

The Experience of Life:

Knowing the Will of God

by Witness Lee

We now come to the lesson of knowing the will of God or the leading of the Lord. This lesson is closely related in experience to the teaching of the anointing. The purpose of the anointing is to anoint the substance of God into us that we may reach the goal of the mingling of God with man. Moreover, the teaching of the anointing is given that we may know the leading of the Lord and His mind toward us. The leading and the mind of the Lord are the will of God. Therefore, if we want to know the will of God, we must have the experience of obeying the teaching of the anointing. Only those who experience the anointing are capable of knowing the will of God. For those who do not experience the anointing, it is almost impossible to know the will of God.

However, when we discuss this lesson on knowing the will of God, we cannot begin with the teaching of the anointing, because the anointing emphasizes the moving of the Holy Spirit in us and is not the will of God itself. At the same time, the will of God is too great a matter and can never be discussed merely as a part of the teaching of the anointing. Therefore, we must devote one lesson wholly to discuss it in detail.

The Scriptural Basis

Ephesians 5:17: “Therefore do not be foolish, *but understand what the will of the Lord is.*” Colossians 1:9: “That you may be *filled with the full knowledge of His will* in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Romans 12:1-2:

I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, *that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect.*”

Hebrews 10:5 and 7: “Therefore, coming into the world, He says,...Behold, I have come...*to do Your will, O God.*” Matthew 6:10: “*Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth.*” Hebrews 13:21: “...*the doing of His will.*”

The Meaning of the Will of God

What, actually, is the will of God? Christians often mention the will of God in relation to trivial affairs, such as their occupation and marriage. They use this phrase in a very casual manner, thus belittling and underestimating the will of God. When we carefully study the will of God throughout the New Testament, we discover that it points to matters great and lofty. For example, Ephesians 5:17, to “understand what the will of the Lord is,” seems to be a very common phrase, but the context of the book of Ephesians reveals that this phrase indicates depth. Ephesians is a very special book in the Bible; many of its words and principles speak of God and eternity. Therefore, the will of God mentioned there can never merely refer to common, insignificant matters. Furthermore, Ephesians chapter five is based on the preceding chapters. Chapter one speaks of the mystery of God’s will (v. 9), and chapter three speaks of the will of God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (v. 11); both refer to extremely great things. Then chapter five exhorts us to understand the will of God, which naturally refers to the great matters previously mentioned, not to trivial matters in our life.

The same is true of Colossians. After Colossians 1:9 speaks of our being filled with the knowledge of God’s will, the following chapters mention the mystery of God in Christ. God’s plan concerning Christ, how God desires that Christ must have the preeminence in all things and become all in all. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit speaks of the will of God in chapter one, it again must refer to the extremely great matters.

After Romans 12:2 exhorts us to prove the will of God, verses 3 through 5 continue by speaking of our different functions and our coordination in the Body of Christ. Hence, the will of God mentioned here is also of great importance.

Hebrews 10:7 is a direct quote from the Lord Himself: "I have come...to do Your will." The context of this verse is the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, a matter of great importance; therefore, when He declared His obedience to God's will, He did not refer merely to small matters such as clothing, eating, lodging, and other trivial matters of life, but to His whole move on this earth in fulfilling God's eternal plan. This is a matter of great significance.

In Matthew 6:10 the Lord teaches us to pray that the will of the Father be done on earth as it is in heaven. This means that the Lord wants the will of God done in heaven to be accomplished on earth—again this is of ultimate importance.

Hebrews 13:20-21 speaks of the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, making us perfect in every good thing to do His will. Since this God who makes us do His will is such a great God, His will must also refer to great matters.

These Scriptures speak of God's will as originating from God and coming to us both from eternity to the present time and from heaven to earth. Thus, God's will mentioned in the Bible is of great magnitude. How different this is from our past concept regarding the will of God! May the Lord open our eyes and change our concept. What really, then, is the will of God? We will discuss this from three aspects:

The Will of God Is His Heart's Desire

When we speak of God's will, we must trace it to the desire of His heart. Ephesians 1:5-12 is one of the most important portions in the Bible concerning the will of God. It says that God in eternity has a plan, which is according to His good pleasure. This portion mentions three related items: "purpose," "pleasure," and "will." Pleasure is of the heart, since the heart is an organ for delight. God has a heart as well as man. Therefore, God also has things of His pleasure, delight, and affection, which means that He also has His heart's desire.

