

The Will of God- Part 1

The Will of God. What does the word “will” mean?

Merriam-Webster dictionary on line uses words like: wish, desire, choice, determination. Volition¹.

There is a spectrum of meaning from wish to determine.

How do the Biblical words for “will” match up with this spectrum?

Let’s start with who has a “will” in the Bible: God, angels and man.

Paul uses the Greek word *thelema* in our passage.

Will of God:

Romans 1:9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you,

Romans 1:10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

Satan’s (i.e. angelic) will is mentioned:

2 Timothy 2:26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (i.e. the will of Satan).

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/will>

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I was going to use the Isaiah passage which contained the five “I will” of Satan. However, I was surprised to find that the “will” part of the translation comes from the verbs and the context in which they are used, not from a specific word for “will.” Nonetheless, this passage in Isaiah is understood to refer to Satan. There are many who do not accept the existence of an Angelic Conflict. They interpret that passage to refer to a human being. That is a discussion for another day. My belief is that Isaiah chapter 14 refers to Satan’s “I will” revolt against God.

Will of men:

2 Peter 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation,

2 Peter 1:21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Luke 23:25 And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

This study will look only at the Will of God. The point at the end is how to determine God’s will for “me.”

Warning: Knowing God’s will is not something subjective. As Robby Dean likes to put it, we are not waiting for some “liver quiver.” There are some objective criteria to aid us in knowing the Will of God.

Now let us look at the Will of God, starting from His perspective. Remember, in the Bible there are different perspectives expressed. There is God’s perspective, the writer’s perspective, man’s perspective, etc. His

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will is sometimes put into three categories: a) sovereign, b) directive and c) permissive. I am going to relate these categories to the Will of God from man's perspective shortly.

God's will has a spectrum from determining what will happen to allowing even bad things to happen.

Sovereign Will: From God's sovereignty He created. He willed things into existence simply by speaking.

God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1) He decreed them into existence.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

In the rest of Genesis chapter 1, God creates specific things. God said.

Genesis 1:6 Then God said...

Genesis 1:9 Then God said...

Genesis 1:14 Then God said...

Genesis 1:20 Then God said...

Genesis 1:24 Then God said...

Genesis 1:26 Then God said...

And that was God's sovereign will. He decreed it and it came into existence.

Directive Will. God has directed things to be done. He explains how something should be done, but He does not make it so. Sometimes this is called His moral will. It is expressed through written commands and other instructions. In the Torah, the rabbi's identified 613 commands². We are most familiar with the Old Testament "Ten Commandments."

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/613_commandments

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Violation of God’s Will is sin. As children of God, we can end up getting “spanked” for not obeying His commands. The purpose of that suffering is to encourage us to get back into walking by faith.

Exodus 20:2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

This is the start of the Ten Commandments. God has directed what is the right path. But, human beings have sin natures and often violate God’s directions. We studied this in the book of Judges.

Permissive Will. God has a **permissive will**. He allows things to happen that He does not agree with. Adam and Eve sinned. Cain killed Able. Jews killed Stephen in the book of Acts. In part, this is documentation for the result of the sin nature and is evidence in the Appeal Trial of Satan.

Now let me introduce the Will of God from man’s perspective by quoting Herman Mattox:

“There is the **Directive** Will of God; the **Permissive** Will of God; and the **OVERRULING** will of God.³” The same categories as from God’s perspective, but now they are from man’s perspective, our perspective.

Directive Will:

In the New Testament there are many instructions given to the Christian in the imperative mood. These are commands. Yet, they cannot be obeyed apart from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit through faith dependence on Him. Here is one example from the book of Romans:

³ https://www.springvalleybiblechurch.org/Audio/Ephesians/notes/2021-05-30Sunday_Morning_.pdf

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Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but 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.

Again, to emphasize the point: we cannot accomplish God's will apart from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as a result of faith dependence on the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—

2 Corinthians 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight—

2 Corinthians 5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

The word for will in the Old Testament, is often translated as pleasing or favor. For now I am sticking to the New Testament passages.

