the problem of the habit or addiction to sin as a result of our practice.

So, in order to renovate we must tear out our human logic and reasoning.

Now let's look at II Corinthians chapter ten verse 5

Verse 5:

and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

The Greek text clarifies the statement, *“...every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,...”* The Greek text says, *“every high thing rising up against the knowledge emanating from God.”*

See! We must tear down all the human logic and reasoning that rises up in rebellion against the knowledge which emanates from God. When we refuse to tear down our own logic and reasoning that is in contradiction or rebellion to God we remain victims of faulty reasoning.

“exalteth” (ep-ai-ro-meh-non) elevates itself

This expression is one that expresses contempt or disregard...and in the context, that contempt or disregard is against the knowledge emanating from God.

“knowledge” (gnoh-seohs) = knowledge that is being taken in

This word implies inception or progress in knowledge. Each time you sin, it is a result of your rising up in rebellion against the knowledge that is emanating from the source of God. You either have not taken it in or you have rebellious contempt for what God says concerning your situation.

Therefore, we must tear out the old human logic and reasoning, stop rebelling against the knowledge that emanates from God, in order to accomplish the objective stated in the following phrase.....

“and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”

Every one of our thoughts must be brought into conformity with the knowledge emanating from God in order for us to become obedient.

We must not entertain thoughts which are based on Human logic or reasoning, but thoughts that are in harmony with the Word of God.

We must develop a renovated mind - in order to prove what is that Good (directive) and acceptable (permissive), and perfect (over-ruling) will of God.

“God's Will - Directive, Permissive, and Over-Ruling”

In this study we will discover the three aspects of God's will. He has a directive will, a permissive will and an overruling will. God's directive will is an expression of His sovereign will for us. It is His preference for our life. God's permissive will is manifested when God permits the exercise of our free will against His sovereign choice for us. He often allows us to act independently of what He has chosen for us. He lets us do our own thing. God's overruling will is manifested when He simply makes it impossible for us to carry out our own will or desire. He shuts the door or blocks the way as He did when Jonah set out for Tarshish

and found himself in the belly of the great fish.

There's a fascinating story found in Numbers, chapters 22-31 that illustrates all three aspects of God's will. The children of Israel had encamped in the plains of Moab and Balak, the son of Zippor who was king of Moab, sent messengers to a prophet by the name of Balaam who lived in Pethor. Balak asked Balaam to come to Moab and curse the Israelites. Balak had observed that everyone that Balaam cursed were cursed and everyone he blessed were blessed. He promised him great reward if he would curse the children of Israel.

Balaam showed integrity and told the men to lodge with him that night and he would inquire of the Lord concerning His will in the matter. When Balaam asked God what he should do God told Balaam not to go with them and not to curse the people because they were blessed. So, the next morning, Balaam told the princes of Balak to get back to their own land because God wouldn't let him go with them. That was the directive will of God. "Don't go with them, and don't curse them."

Well, as you can imagine, Balak wasn't too happy about it. So, he sent more princes, more honorable than the others, with a blank check -- whatsoever Balaam would ask he could have. The preacher again showed integrity. He told Balak's princes, *"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."* (Numbers 22:18)

But,...isn't it funny how we can always come up with a...but? But, Balaam must have forgotten that God is immutable, unchangeable. He told the men to tarry with him that night while he talked to the Lord about it, to see what God had to say about it. When God has expressed His will in a matter there is no need to go back and ask again just because the ante has been raised. But sometimes the motivation is enough that we try God's patience and ask again.

Well, God told Balaam,

"If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt you do." (Numbers 22:20)

The old adage *"if you give them an inch they will take a mile"* is true of most of us. So, the next morning without the men having come to him Balaam just got up and went with them. God had given a directive expressing His directive will. But, the preacher went beyond that and took off for Moab.

Verse 22 of Numbers 22 tells us:

"And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants with him."

The angel of the Lord stood in the way with a drawn sword in his hand. Now, old reward focused Balaam didn't see the angel but the she ass he was riding saw him and turned aside out of the way and went out into a field. We never go against the will of God without Him trying to turn us around. But, usually we are so determined to have our way we don't

interpret such warnings as God's attempt to turn us around.

So, Balaam smote the ass and turned her back into the way. But the angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards with a wall on each side. And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord she thrust herself unto the wall and crushed the preacher's foot against the wall. So, the preacher struck her again.