To attain His pleasure, He has a plan which He purposed to fulfill to reach His goal. This purpose is His will. Therefore, God's will and His heart's desire are the same. Anything not touching God's heart's desire is not His will.

For example, the Bible reveals that God's heart's desire

from eternity is a group of people as the companions of His Son. To reach this goal, God planned the creation of heaven, earth, and man according to His pleasure. Then He created everything according to His plan. At that time creation became His will.

Plainly speaking, God's will is His heart's desire, planned according to His pleasure. From His viewpoint, anything hidden in God is His heart's desire. From our viewpoint, when His heart's desire is executed upon us, it becomes His will. Therefore, the will of God which comes upon us is His heart's desire, because His will is derived from His heart's desire.

The Will of God Is the Mingling of God with Man

Since God's will is His heart's desire, we must learn what that desire is. It is the mingling of God with man. To mingle with man is both God's desire and His will.

A thorough study of the Bible will help us discover the amazing fact that God in eternity planned according to His heart's desire to attain the goal of mingling Himself with man. God in the universe has this one will: to work Himself into man and to mingle Himself with man. His creation, redemption, sanctification, and all other aspects of His work are for this one purpose. This is the one desire of His heart in the universe: it is the only goal, and it is the basic principle of all His work in the New Testament. Therefore, if we desire to know God's will in any situation, we must first ascertain whether the situation is conducive to the mingling of Himself with us. Without this mingling, no matter how good or praiseworthy the situation may be, it is not God's will. This is a strict measurement!

The earthly life of our Lord Jesus is the perfect expression of this principle. The Lord said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will" (Heb. 10:7, 9), and, "I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30). We see how the Lord's behavior on this earth was according to God's will. To Him, His entire life on this earth was God's will. However, He also said, "The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works" (John 14:10). This means that while He was on this earth, His words, His deeds, and all His living did not originate from Himself, but the Father, who was abiding in Him, mingled with Him and worked through Him. From these three Scripture quotations we see that the Lord's life on this earth was in obedience to God's will and that it was a life of the mingling of God with man.

We cannot separate the will of God from the desire of God's heart; neither can we separate the will of God from God Himself. If we depart from His heart's desire, we cannot know His will. Likewise, if we depart from God Himself, we cannot have His will. You may feel that you

have understood and obeyed His will, yet if you have not touched God Himself, He remains God, and you remain you; there is no mingling whatever between you and Him, and you can be certain that what you have felt to be His will is not His will. A Christian should be like the Lord Jesus in obeying God's will. Not only must we be able to say in every matter that it is not my will, but God's will; we must be able to say further that it is not I that work, but God who works in me. It is not enough just to say that I know something to be God's will. We must also be able to say that when I do this thing, it is God who does it in me. We must ask two questions, "Whose undertaking is this, God's or my own?" and, "Who is doing it, God or myself?" If we can only ask the first question and not the second, the subject of His will remains doubtful. Anything that I do on my own is certainly not God's will; only what He does is His will.

For example, a brother may be planning to go to a certain place. If he can only say, "I am clear that it is God's will for me to go," this is not enough. He still must ascertain whether God goes with him and mingles more with him. As another example, when we offer money on the Lord's Day, we should not only ask, "Is this offering God's will?" but also, "Am I offering it myself, or is God offering it through me?" Therefore, in every matter, not only must we know what God's pleasure and desire are, but we must also definitely determine whether we have the presence of God and whether God mingles and works with us. It is not enough to say that we are doing the work of God. We should also be able to say that it is God who mingles with us to do His work. This is His will.

From God's viewpoint, the aspect of God's will as His heart's desire is difficult for us to fathom. But from the human viewpoint, the aspect of God's will being His mingling with man is absolutely subjective and easy to comprehend, because God mingles with us through the anointing. Whenever there is the anointing, there is also the mingling of God and the presence of God. Without the anointing, it is impossible to have His mingling and His presence with man. Therefore, to understand His will, we must touch the anointing. Whenever we feel the inner anointing and the presence of God, we are in God's will; otherwise, we are not in God's will.

