

“The Will of God”

1 Corinthians 1:1

The first three verses of this book act as an introduction to what we call “First Corinthians” (or, “One Corinthians,” as some say). It was the first of two letters recorded in Scripture from the Apostle Paul to the saints in the city of Corinth. This was not, however, the first letter he wrote to them. 1 Cor. 5:9 mentions an earlier letter that he sent to them dealing with the issue of fornication.

Although there are some very familiar statements made here that we find common in the Apostle Paul’s writings to the churches, they are very important truths, nonetheless. We find in these verses some truths that can teach all of us what it means to be a follower of Christ – as the Apostle said to this church, recorded in chapter 11 and verse one – “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”

In order to be the follower of Christ we need to be, especially in the world we live in today, we are going to need to be fully aware of, and surrendered to, the will of God in our lives. If we are not, then we will not be the servant we are meant to be, and the church, as the Bible teaches it, and as the Lord would have it, will not be effective. The very theme of the book deals with that issue. As C. I. Scofield said of the theme: “The subjects treated are various, but may all be classified under the general theme, Christian conduct. Even the tremendous revelation of the truth concerning the resurrection is made to bear upon that theme – 1 Cor. 15:58.”

Anyone who has ever tried to formulate a private prayer in silence, and in his own heart, will know what I mean by diabolical interference. The forces of evil are in opposition to the will of God. And the nearer a man approaches God’s will, the more

apparent and stronger and more formidable this opposition is seen to be. It is only when we are going in more or less the same direction as the devil that we are unconscious of any opposition at all.

David Bolt

I. THE WILL OF GOD IS PERSONAL – “PAUL”

(We looked at the man himself in a fair amount of depth when we looked at Romans 1:1 so I am not going to dwell much on who he was, but rather on the issue of the will of God as it related to him personally.)

A. It is not ambiguous (unclear) or vague or general, but rather, it is specific to every individual believer

B. Some say they don't know what the will of God is for their lives – if we are doing the things the Bible clearly states as being His will (things like praying, being thankful, being a witness, living right, etc.) then the decisions we face in life will be either abundantly clear to us, and/or the decisions we make will be the right ones, whether they are clear at the time or not.

The disciple who is in the condition of abiding in Jesus is in the will of God, and his apparent free choices are God's foreordained decrees. Mysterious? Logically absurd? But a glorious truth to a saint.

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

The cross is the pain involved in doing the will of God.

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

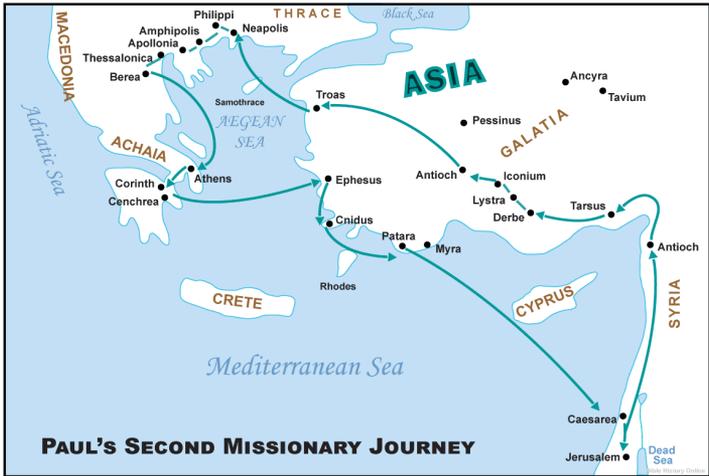
I find doing the will of God leaves me no time for disputing about his plans.

George Macdonald (1824-1905)

A deeply spiritual (though misinformed) missionary I know used to pray for special guidance about the most trivial matters. She would even try to decide whether it was God's will that she wash her hair on a given evening. She was right in understanding that God is interested in the mundane affairs of life, but she was wrong in believing that she always needed a special sign. Obviously she was a mental wreck. She did not realize that the will of God is simply living in obedience to whatever lies ahead. His guidance is not mysterious. In short, if your hair needs washing, wash it!

Erwin W. Lutzer (1941-)

- C. The first word of the letter is the name of the human author of the book – "Paul" (or, as we will refer to him throughout his writings, "The Apostle Paul")***
- D. The letter begins with his name, as was often the case in letters of this time period, but what can be understood from this verse, and his name being here, is that he was calling to mind the important roll he played in establishing the church in Corinth – it demonstrates the application of the will of God in a person's life***
- E. The church was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey***



1. He leaves on his second trip with Silas (Acts 15:40)
2. At Lystra they pick up Timothy (Acts 16:1)
3. At Troas Paul receives his Macedonian vision (Acts 16:9)
4. At Philippi a woman named Lydia, a demon-possessed girl, and a Roman jailer are all three saved (Acts 16:14-34)
5. From Philippi Paul moves to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1)
6. From there to Berea (Acts 17:10)
7. From Berea to Athens (Acts 17:15)
8. From Athens, finally to Corinth (Acts 18:1)

F. Acts chapter 18 relates the "groundbreaking" ceremonies for the church in Corinth

1. In Corinth Paul soon meets Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2)

2. Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, is saved (Acts 18:8)
3. God comforts Paul in a vision (Acts 18:9-10)
4. Paul stays at least eighteen months in Corinth before departing (Acts 18:11)
5. The Corinthian church was then pastored by a man called Apollos (Acts 19:1; 1 Cor. 3:4-6)

II. THE WILL OF GOD HAS A PURPOSE – “CALLED TO BE AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH THE WILL OF GOD”

A. As we understand the will of God FOR our lives personally then we will be better able to see the purpose of the will of God IN our lives.