Then, the angel of the Lord went a little way farther and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn, neither to the right nor to the left. When the ass saw the angel of the Lord she just fell down under Balaam. The preacher was really angry by that time and he struck the she ass again with his staff. Does this strike a familiar chord? How many times does God have to block our way, when we are going against His will, for us to wise up?

Look what God did then.

"And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, 'What have I done unto thee, that thou has smitten me these three times?'" (Numbers 22:28)

Now look at old Balaam. He has so lost his ability to discern that he carries on a conversation with his she ass.

"Balaam said unto the ass, 'Because you have mocked me: I wish I had a sword in my hand because now I would kill you.'" (Numbers 22:29)

Ha! It's funny Balaam should wish for a sword. Here he is mocking God and the angel has a sword but has not killed the preacher because his she ass has been smart enough to stop. Well, old Balaam is really in deep by this time.

All discernment is gone and the ass answers him back.

"Am I not thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?..." (Numbers 22:30)

Old dumb Balaam doesn't get it yet. He just answers the ass, No, you haven't done this before. You see? In order to know the will of God we must use spiritual discernment concerning providential circumstances. Nothing happens by chance, but everything has a divine design.

Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw the angel of the Lord with the drawn sword and bowed down his head and fell down flat on his face. The angel asked Balaam why he had smitten his ass those three times telling him that he had gone out to withstand him because his way was perverse. The angel said if the ass hadn't turned out of the way he would have slain the preacher and saved the ass' life.

Balaam jumped up and said, I'm sorry I made a foolish decision and if you want to talk to me about it see me at home. And he ran home as fast as he could. No! I'm afraid that's not the way he handled it. I'm not sure, but, I hope that's what I would have done.

Look at old Balaam. He said, *'I've sinned because I didn't know that you stood in the way against me.'* Hey, Balaam, God told you the conditions under which you were to go! But you

established your own will over His! Yes! You have sinned.

But wait a minute, look at this next statement of Balaam. *"If it displeases you I'll go back home."* What do you mean Balaam, *"If it displeases Him?"* Didn't God tell you not to go and that these people were blessed? Where do you get the nerve to whimper and whine and offer to go back home?

God had given His directive will, but Balaam refused to abide by it. So, God then expressed His permissive will. He said, "Alright, Balaam, if you are so set on going, go ahead! But, now listen to this. But, you only say what I tell you to say. So, old dumb Balaam takes the permissive will of God and goes on.

There often comes a time when God says to us, *"Okay, if that's what you want, go ahead."* We are skating on pretty thin ice at that point and better really be careful. We may be doing what we want to do, but it is not going to produce the results we desire.

Balaam met the king and the king showed him the children of Israel from atop the high places of Baal and asked Balaam to curse them. Well, the preacher told the king to build seven altars and offer seven bullocks and seven rams while he went and talked to the Lord about it. God told Balaam to bless them not curse them. So, Balaam pronounced a blessing on them.

The king was upset about that. He took the preacher to the top of Mount Pisgah and asked him to curse the Israelites. Now Balaam is a slow learner. He said, *"Build seven altars and offer seven bullocks and seven rams while I go see what the Lord wants me to do."* Have you ever seen anyone, other than ourselves, so dense? God hadn't changed His mind. So, Balaam pronounced a blessing instead of a curse on the people.

Balak then took Balaam up on Mount Peor and asked him to curse them from there. By this time the preacher had gotten a little smarter, so he didn't have to go ask God about it. He just pronounced a blessing and said, *"If the king were to give him his house full of silver or gold he could not go beyond the word of God."* Then, it appears that Balaam went back home. And the story seems to have a happy ending.

But, over in chapter 31 of Numbers, in verse 8, we find Balaam dead on a battlefield with the kings of Midian and Moab. This is the overruling will of God and you have to go to II Peter 2:15; Jude 11 and Revelation 2:14 to find out that Balaam didn't want to go home without that payola check. So, he told Balak that he could not curse the children of Israel for him, but he could give him a plan by which God Himself would kill them.

He told Balak to send his pretty young girls into the camp of Israel and have them seduce the young men of Israel into the immoral worship of Baal. He said God would be jealous and kill them Himself. So, Balak did just that. But, while God did kill 24,000 of his own people for going for that idolatrous trick, He then led the Israelites in wiping out the Midianites. And, with His overruling will He stopped the rebellious preacher.