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2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Going outside the Will of God is sin and subject to divine discipline in order to convince us to get back to walking by faith. Living inside the Will of God results in eternal rewards.

Permissive Will: The Angelic Conflict is nothing if man does not have free will. Some theologians say that there is no free will. God determines everything. Then it is no mystery why they blame God for evil in the world. They would have to conclude then that God is evil. But God is righteous. He allows evil as part of the Angelic Conflict. He can provide his righteousness to sinful man because of the work Jesus Christ did on the cross and God the Father's validation of that work through the resurrection.

Genesis 4:8 ... And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

God allowed this. But He didn't cause this or promote it. As a result of this first documented murder, Set was born and became an ancestor of Jesus Christ. (Luke 3:38)

But you are most interested in what God wants for you.

Before looking at specific objective ways that God can guide us, we must understand that God's Will is communicated differently in different dispensations. In the Old Testament and in the early days of the Church, the cannon of Scripture was not complete.

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In the New Testament, there were various people like prophets and apostles that were given the task to receive revelation and write it down in the canon of Scripture. When they died, there were no additions to Scripture allowed.

I do not think God has a predetermined thought for us for each moment. We have free will even while filled with the Holy Spirit.

For instance, before the fall, Adam was not told what to name the animals.

Genesis 2:19 19 Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.

Adam did not yet have a sin nature. God brought the animals to Adam who exercised his free will to give the animals names. God did not impose names on them. God did not guide Adam to specific names. We do not know how Adam came up with the names.

This leads us into a difficult topic of free will and the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Control: Some say that being filled with the Holy Spirit controls our souls. We do only what God directs us to do. In this view, the only decision we can make is to do what God wants or to decide to sin and go outside His will. I think Thieme describes this as similar to a light switch. It is either on or off.

Influence: Some say that the Holy Spirit influences our thought in the filling of the Holy Spirit. This view says that the “Control” would

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preclude us from deciding to sin. For me, this seems a little weak. When filled with the Holy Spirit, we do not sin. When filled with the Holy Spirit we are empowered to accomplish spiritual things.

I don't have a word I can point to and say, this is what the Holy Spirit does. The closest I can come is "empower."

What follows is taken from R.B. Thieme Jr. teaching on the mechanics of knowing God's Will which he does using Acts chapter 11. This is the heart of the lesson. Remembering that we don't usually teach doctrine from the book of Acts, there are some valuable lessons to be learned if we understand that apostles, prophets, visions, etc. are no longer needed since we have the written canon of Scripture. Acts chapter 11 is used to illustrate the various mechanics of knowing God's will. Already I can see it would be useful to have a second lesson on the Will of God giving examples from other parts of the Bible. Perhaps another day. Perhaps next week.

These points are from Thieme's Basic 101 course in 1961. It has been handed down over the years through different pastors-teachers. This version uses the will of God doctrine from kukis.org⁴ and a version of Thieme's pamphlet that has been updated by R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries⁵. An important point brought out in the pamphlet is the directive Will of God. There are divine directives written in the Bible, the New Testament especially for the Christian which can answer questions. One of the methods of divine guidance is the recall of this information. For instance, if you are considering marrying an unbeliever, remember what Paul wrote about this: 2 Corinthians 6:14;

4 http://kukis.org/Notes/RBThiemeJr_browser_notes/Setup/NB2/Divine%20Guidance.htm

5 Thieme, B. (1999). Divine Guidance. R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries.

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Mechanics of the Will of God, Acts 11.

Verses 1-4 set the background for Peter's explanation of God's will in giving him new revelation concerning "unclean things" in the new dispensation of the Church.

Acts 11:1 Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

Acts 11:2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him,

This is no longer the dispensation of the Mosaic Law. There is a transition period which required the temporary gifts of apostle, prophet and others to acquire dispensation-specific information and to disperse it throughout the believing community.

Acts 11:3 saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Under Jewish law, this was forbidden. Gentiles were "unclean."