For years we have been speaking about God's will, but somehow we have felt that it was remote and vague. Now we believe that God has given us light, that He has

caused us to have a clearer insight, and that He has enabled us to present it in a more concrete manner. God's will is now substantiated; it is no longer vague and abstract. The God we believe in is not only real and living, but He lives in us. In anything that is His will, He is in us anointing and mingling Himself, making His presence felt in us. If we can touch God inwardly in all matters, His substance is increased in us and mingled with us. Then we can be assured that this is the will of God and proceed accordingly.

Although God's will is an extremely great matter, yet, speaking from the standpoint of God mingling Himself with man, it is not too difficult for us to touch, and it is not unfathomable. If we can comprehend this point thoroughly, then not only can we touch His will as something lofty and deep, but we can also easily know His will.

The Will of God Is the Fulfillment of His Plan

God's will is not only His heart's desire and His mingling with man, but also the fulfillment of His plan. Generally, we are used to belittling and underestimating the will of God. Many people ask, "Is it God's will that I go to a certain place today? Is it His will that I seek a doctor for my sickness? Is it His will that I seek this occupation?" We miserable beings can never forget ourselves when we mention the will of God! Nor can we be separated from the trivial matters of life! We always view the will of God from an earthly standpoint, from our present situation, and from ourselves. Actually, none of these trivial matters of life can come up to the will of God! How great and how high is the will of God! God's will fulfills His eternal plan!

The book of Ephesians reveals to us God's heart's desire and God's plan. God's plan in Christ originated from His heart's desire. God in eternity had a plan, which He purposed to fulfill. This plan is the will of God. Therefore, the will of God is for the fulfillment of His plan. All the works of God in this universe are according to His will and for the fulfillment of His plan.

Hence, if we want to understand the will of God, the preliminary requirement is that we must know the eternal plan of God. We must be clear concerning what God is going to do on this earth, in this age, and in this locality. When we are clear about these matters, then we are qualified to touch the will of God and ascertain what His will is for us today.

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Some brothers and sisters, who are indeed born again and realize that they are God's children, are ignorant and even unconcerned about what God is doing in this universe, what His economy is on this earth, and what His move is for this day. They themselves, their daily living, and their business as well are all for themselves, not for God. They are completely outside of God's economy. Yet they pray daily for God's will in their own living, behavior, and career. Consequently, the result of their inquiry is something of their own will, not God's will. They neither know nor are they in the plan of God. Any such person has no way of understanding the will of God.

To understand the will of God, the basic problem we must solve is to realize that God, to whom we belong and whom we serve, has a great plan in the universe. He desires a group of people for the building up of the Body of Christ and a corporate man to be the mystical bride of His Son. Furthermore, we need to know what God would do in our locality. If we touch the plan of God and place ourselves into the plan of God in this manner, we are taking God's economy as our career. Thus, when we engage in business, teach, or whatever we do, we are for God's economy; our entire living and all our actions are for His economy. Then we shall have the ground and qualification to touch God's will and be clear about His guidance regarding all the affairs of our daily life.

Therefore, each one of us should first ask ourselves: Do I clearly see the economy of God on this earth? Do I really see what God desires to do in this locality today? Even though we pursue the growth of life, the fellowship in life, and the presence of the Lord, yet without knowing His economy, these afford us but a little spiritual enjoyment for ourselves and fall short of the will of God.

Before we see the plan of God, though He is in charge of our affairs and our living, we are only under God's providential care, not under His will. When we have seen God's plan, we dare not use the term "God's will" in a light manner. We will not carelessly refer to trivial situations as being God's will. We can only speak of these matters in general as God's care for us.

The Means of Knowing the Will of God

How does God show us His will? By what means do we come to know God's will? Basically, there are five categories by which we may know His will.

Creation

First, we need to know God's will through His creation of all things, including matter, nature, and mankind. Revelation 4:11 says that all things were created according to His will. Everything that exists in the universe speaks forth a

measure of God's will. All things in heaven and on earth are certain components which enable us to know the will of God. Therefore, to know God's will, we must take note of all things which He created in the universe. They are like a book for us to study; hence, we must search out and discover why God needed to create all things in heaven and on earth. What was His purpose in creating man? Why is the human race distributed as it is on the earth? If we thoroughly study the matter of creation, the magnitude of God's will in this universe will be understood to a certain degree.