God Has a directive will, a permissive will and an overruling will. I challenge you to seek His Directive Will.

“Principles For Understanding the Will of God”

How do you make those decisions? What are your guidelines for knowing God's will? Do you put out fleeces and seek signs from God when you have decisions to make. I have had people tell me, "I want to do what God wants me to do." Then they ask, "But, how can I know what God's will is?"

Ephesians 5:17 says:

"Wherefore, be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

God doesn't expect us to do His will without showing us what that will is. There are seven basic steps found in Acts chapter eleven, that set up a formula for helping us know God's will. This passage deals with Peter's explanation to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem as to how God led him to go to Caesarea and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The Jewish believers in Jerusalem had questioned why Peter had taken the gospel to the gentiles. The details of this incident are found in Acts chapter ten, but Peter's explanation is given in the eleventh chapter. Peter explains the process that caused him to make the decision to preach the gospel to the gentiles.

God had His work cut out for Him when He set out to get Peter to go preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter was prejudiced against the Gentiles and considered them totally unworthy of the gospel. However, Peter desired to do what God wanted him to do and he was going to have to explain to the brethren in Jerusalem why he took the gospel to the gentiles. So, rather than just tell Peter to go to preach to them, God established some principles by which Peter would know, the brethren would understand, and we would have some guidelines for our decision making. These principles taught Peter that God wanted Peter to go to Caesarea and preach the gospel to the Gentiles and established some principles for understanding the will of God in any situation. It's in that context that we find the formula whereby we too can know God's will.

Let me insert a word of caution here before we study the passage. If we try to duplicate other peoples experience we will not find the will of God for our lives. But, if we look beyond their experience and examine biblical principles we will find a formula for knowing God's will in regard to every decision we must make.

First Guideline - Prayer

The first guideline to knowing God's will is found in Acts 11: 5. It is PRAYER.

Peter says:

"I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from Heaven by four corners; and it came even to me..."

Yes, the first principle for knowing God's will is PRAYER! However, I want you to notice

something very important. Peter was not praying, Lord, do you want me to go preach to the Gentiles? That was the farthest thing from Peter's mind at that time. Peter was simply maintaining a consistent line of communication with God through prayer. Most of us use prayer in an attempt to know the will of God about a particular matter, but neglect the consistent prayer life that is vital for knowing God's will on a daily basis.

Back in the tenth chapter of Acts we discover that it was noon and Peter had gone up on the housetop to pray while others were preparing lunch. It was his custom to pray at that time of day. We will need to spend some time each day in prayer if we are going to be effective in knowing God's will. If we stay "prayed up" we won't have to pray in a crisis concerning decisions.

A number of years ago an airliner developed landing gear problems as it attempted to land in New York. The plane circled for a while to use up fuel before attempting an emergency landing. A reporter covering the incident found from the passenger list that there was a minister on board the aircraft. After the plane landed and everyone was safe the reporter interviewed the minister. He asked the minister if he did a lot of praying while they were circling and during the emergency landing. The minister said, "well, not really. When you stay prayed up you don't have to do a lot of praying in a crisis."

Most of us use prayer as a tool for knowing God's will. But we generally use it as a 'crisis tool.' That is, when we have an important decision to make, we began to pray earnestly for God's direction. Now, I am not condemning that. We do need to seek God's guidance through prayer concerning specific decisions. However, if we maintain a consistent prayer life we will develop a sensitivity to God's leading and decision making will not become a crisis situation for us.

Prayer is the means by which we commune with God. And, there are times when we need to go into our closets and pray. But, Paul tells us in I Thessalonians 5:17: *"Pray without ceasing."* Our communication with God needs to be an open dialogue with God during our daily activities. This kind of association with God will keep us sensitive and alert to detect His direction concerning the many decisions we have to make each day.

Peter was praying, as was his custom, and while he was praying God give him direction about an issue he was not even considering. Prayer is an important guideline for knowing God's will. It is frequently while we are praying we find our direction concerning future decisions we have to make.

Second Guideline - Spiritual Evaluation

The second guideline of divine guidance is SPIRITUAL EVALUATION.

It is found in the Acts 11:6. where Peter is telling about the sheet that was let down.

"Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air."

