

Finding God's Will Seminar¹

Syllabus

<i>Date</i>	<i>Session #</i>	<i>Title</i>
5/20/2019	1	Where is God's Will?
5/21/2019	2	Theories of Guidance
5/22/2019	3	How Does God Guide Us?
5/23/2019	4	Wisdom and Maturity

¹ Borrowed from James C. Petty, *Step By Step* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999).

Session 1

Where is God's Will?

- I. Where is God's will?
 - A. How did it get lost?
 - B. How shall we find it?
 - C. The questions that drive us to find God's will.
 - 1. Which university shall I attend?
 - 2. What shall be my major study?
 - 3. Who shall be my roommates and friends?
 - 4. What job shall I take?
 - 5. Which man/woman shall I marry?
 - D. The stakes are very high with these questions.
 - 1. They determine the course of our lives.
 - 2. We want divine help so we don't make a mistake and ruin our lives.
- II. God does guide us.
 - A. The significance of man.
 - 1. Created a little lower than God – Psalm 8:3-5.
 - 2. The object of God's attention – Psalm 139.
 - 3. The object of God's plan of salvation from the beginning – Ephesians 1:4-10.
 - B. Guidance in history.
 - 1. Call of Abraham – Genesis 12:1.
 - 2. Leading Israel – Exodus 13:21-22.
 - 3. Choosing a king – 1 Samuel 16:1-13.
 - 4. Paul's missionary journey – Acts 16:4-10.
 - C. Promises of guidance.
 - 1. Psalm 23.
 - 2. Proverbs 3:5-6.
 - 3. James 1:5.

III. Case study: What to study.

You are a sophomore studying engineering at the university. You are doing fine in your courses, but you are not sure this is the right field for you. In the fall semester you took a course in the history of Western Europe and were excited and intrigued by it. You can do the engineering work, but you don't find it interesting. But you have always been interested in history. Some of your favorite books are historical fiction, and you loved the history courses in high school. But engineering seems the practical course to major in. After all, what can you do with a history degree? Your parents have been happy that you are an engineering student, and your father has mentioned a few times how easy it is to get a good job in that field. What will they think if you switch to studying history? On the other hand, you are increasingly uneasy about spending your life doing something you don't especially like. What should you do?

Session 2

What is God's Will?

- I. Review.
 - A. What are three evidences that God does guide His people?
– Significance of man, History, Promises
 - B. What are three scriptures where God promises to guide us?
– Psalm 23; Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5.
- II. The Nature of God's Will.
 - A. We use the word "will" in two ways.
 - B. Will = fixed determination.
 - C. Will = desire.
- III. God's Decretive Will.
 - A. The plan of God.
 - B. "God predestined us...according to His will." – Ephesians 1:5.
 - C. "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." – 1 Peter 3:17.
 - D. "The plans of the LORD stand forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." – Psalm 33:11.
 - E. "Many are the plan in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails." – Proverbs 19:21.

- F. God does have one specific plan for your life.
- G. The events and choices of your life irresistibly and sovereignly work that plan in every detail.
- H. God's plan has all your mistakes, blindnesses and sins accounted for in advance.²
- I. His plan is, and will remain secret – Deuteronomy 29:29.
- J. Scripture never instructs us to seek this plan.
- K. It is futile and foolish to attempt to discover this plan.

IV. God's Preceptive Will.

- A. The commands of God.
- B. "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." – Matthew 6:10.
- C. "It is God's will that you should be sanctified." – 1 Thessalonians 4:3
- D. The scripture has all God's commands – John 15:9-17.
- E. "...everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." – John 16:15.
- F. Scripture thoroughly equips for every good work – 2 Timothy 3:17.
- G. If the will of God is the commands of God, the scripture adequately reveals the will of God.
- H. Our job is to learn the scripture thoroughly.

V. Conclusion.

- A. God has a comprehensive plan for us, but He has not revealed it.
- B. What God has revealed is His commands.
- C. God's will is to know and do His commands.
- D. Our job is to learn the scripture thoroughly.

Theories of Guidance

I. Secret plan.

- A. God has a secret plan for your life.
- B. That plan is your guidance.
- C. Your job is to discover what that plan is.
- D. Methods of discovery.
 - 1. Fleece – Gideon already knew God's will.
 - 2. Sensations – feelings, dreams, spontaneous ideas can arise from many sources.

² Ibid., p. 59.