Examples of this aspect can be found in the Old Testament. There people learned a part of God's plan through all things which He created. Psalm 8 is a very good example. This psalm, which is a spiritual psalm, covers the creation, the present age, and the kingdom. The Lord Jesus quoted this psalm in Matthew 21:16, and it is quoted again in Hebrews 2. The writer was inspired to write this psalm while he was observing heaven and earth. As he considered the heavens, the works of God's fingers, and the moon and stars that He ordained, he praised the Lord: "O Jehovah our Lord, / How excellent is Your name / In all the earth, / You who have set Your glory over the heavens!" He saw the heavens speaking forth the glory of God and the earth telling the sweetness of His name. Through the means of creation he knew God and His will regarding the whole earth.

In another instance, the psalmist of Psalm 19 discovered that although this universe uttered "no speech and no words, yet their voice is heard" (v. 3, Sept.). Their line is gone out through all the earth and their language to the end of the world. Therefore, the heavens do declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork. This shows how the psalmist knew the will of God through His creation. If we desire to understand God's will, we cannot neglect His creation. We must be enlarged to such an extent that we recognize God speaking to us through all things. Everyone who loves God and pursues after Him must at some time be brought to the place where he can comprehend God's will in the universe. First, such a comprehension of creation will enlarge his heart. The universe will enlarge him to become a universal man. Thus, he can read the will of God from a high and lofty ground and from eternity. Second, he will not be concerned about matters of minute importance. He will not argue with others for the sake of making a dollar in business, nor will he neglect God's work in the entire earth by being overly concerned about the situation and need in his own local church. He will indeed be able to say, as the writer in Psalm 8, "O Jehovah our Lord, / How excellent is Your name / In all the earth!" Every day he will labor faithfully on behalf of his local church, yet his heart will be enlarged to include the burden of all the churches on earth. Third, in his concern for the work and move of the Lord, he can easily be led anytime and

anywhere—the whole earth is his field, and all souls are the object of his work. He can be led to show concern for the church far away as well as for the church nearby. The Lord's work in the whole earth has become the goal of his concern.

We regret to say that today many brothers and sisters have never read the creation of God in order to know God's will. Meanwhile, they give daily attention to the occurrences in their own little circles. They themselves are their own universe, their all. They are completely trapped in themselves. Therefore, whenever they seek to understand the will of God, their little self is their only starting point and base. What they ask is: Should I teach in a certain school? Should I consider marrying a certain sister? Should I take the train or the plane to travel somewhere? Should I see a certain doctor or go to a certain hospital regarding my ailment? All day long God's children inquire about God's will concerning such matters of daily living. Actually, these are not worth being listed under the category of the will of God. They are not God's will. Does God's will deal with our eating and clothing, our marriage and occupation, our healing and peaceful living? If our eyes have been opened by the Lord, we will see that our common talk about the will of God has nothing to do with God Himself. It is certainly not the will of God that is mentioned in the Bible.

The strange thing is that today's Christians are occupied with many things that are not mentioned in the Bible.

Conversely, many things that are mentioned in the Bible are unknown to them. Such is the case of many in knowing the will of God. The Bible never tells us to pay continuous attention to sickness, occupation, traveling, and other matters pertaining to our living, and to study the will of God concerning them. However, most Christians are fully occupied with these matters. Every time the will of God is mentioned in the Bible, it touches God's heart's desire, God's plan, God's work on this earth, the church of God, the Body of Christ, etc., all of which are matters of great importance and eternal value. Among God's children, we have seldom seen or heard these things mentioned.

For example, one brother may testify concerning some article of his possessions; it had been borrowed from him a long time ago and had not been returned. Therefore, he prayed to the Lord, and after a few days that article was returned. He was very glad and praised the Lord exceedingly. When we hear this kind of testimony, our heart groans. This type of person has seen neither heaven nor earth. He is completely enveloped in himself. All he sees is his little

earthly benefits. When he seeks the will of God, he can never forget himself or be severed from his selfish interests of gain. This kind of person is not qualified to talk about the will of God.

If anyone wants to talk about the will of God, he must first come out of himself. Moreover, to come out of himself and understand the eternal and lofty will of God, he must study God's creation carefully. Man must thoroughly study creation in order to become enlarged, withdraw from himself, touch a little upon God's desire and plan in the universe, and understand the will of God. The more spiritual a person is, the more he will realize God in all things. The deeper he lives in the Lord, the more he will understand the will of God through creation.