Acts 11:4 But Peter began *speaking* and *proceeded* to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying,

In Acts chapter 2, the dispensation of the Church started. At that point, the rules governing mankind, especially believers, changed. One of those rules was the prohibition against eating pork and other banned foods. It was not permissible. Association with Gentiles was not allowed. It made one "unclean." But now in this new dispensation, the rules had changed. Fellowship with Gentiles was now allowable. The rules had changed.

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God's direction concerning unclean things had changed. But those rules had not been written down yet. So the apostles, in this case Peter, had to provide that information to others. So Peter is called out on these new rules by believers in Jerusalem who have not gotten the "memo." But through this narrative in which Peter himself struggles with the new rules, we are exposed to a series of methods whereby divine guidance might be given. It is important to emphasize that the methods require the filling of the Holy Spirit.

1. Guidance through prayer, verse 5.

Acts 11:5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me,

The canon of Scripture is complete. We will not receive new revelation in prayer. But, when we pray about something intently, the prayer, concentrating on God's grace to solve problems, can illuminate our situation to the degree that a solution may present itself. When that happens be sure to thank God for his illumination.

2. Guidance through objective thinking of Bible doctrine, verse 6.

Acts 11:6 and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air.

Remember, these methods of knowing God's will depend upon faith reliance on the Holy Spirit. Fixed my gaze, observing and I saw. Peter is analyzing the vision objectively.

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3. Guidance through perception and recall of doctrine, verses 7-10.

Acts11:7 I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’

Acts11:8 But I said, ‘By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

Peter is struggling with new rules in the new dispensation. In the previous dispensation there were strong repercussions for violating the Mosaic Law/commands.

Acts11:9 But a voice from heaven answered a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.’

I do not have space here to explain how God cleansed these things.

Acts11:10 This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.

Here Peter is recounting what happened. For us, this is now written down for us. If we have actually studied Scripture, there will be verses that sometimes just “pop up” in our memory when we come to a difficult situation in our life. If it applies, then we have an answer which we must consider.

4. Guidance through providential circumstances, e.g. the people we meet, verse 11.

Acts11:11 And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were

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**staying, having been sent to me from
Caesarea.**

I remember a specific encounter I had in college. As a new Christian, Campus Crusade (now called just CRU) emphasized giving the gospel. There was such an emphasis on this, that I felt like I was not living the Christian life because I hadn't grabbed someone and given them the gospel. One day I was walking with a Muslim student. My recollection is that he was in one of my Physics classes. I asked God for some guidance on how to get started with the gospel. Prayer. Almost immediately, the Muslim student turned to me and asked me about God. Providential circumstance. As far as I know, the student didn't accept Christ. At least not then. But I had broken through the psychological barrier of giving the gospel to someone. There was a silent joy in my heart. God provided the circumstance.

5. Guidance through filling of the Holy Spirit and humility, verse 12.

**Acts 11:12 The Spirit told me to go with them
without misgivings. These six brethren also
went with me and we entered the man's
house.**

Be careful when saying "the Spirit told me." Today we have the written Word of God. We may have received guidance through other means like providential circumstances and say the Spirit told me. The emphasis of this lesson is on the objective methods of learning God's will. Subjectivity can be colored by what we want as opposed to what the real Will of God is.

6. Guidance through fellowship and comparison of spiritual data, verses 13-14.

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Acts 11:13 And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here;

Acts 11:14 and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’

Acts 11:15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.

Other believers may have experienced similar situations and be able to help in some cases. Others who have more maturity may recall appropriate Scripture or doctrine. I remember having a bicycle accident years ago. As a result, I endured some suffering. Later, another person suffered a medical issue. I was able to minister to him as a result of my experience.

7. Guidance through recalling of doctrine, verse 16.

Acts 11:16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

This requires knowledge of and memory of Bible information given categorically. This goes back to God’s directive will. Scripture contains information of do’s and don’ts. There are even applications of doctrines to specific situations.

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Acts chapter 11 was used as an illustration because it contains many methods of knowing the Will of God. However, there are other passages that may be clearer applications. I will attempt to review the mechanics of knowing the Will of God next week and provide additional clear illustrations both from the Bible and from personal experience.