The word *"considered"* is translated from the Greek word "atenisas." "Atenisas" means,

to seek understanding - to evaluate. There is no such thing as luck or coincidence. Those who believe in luck and coincidence believe in a God of chance. Our God has everything in control and has established the laws of cause and effect. Everything happens as a result of God's directive, permissive and overruling will.

Yet, more often than not, we give little consideration to the things God uses in an attempt to direct us into His will. Peter gave careful consideration to the phenomena he saw. If you are going to understand the will of God you are going to have to spiritually evaluate the things which happen to you and around you.

Peter said he fastened his eyes on the sheet that was let down before him *and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air."* Peter evaluated what he saw and attempted to understand what it all meant.

We need to evaluate the things that happen to us from a spiritual perspective. Since nothing happens by chance, but is a result of God's design, we need to pay attention, to understand how God is attempting to direct us. When Moses saw the burning bush in the wilderness of Midian, he turned aside to evaluate and understand what was happening. On the other hand even when God opened the mouth of Balaam's she ass and let her speak that prophet failed to see and accept what God was trying to get him to understand.

If we will evaluate, from a spiritual perspective, those things which we encounter we will be better equipped to know God's will concerning decision we need to make.

Third Guideline -The Word of God

The third guideline of Divine guidance is the WORD OF GOD.

Acts eleven verses 7 through 9 says:

"And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from Heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."

God spoke to Peter directly, *"Arise, Peter; slay and eat: What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."* Now in this age, God seldom speaks to us in an audible voice. But, He has given us His Word. The Bible is the Voice of God! It speaks clearly and distinctly concerning the issues about which we need to make decisions. God did not simply tell Peter to go preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. He simply taught Peter the technique by which Peter and all of us could know God's will.

Many aspects of the directive will of God are given to us in the *"Thou Shalts"* and the *"Thou Shalt Nots"* found in the word of God. Clear direction is given to us in the imperatives of the Bible. But, of course, there is not a *"thou shalt"* or a *"thou shalt not"* for every decision we have to make. So, God has given us principles though out His Word which help us to understand His will for our lives.

Paul tells up in Ephesians 1:9, that God has made...

"known unto us the mystery of His will..."

In Romans 12:2 he says:

"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."

It is necessary for us to read and study the Bible in order for us to know the will of God. It is His voice for us today. As we read and study it our minds become transformed from human perception to spiritual perception and we begin to understand what God is saying to us.

Notice, Paul said we are to become transformed by the renewing of our mind, in order that we *"... may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."*

The *"good will of God"* is God's directive will for our lives. The *"acceptable will of God"* is God's permissive will and the *"perfect will of God"* is His over ruling will.

In I Corinthians 2:16 Paul tells us that we have the mind of Christ. This is of course a reference to the Bible, the word of God.

II Timothy 3:16-17 says,

All scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

I've seen people wrestle and pray over a decision needlessly because, if they had read their Bibles, they would have discovered that God had already given the answer as a directive in His word. Most Christians are lazy. They don't want to study the Bible. They want God to give them audible direction. They want that personal attention. You can't consistently know God's will apart from knowing His Word. It is blasphemous to agonize in prayer over a decision concerning which God has already given specific direction in His word. The answer to our decisions are in the Bible, either in direct dictation or in biblical principles.

Remember! The voice of the Lord did not tell Peter, *"I want you to go down to Caesarea and preach the gospel to the gentiles."* The voice of the Lord taught Peter a principle. Most of the answers to decision we will make cannot be found in the *"thou Shalts"* and the *"Thou Shalt Nots"* of the Bible but rather will be found in Biblical principles.

Fourth Guideline - Divine Providence

The fourth guideline is found in Acts 11:10-11: it is DIVINE PROVIDENCE

"And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into Heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me."

Now, isn't that a coincidence? Three times this process was shown to Peter. Three times the

Lord told Peter not to call anything He had cleansed common and here were three common men - Gentiles who had come from Caesarea to get Peter.

No! Of course it wasn't coincidence! This was divine providence. Peter had been told three times not to call anything common that God had cleansed. And, now, here were three 'common men' gentiles which had come to the house to get Peter to go back to Caesarea with them.

God designed it to fit together like that. And He does the same thing in your life, too. How often we continue to agonize over a decision because we have not understood the divine providence of God sent to guide us into understanding.