3. Circumstances.
 - a. Can't distinguish between the work of God or of Satan in mere circumstances.
 - b. No one in the Bible was guided this way.
 - c. Many biblical characters acted against circumstances, e.g. Paul.
4. Peace – Colossians 3:15 doesn't refer to guidance.
- E. These methods of obtaining guidance are essentially pagan.
 1. Seek knowledge we don't need and which God does not reveal.
 2. Akin to divination, etc.
 3. Make knowing God's will more important than knowing God.
 4. Are unreliable at best, idolatrous at worst.
- F. You are not in trouble if you have been doing these things.
 1. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" – Romans 8:1
 2. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God." – Romans 8:38-39
 3. God's plan has all your mistakes, blindnesses and sins accounted for in advance
 4. Our purpose is not to criticize you, but to point you in a better direction.

II. Wisdom.

- A. God's secret plan is really secret.
- B. God guides you by giving you wisdom.
- C. Your job is to become wise.

III. Role of the Holy Spirit.

- A. God is always present with us.
- B. Fellowship with God is more important than guidance from God.
- C. God guides, makes wise, and befriends us.

IV. Case study: Transferring Schools.

You are a sophomore at the university, doing well, and satisfied with your school, friends, and Christian fellowship. One day while talking with the head of the Geology department, he says you should transfer to a different school. You are studying biology with the intent to pursue research, and he thinks your current program will not prepare you well enough to meet your goals. He shows you the list of the top ten schools in the country in your field and suggests you transfer to one of them. Any of them is going

to be a lot more expensive than your current school. You are presently enjoying an exceptional Christian fellowship, and the schools you are considering will not be as easy on your faith. What should you do?

Session 3

Decisions and Guidance

- I. Review
 - A. How can we be sure God will guide us?
 - He promises to do so.
 - B. What are the two ways we use the word “will?”
 - Fixed determination; Desire.
 - C. What is God’s decretive will?
 - The plans of God
 - D. What is God’s preceptive will?
 - The commands of God
 - E. Where can we find God’s decrees for our lives, or for anything?
 - Nowhere. God’s decrees are secret.
 - F. Where can we find God’s precepts?
 - Scripture.
 - G. What are the two theories of divine guidance?
 - Secret plan; Wisdom
 - H. What are the problems with the Secret Plan theory?
 - I. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in guidance?
 - He guides, makes wise, and befriends us.
- II. Kinds of decisions.
 - A. Black and white.
 - 1. Moral issues are clear.
 - 2. Scripture speaks directly to these.
 - 3. E.g. don’t marry unbelievers.
 - 4. Guidance: do what scripture says.
 - B. Personal preference.
 - 1. Moral issues don’t exist.
 - 2. Scripture doesn’t speak to these issues.
 - 3. E.g. what color socks to wear.
 - 4. Guidance: do what pleases you, and God will be pleased.

- C. Difficult.
 - 1. Moral issues are under the surface.
 - 2. Scripture provides principles.
 - 3. E.g. which person to marry.
 - 4. Guidance: seek wisdom from scripture and the Holy Spirit.

- III. The prerequisite for guidance.
 - A. Offer your body as a living sacrifice – Romans 12:1.
 - B. Be single-souled – James 1:7.
 - C. Believe in Jesus – He is reliable and should be obeyed.

True Guidance

- I. True guidance.
 - A. True divine guidance comes through a combination of sources.
 - B. Scripture.
 - 1. Contains all we need to know of God's will.
 - 2. We must apply it by thoughtful consideration of our situation.
 - C. Counsel – other people, especially believers, help us apply the scripture to our lives.
 - D. Circumstances.
 - 1. God guides in circumstances by allowing or preventing certain actions.
 - 2. We should see circumstances as God's providence, and not rail against them.
 - 3. Circumstances are not a code to discover God's secret plan for us.
- II. Holy Spirit.
 - A. May occasionally give us dreams, intuitions.
 - B. His ordinary work is to teach us to apply the scripture in our lives.
 - C. Without Him we will never follow God's will.
 - D. Thus prayer for God's help is an essential part of seeking divine guidance.
- III. Summary: **Divine guidance comes as we learn and obey God's commands, and apply them in our situation through the help of the Holy Spirit.**

IV. Case study: Switching Jobs.

You have been working at the ABC Corporation for 10 years. You have a solid, dependable job. The pay and benefits are average. You don't really like your work, but at least it's not unpleasant or dangerous – and there isn't a lot of travel. You also have 3 children, ages 2, 5, and 7. You want more children, but your wife says you can barely make ends meet as it is and does not want more children under the current conditions. You have a three bedroom house, but it is starting to feel cramped. Your best friend has told you of a job opening in the company he works for. It pays better, has better benefits, and looks much more rewarding. You want to take this new job, but your wife is opposed. She doesn't trust your friend's judgment, and she thinks you are foolish to give up a secure job for an unknown. Furthermore, the new job will require you to travel one week every two months. What should you do?