God promised Abraham that he would become a great nation and that his descendants would be as the sand upon the seashore. But Abraham, still in himself, could not believe God's word. He still thought that his steward, Eliezer of Damascus, would be his heir. Therefore, God led him outside and said, "Look now toward the heavens, and count the stars" (Gen. 15:1-6). God then promised him that his descendants would be as great in multitude. When Abraham looked, he believed. Because he beheld God's creation and realized the deeds of God, he found faith. At that moment God accepted him, and he was reckoned righteous in the eyes of God.

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Take, as a further illustration, the story of Job. Although Job was repeatedly stricken by the hand of God, he failed to realize God's intention because he was completely in himself. His speeches were full of "I," full of himself. Thus, in order to bring him out of himself, God brought him to His creation. From Job 38 through 41, God questioned Job repeatedly regarding the created things in the universe. From this he finally came to see God's greatness and transcendency and thus came out of himself, saying with repentance of heart, "Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?" (Job 42:3). Originally, because he lived in himself, God's will was obscured from him. Now since he withdrew from himself, he saw God with his own eyes and understood His will. Therefore, it was through God's creation that Job was delivered from himself and touched the will of God.

Since the understanding of God's will has much to do with our knowing of God's creation, we need a scheduled plan to study God's creation, as though we were attending school. We must spend time to expose ourselves to nature

in order to comprehend God's will. The study of both astronomy and geography would prove very helpful.

The Bible

The second means of knowing God's will is the Bible. God's creation is only a piece of God's work; it is not sufficiently clear in revealing His will. The Bible as God's Word tells us thoroughly and clearly what God desires to do in the universe and what His purpose is. Therefore, the Bible is the clearest revelation regarding God's will. We should study the Bible and be familiar with the Bible in order to understand His will.

However, many people, by studying the Bible, cannot ascertain God's will. At times, they may have some light regarding His will, but only in trivial matters. For example, they extract from the book of Ephesians the minor points: the one who stole should not steal again, the wife should obey her husband, the husband should love his wife, the children should obey their parents, and the parents should not provoke their children. But important matters such as God's plan, the mystery of Christ, etc., are never discovered, because the person who reads the Bible in this way is so small and so much in himself. He studies the Word of God from his own pitiful view, and as a result, he is like a man who views the sky from the bottom of a well—his view is limited to the scope of his narrow self.

Therefore, the study of both creation and the Bible are inseparable. If we wish to study the Bible, we should first study creation and allow the universe to enlarge us; then we may comprehend the magnificent things in the Bible. Actually, the Bible itself is closely linked with all things in the universe. In the beginning we read about God creating the heavens and the earth, and at the end about the new heaven and new earth. All of God's works and will as revealed in the Bible are largely related to the universe. Therefore, the universe should first be studied that our heart may be enlarged; then the Bible should be studied that our view may be broadened. Thus, we will become one who has a clearer understanding of the will of God.

This category of study also includes spiritual literature, messages, spiritual fellowship, words of encouragement, testimonies of the saints, etc. These all originate from the Bible and serve as a means by which God reveals His will.

The Environment

The third way we know God's will is by our environment. When speaking of God's creation, we emphasize the sun, moon, stars, all things in heaven and on earth, and the vastness of His creation. But when we speak of environ-

ment, we are referring to our immediate surroundings, including people, things, and circumstances which affect our lives. In order that we may understand and obey His will, God arranges and changes our environment. Therefore, we need to study both God's will and His guidance in our environment.

When we first came to Taiwan, it appeared that it did not offer much for the Lord's work. Later, the Lord opened our eyes: we saw that in times past it was difficult to preach the gospel to the many provinces on the mainland of China. However, the political situation had now changed, and people out of all the different provinces had been gathered in Taiwan before our very eyes. Was not this a golden opportunity for the gospel? If we helped these people to be saved, would they not spread the gospel to all China upon their return to their provinces? With this vision, we exerted ourselves wholeheartedly in the work of the gospel. As a result, the rapid increase of new believers included many from all the provinces. Originally, they had neither opportunity to hear the gospel nor the heart towards the gospel; now their environment forced them to come to Taiwan. Consequently, they were saved. This is a good example of how God accomplished His will through the change of environment. When we are alert to the environment about us, we can often touch God's will and know His move for today.