Did you hear the story about the man in the Jamestown flood who had taken refuge up on the porch of his house and prayed that God would miraculously deliver him? The story tells about the rescuers in a boat attempting to assist him but he told them, No, thanks, he was waiting for God to deliver him. According to the story they attempted to get him into the boat on two later occasions when he had moved up on the roof of the house, but he declined their assistance insisting that God was going to deliver him. So, as the story goes, the man drowned and when he saw God in heaven he asked God why he had not delivered him. God's response was, I sent the boat out three times but you wouldn't get in. Too often, we are looking for the supernatural and miss the hand of God in the normal routine of our lives - in those providential circumstances.

If God works through the law of cause and effect and leaves nothing to chance, then, there is no such thing as coincidence - these are divine appointments. Pay attention to them. God is trying to direct you into His will.

Fifth Guideline - Holy Spirit's Conviction

The fifth guideline is found in Acts 11:12. It is **THE HOLY SPIRIT'S CONVICTION**.

"And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:..."

Peter sensed the direction of the Holy Spirit! It is important to note that this bidding on the part of the Holy Spirit was preceded by Prayer, Spiritual Evaluation, The Word of God, and Providential Circumstances. Many Christians seek the bidding of the Holy Spirit apart from these fundamental principles. We are warned to "try the spirits."

I John 4:1 says,

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

So, we have to be sure which "spirit" is leading us and that requires that the bidding of the spirit must be in harmony with the Word of God.

God prepares us ahead of time so we are sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit. All

the things that had happened to Peter made him sensitive to the direction of the Spirit. And, he had no doubts he was to go.

Sixth Guideline - Spiritual Show and Tell

The sixth guideline of divine guidance is found in Acts 11:13-14. It is what I call SPIRITUAL SHOW AND TELL . Peter and Cornelius exchange information. Peter said,

"And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

God never works on just one end of a situation. He always works on both ends. We need to find out what God is doing on the other end of our situation so we can act effectively. What is God doing with those others who are going to be affected by our decision?

You will notice that Peter went to Caesarea on the basis of the facts he already had. But, it wasn't until he got there and heard Cornelius' story that he understood what he was to do.

See! Before God gave Peter any direction about going to Caesarea, God had already prepared things on the other end. He sent an angel to Cornelius to give him direction to send for Peter in order that Cornelius might hear the gospel.

We need to be involved in "spiritual show and tell" with others who are involved in, or affected by, our decisions.

Seventh Guideline - Act

The seventh guideline is found in verse 15. We are to ACT on the guidance information that has been provided.

Peter said:

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them as on us at the beginning."

Peter acted on the information he had. We may not have all the answers but we are to act on the information we do have. Peter acted on the vision, the Word of God, and the direction of the Spirit and went to Caesarea. Then, he acted on the information he gained from Cornelius.

God opens many doors for us and attempts to lead us through. However, we often refuse to act on His leadership. We must be willing to act on the information we have.

Three Results of Divine Guidance

There are three results of divine guidance identified in this incident recorded in Acts 11:15-18.

First Result - Spiritual Verification

In Acts 11:15 there is SPIRITUAL VERIFICATION. The Holy Spirit verified that Peter was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit fell on those Gentiles just as He had on Peter and the other believing Jews on the day of Pentecost. Does the Holy Spirit verify your decision?

Second Result - Scripture Harmonization

The second result was SCRIPTURE HARMONIZATION. In Acts 11:16 Peter was able to harmonize this action with scripture. he said:

"Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Can you harmonize the results of your decision with scripture?

Third Result - Logical Deduction

The third result was A LOGICAL DEDUCTION. Verses 17 and 18 record that those at Jerusalem were able to come to the logical deduction that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well.

Are others able to see the logic in your decision and its results?

Summary of Steps To Understand The Will of God

Let me summarize the seven guidelines for knowing the will of God:

1. A consistent prayer life
2. Spiritual evaluation of occurring events
3. Knowledge of God's Word
4. Sensitivity to Divine Providence
5. The Holy Spirit's conviction
6. Spiritual show and tell
7. Acting on our information

Don't make decisions based on just one or two of these guidelines but use them all in seeking divine guidance and you will find the will of God. Utilize all seven of these guidelines and you will be able to know God's will in every circumstance and situation you face. May God Bless you as you seek and perform His will!