B. The Apostle Paul refers to his apostleship, as he does on numerous occasions in his writings. This is done to vindicate his authority (he confronts this again later in his letter, so we will see this point brought up again in our study), considering he was not one of the original Twelve, and his authority was constantly called into question. He mentions it as he does to show to his readers he had a message that was from the Lord Himself.

C. “Called” - The issue of the “call” is that of appointment to ministry – he was given the summons to duty and he obeyed. “This word called means here not merely to be invited but has the

sense of appointed. It indicates that he had not assumed the office himself, but that he was set apart to it by the authority of Christ himself... (Barnes)

D. He is said to be "an apostle of Jesus Christ"

1. The words "to be" in the King James Version of the Bible are in italics, meaning they were supplied by the translators to clarify the reading to make it easier to follow (as they saw it). They appear in many other versions of the English Bible, but not in italics, so it's not as clear in those versions that they were inserted for clarity.
2. If you drop the "to be," the Greek simply says "called an apostle of Jesus Christ" (or, literally in the Greek "a called apostle") – he wasn't necessarily called by the Lord to be one, he was placed into service AS ONE.
3. The "to be" is to be seen in the light of his service as much as his call. Viewed originally – he had no option, no choice but to be what the Lord called him to be – that's how the Apostle viewed his ministry. How do we view ours?

E. He said that he was "called...through the will of God"

1. That is to be true of all of us, in whatever capacity it is we serve
2. The word "will," as it relates to God "signifies His gracious disposition toward something. Used to designate what God Himself does of His own good pleasure."

(Zodhiates)

3. We are here, to serve according to, or through the authority of, and for the purpose of, "the will of God." If we are here for any other reason, we are out of the "will of God" and will be a detriment rather than a help.

F. He says all this to get to the point – he was writing to "the church of God" with a message from God – he needed the readers in the congregation there to understand his authority to give what he was about to give. In the same sense, when a pastor/teacher stands before the congregation of the Lord and presents the truth of the Word of God to His people, it is with the same authority and with the same consequences as is seen here – it is the will of God to be so.

III. THE WILL OF GOD PRODUCES FRUIT – "SOSTHENES OUR BROTHER"

A. He then refers to a man named Sosthenes as a brother – a co-laborer with him, and someone that the Corinthian believers would most likely have known. Mentioning him as a "co-sponsor" of the letter, so to speak, would have created a sense of legitimacy to the letter for the readers.

1. We cannot be absolutely sure who this Sosthenes was but there is another man by that name mentioned in the book of Acts (18:12-17) in relation to the city of Corinth and it would be very likely that it is the same man (it would be quite a

“coincidence” if it wasn’t).

2. If it is the same man, then he was a ruler among the Jews that was converted and travelled with the Apostle Paul (and was now in Ephesus with him, since that’s where the letter was sent from). Some think he may have been the Apostle’s secretary, but there is no real evidence for this.
3. There are some (the Orthodox Church, for instance) that have him as one of the Seventy that Jesus sent out (in fact, they have him as a saint because of it), and if that is the case then it wouldn’t likely be the same man as in recorded in Acts.
4. Who he was, as a person, is not as important as who he was in service to the Lord – “our brother.” Again, notice the word “our” is italicized in the KJV. Literally, in the Greek, it is “Sosthenes the brother” – this is a normal Greek idiom that is often used for “our brother” (which is why almost all versions have it that way), but the use of it here as it is demonstrates how close he was to the Apostle, as well as his relationship with the congregation of God at Corinth.

B. If we are walking in the will of God, as He wants us to then we will bring others along with us – whether we win them to the Lord ourselves or not, we will have an influence on them and impact their lives to produce the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Galatians 5:22-23

(22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

(23) Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

John 15:1-8

(1) I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

(2) Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

(3) Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

(4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

(5) I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

(6) If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

(7) If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

(8) Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

Conclusion: The will of God is not intended by the Lord to be a difficult concept, nor is it intended to be hard to determine. Like the Apostle Paul, if we are following the Lord as we should be then His will will be clear to us, no matter the need we have to know what it is (in prayer, in practice, in person, etc.).

Where are you in your Christian walk? As we will see from the study of First Corinthians, the closer the church got to the world, the further they got from

the will of God, and the less impact they had on their community for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus pursued the will of His Father – “Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done, O Lord” He prayed in the Garden. He prayed, in what we call the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” If Jesus, the Son of God, prayed concerning the will of the Father, don’t you think that should be our desire as well?

Perhaps the most astonishing characteristic of Jesus’ praying is that when he prayed for others, he never concluded by saying, “If it be thy will.” Nor did the apostles or prophets when they were praying for others. They obviously believed that they knew what the will of God was before they prayed the prayer of faith. They were so immersed in the milieu of the Holy Spirit that when they encountered a specific situation, they knew what should be done. Their praying was so positive that it often took the form of a direct, authoritative command.

Richard J. Foster (1942-)