Heart, Spirit, and Mind

The fourth means by which we understand God's will is our heart, spirit, and mind. God created these organs mainly for us to understand His will. If we were like a chair, without a heart, spirit, or mind, we would still not understand His will, even though God had prepared all things in the universe, including the environment about us, and had given us the Bible. Therefore, the three organs—heart, spirit, and mind—are of great importance in our understanding of God's will. The creation, the Bible, and the environment are but instruments for God to reveal His will to us; whereas, the heart, spirit, and mind are organs for us to comprehend His will.

When we speak of these three organs, we are referring to the parts of the new creation. Since the heart is a new heart, it inclines toward God, loves Him, seeks after Him, and chooses Him. Because the spirit is a new spirit, it can contact God and fellowship with Him. Since the mind is a renewed mind, having a renewed understanding, it can comprehend and interpret the feeling it obtains while in fellowship, and thus understand the will of God. If our heart is not new, our spirit is not keen, and our mind is not clear, we will be greatly hindered in the understanding of God's will. The men whom God has greatly used throughout the generations are those in whom these three organs have been renewed, made keen, and made clear.

The Holy Spirit

The fifth means by which we understand God's will is the Holy Spirit. Creation and our environment are outside of us; they are indistinct and not easily understood. The Bible and spiritual books which pertain to God's Word are more practical, yet still objective. However, the Holy Spirit enters into us to reveal God's will in us; hence, this is both practical and subjective. Furthermore, all the previous four means by which we understand God's will are entirely dependent upon the working of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit does not inspire us from within, even though our heart, spirit, and mind are in perfect condition, we still cannot understand the will of God through creation and environment. Neither will we understand the revelation God has given in the Bible. Creation, environment, and the Bible are the material means by which God reveals Himself, but it is the Holy Spirit who makes them meaningful to us. Our heart, spirit, and mind are the organs through which we understand God's will, but it is only through the Holy Spirit that these organs can properly function. Therefore, without the Holy Spirit, the four means we have mentioned will be ineffective in revealing God's will.

There are no other means through which we understand the will of God than the five mentioned above. Dreams and visions mentioned in the Bible are included in the category of the Holy Spirit and will not be listed separately.

In order to understand the will of God, we need to be familiar with these five categories: (1) God's creation, (2) His Word, (3) our environment, (4) our heart, spirit, and mind, and (5) the Holy Spirit. A full knowledge of these will certainly cause us to know the lofty and eternal will of God. We will be able to ascertain that God's eternal plan is to use the universe as a sphere and all things as a means to gain a group of people to be the mystical Body of His Son, thereby manifesting His glory. He has placed us in the very center of His plan that we may have a position in the Body of His Son and become His members. By knowing this, we will view the present through eternity and God's eyes; then we will immediately ask ourselves: "Am I a part of this plan? What kind of member am I in the Body?" Thus, we will be able to understand the will of God.

Regrettably, many brothers and sisters not only have failed to give attention to these five means, but they do not have any knowledge of them. They neither give attention to God's plan in this universe and to God's revelation in the Bible, nor do they care about His guidance in them

through the Holy Spirit. Their only concern is to have a wonderful, peaceful life for themselves. All they ask is: "Should I go to a certain place?" or, "Is it God's will for me to do a certain thing?" How can such a person understand God's will? This is definitely not the understanding of God's will as mentioned in the Bible. What the Bible mentions is His lofty and eternal will, which can only be understood by those who know these five categories. May God grant us mercy that we may have a drastic change in our concept toward His will.

Furthermore, we need to practice these items. First, we need to study creation. We must often leave our immediate setting and expose ourselves to nature, studying and observing it carefully. If possible, we should make extended trips in order to enlarge our horizon as well as our vision.

Secondly, we need to study the Bible. We must study the truths and revelations that are of great importance, giving special attention to those passages which deal with God's eternal will and His mystical plan.

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Thirdly, we must study our environment. Always learn to comprehend the meaning of the environment with its circumstances. Realize why God put you in such a place to meet certain kinds of people under certain circumstances. We need to study all of our surroundings and the world situation as well in order to understand the will of God in this present time.