Session 4 *Wisdom and Maturity*

- I. Review
 - A. How did we define divine guidance?
 - Divine guidance comes as we learn and obey God's commands, and apply them in our situation through the help of the Holy Spirit.
 - B. What is the prerequisite for divine guidance?
 - Be single-souled
- II. Wisdom is required.
 - A. "...asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." – Colossians 1:9.
 - B. Philippians 1:9-11.
 - C. "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is..." – Romans 12:2.
 - D. Proverbs 2:1-4.
 - E. Promise of wisdom – James 1:5-7.
- III. Maturity is expected.
 - A. Ephesians 4:13
 - B. Colossians 1:28.
 - C. James 1:4

IV. The mind of Christ.

- A. We have it – now! – 1 Corinthians 2:16.
- B. The word of God is put in our hearts and minds – Ezekiel 36:26-27.
- C. We must use it to develop its full ability.

V. Wisdom and the mind of Christ – 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16.

- A. 1:18-25 – wisdom and foolishness.
 - 1. The world thinks God's wisdom is foolish.
 - 2. God says the world's wisdom is foolish.
- B. 1:26-31 – the wise and the fools.
 - 1. The world thinks God's people are foolish.
 - 2. Jesus is the true wisdom from God.
 - 3. Therefore those in Christ are truly wise.
- C. 2:1-5 – wisdom and salvation.
 - 1. The world's wisdom does not save.
 - 2. The power of God is what saves.
 - 3. This power is from the Holy Spirit.
- D. 2:6-11 – the nature of God's wisdom.
 - 1. God's wisdom is for the mature.
 - 2. God's wisdom is entirely different than the world's wisdom.
 - 3. God's wisdom is a mystery.
 - 4. God's wisdom is revealed by the Holy Spirit.
- E. 2:12-16 – God's wisdom is contained in the mind of Christ.
 - 1. Receiving the Holy Spirit == receiving the mind of Christ (cp. vv. 12, 16)
 - 2. God's wisdom is spiritual wisdom.
 - 3. Natural man cannot penetrate spiritual wisdom.
 - 4. Natural man concludes that spiritual wisdom is foolish.
 - 5. Spiritual man rightly judges the wisdom of others.
 - 6. This is because he has the mind of Christ, who is the judge of all.

F. Conclusions.

1. All believers are spiritual and have the mind of Christ.
2. Immature believers will think and act like natural men because they have not practiced the use of their new mind and their new spiritual nature.
3. They will appear foolish, like natural men.
4. As believers mature, the mind of Christ in them will become evident and they will act in true wisdom.

VI. Supernatural guidance.

- A. Wisdom and maturity are more miraculous and supernatural than dreams and prophecy.
- B. God supernaturally transforms the whole person so that he begins to think like Christ.
- C. Thinking Christ's thoughts all the time is much better than getting a divine message occasionally.

VII. More glorious guidance.

- A. The age of the Spirit is more glorious – 2 Corinthians 3:7-11.
- B. God treats us as friends, not as servants – John 15:14.
- C. God treats us as sons, expecting us to make decisions as He would – Romans 8:14-17.

VIII. Conclusion.

- A. How did God's will get lost?
 1. God's decrees have been in operation from the beginning.
 2. God's precepts have been in the Bible all along.
 3. Sin clouds our understanding so that God's will can seem lost.
- B. Where can we find it?
 1. God's will is in the Bible and is revealed by the Holy Spirit.
 2. Divine guidance comes as we learn the Bible and apply it in our situation through the help of the Holy Spirit.
 3. God promises to guide us, even if it sometimes feels like we are cast adrift.

IX. Case Study: Whom to marry.

You are in love with Mary. Ever since you met her at college you just cannot keep your thoughts off her. In the two years since you met you have spent a lot of time together and enjoyed every minute of it. Mary is exciting and fun to be around. She is studying economics, but she says her real desire is to have children. She had an internship with a Wall Street company in New York last summer and you missed her a lot. She did well last summer and the company is planning to make her a very attractive job offer. You both will graduate this year. Perhaps you should ask her to marry you this summer. You are picturing a blissful, fun-filled home life with a happy wife and children. But you have this nagging doubt in the back of your mind. Your parents have been happy about you and Mary, but Jenny is the girl they always talk about. Jenny is a beautiful girl, too. She is studying chemistry and is involved in the Christian fellowship. Jenny is always helping the other girls on campus, so you don't see as much of her. You like Jenny and find her attractive. She is a very nice person and has an obvious love for God, but she just doesn't light up your life the way Mary does. Mary is a real believer and goes to church too, at least whenever she's with you. What should you do?

C. David Green