Fourthly, regarding the heart, spirit, and mind, we must first ask God to give us a heart to love Him, be drawn to Him, and long for Him. Then we should always worship Him in our spirit, draw nigh to Him, and fellowship with Him. Furthermore, we need a renewed mind. We should learn to forsake the viewpoint of the worldly people, as well as our own selfish viewpoint, in order to grasp the mind of God and His viewpoint. The minds of some brothers and sisters are occupied with financial matters, clothing, business, and children; they never concentrate on matters pertaining to God. Therefore, their understanding concerning the will of God appears to be very dull and slow. This is unfortunate. Our minds must always be fixed on the things of God that we may be taught of God and that the Spirit may permeate more of our mind, thus making it a spiritual mind. Finally, as a result, we will easily comprehend the feeling in our spirit and understand spiritual things. This, however, depends upon constant practice.

Lastly, we need to give careful attention to the Holy Spirit. We should always sense the moving and understand the

revelation of the Holy Spirit within us. Our condition should always be right before the Lord so that the Holy Spirit can speak and reveal Himself to us. It is only by the Holy Spirit that God manifests the meaning of the universe and reveals the truths of the Bible to us. By seeking Him to do this, we will know His mind and our position in His plan. In all of these categories, we need to be constantly exercised and continually learning in order to use them as the means of understanding God's will in our experience

The Pathway of Knowing the Will of God

We have seen the definition of God's will and the means by which God reveals His will. Now we will consider the pathway or the procedure leading to the knowing of God's will. In other words, how can we understand God's will? We will cover this pathway by the following eight steps.

Present Yourself as a Sacrifice

The first step is to present ourselves as a sacrifice. The first two verses of Romans 12 show the clearest way to know God's will: "I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God...that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect." Here, both the presenting of our bodies and the knowing of His will are joined together in one passage, because the presenting of ourselves as a sacrifice is the primary condition for knowing God's will. When a man presents himself as a sacrifice, he becomes qualified and has the ground to know God's will.

Why must a man present himself as a sacrifice in order to know God's will? When a person has not yet presented himself as a sacrifice, he himself is the center of his life and the motivating factor of all his behavior and activities. He naturally thinks of himself and loves himself; even his slightest pursuing in the spiritual realm is for his own pleasure and enjoyment, for his future reward. However, he is oblivious to what God desires to do in this universe and never inquires into the purpose of God's salvation for him. Apparently, he seems to be seeking God's will, but actually he is wishing that God's will would fulfill his own satisfaction. When he is sick, he asks God whether he should go to a doctor, because he believes that if his going to a doctor is God's will, his sickness should soon be healed. Before going on a business trip, he asks God whether he should go, because he thinks that if the trip is God's will, he will be blessed and everything will go well. These people can only understand their own will and not the will of God; much less can they understand His lofty and eternal will. Therefore, if one desires to know God's will, he must first put himself and his all on the altar as a consecrated sacrifice to God.

He is not for himself, but for God. He lays down his own career and enters into God's economy. In this way it is possible for him to know God's will. The altar is the only place and the only ground upon which man can understand God's will.

Our experience of following the Lord involves two different stages of consecration. In the first stage, consecration is usually the result of our being touched and constrained by the Lord's love. As far as emotion is concerned, this kind of consecration is correct and acceptable to the Lord, but as far as consecration itself is concerned, it is insufficient. Since the consecration in this primary stage is mostly a matter of the emotion, it changes according to our mood. Therefore, it is not dependable or stable.

Only after a certain period of time, when our life has grown, our spirit is enlightened, and our view is broadened, will we gradually see the plan of God in this universe and recognize the working of God in this age. Then, naturally, we will have a deeper consecration by placing ourselves in His plan and work in order to meet His need and answer His call for this age. This is the second stage of consecration; it is deeper and higher than the first. It goes beyond our emotion and brings us into the reality of consecration. If we wish to understand God's will, we need this deeper kind of consecration. Man must see God's need concerning His plan and work and consecrate himself to God; then he has the ground to understand God's will.

This is the kind of consecration that Romans 12 speaks about, that is, to present our bodies to God. This is the practical side of consecration. Because our being exists in the body, we must present the body so that our whole being may be given over to God in a practical way. Many people have a heart to consecrate themselves, but because their physical body has not been offered, their consecration is useless. Real consecration means that our body has been presented; it is neither a mere desire nor a verbal yieldedness, but a giving of ourselves entirely and practically to God.

The purpose of presenting our body is to become a living sacrifice. Negatively, this means to be cut off from all our past activities. For example, before an ox in the Old Testament was brought as a sacrifice, he was in his own place and acted according to his own will. Once he was placed on the altar, he no longer moved by his own will, and his activities ceased. The principle is identical when we become a living sacrifice. Before we were consecrated to God, we were like a wild ox or sheep living in the mountain wilds; we acted completely by our own will. Only when we become a living sacrifice to God do we cease from our own activities in order to await God's command.

The positive meaning of a living sacrifice is to live for God

and be used by God. Once the sacrificial animal in the Old Testament became a sacrifice, it was killed and then burned completely. We may say that it was a dead sacrifice. However, in our case, after we consecrate ourselves, we are still alive; we are a living sacrifice. The difference is that in the past we lived for ourselves, but now we live for God. Before, we sought after our own benefit; now we seek His pleasure. Formerly, we were interested in our own affairs; now our concern is about God's work. If a person consecrates himself as a living sacrifice and lives for God, it is then God's good pleasure to reveal His will in him so that he can understand His will.

Deny the Self

The second step in the pathway of knowing the will of God is to deny the self. The two most important passages relative to knowing God's will are Romans 12 and Matthew 16. The former speaks of the relationship between being a sacrifice and understanding God's will; the latter speaks of the relationship between God's will and the denying of self. To be a sacrifice is to solve the problem of living for ourselves. To deny the self is to solve the problem of living *according to* ourselves. If we are merely a sacrifice and have not denied ourselves, even though we are living for God, we are still living according to our own opinion and ideas. As such, we cannot understand His will. Therefore, the denying of self is also a basic requirement for knowing the will of God.

Matthew 16:21-24 discloses three sections relating to the denial of self. The first consists of verses 21 and 22, where the Lord showed the disciples that He had to go to the cross and die. Peter rebuked the Lord, saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You." "God be merciful to You" in another translation is "Pity yourself." Peter meant that the Lord should pity Himself and not accept the cross. The Lord mentioned the cross, but Peter mentioned the self. These two are contrary to each other. The acceptance of the cross means the annihilation of the self. Whenever we pity ourselves, we lay aside the cross.

Therefore, in the second section the Lord rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men" (v. 23). The "things of God" means the will of God. This rebuke contains at least two explanations: First, if we pity ourselves, laying aside the cross, it is doubtless the work of Satan

within us. Satan causes man to pity himself and to refuse the cross. Second, the Lord exposed two contradicting things—the will of God and the thought of man. Since the Lord's rebuke followed the preceding verses, the will of God means the cross, and the thought of man means the self. When man accepts the suggestion of Satan, pities himself, and rejects the cross, the result is that he minds not the things of God but the things of man.

Hence, the Lord concludes in the third section: "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (v. 24). Here again the Lord emphasizes the opposition between self and the cross. If we desire to follow the Lord and obey His will, we must on one hand deny ourselves and not set our mind on the things of man, and on the other hand bear the cross and set our mind on the things of God.

In Matthew 16, "self" indicates the things of man. The things of man include all the varied kinds of ideas, viewpoints, perceptions, and opinions. When man touches our ideas, viewpoints, perceptions, and opinions, he touches our "self."

*Man's will is his self,
and God's will is the cross.
Whenever God's will is revealed to
man, it is like the cross which puts
man to death. The will of God
kills primarily the self in man.
It kills man's ideas, viewpoints,
perceptions, and opinions.*

Our natural being is full of self with its ideas and opinions. Even though we zealously love the Lord and consecrate our all for the Lord in order to serve Him, yet we are full of our own ideas and opinions. We always want to do this and that for the Lord; we never pause to inquire what He

desires us to do and how to do it. The human concept is that it is a good thing to be zealously serving the Lord, but according to Matthew 16 this kind of zeal can originate from Satan. When Peter laid hold of the Lord and said, "Lord, pity Yourself," he was not opposing, but loving the Lord. However, the Lord's rebuke exposed this to be Satan's injection. When man serves God by his own zeal, it is horrible and abominable in God's sight. Because Satan is hiding within man, man's will is ever the enemy of God's will. When he lives in himself and does something for God according to his own idea and opinion, it is absolutely impossible for him to understand the will of God.

Again, the Word of the Lord shows us that God's will and man's will ever contradict each other. Man's will is his self, and God's will is the cross. Whenever God's will is revealed to man, it is like the cross which puts man to death. The will of God kills primarily the self in man. It kills man's ideas, viewpoints, perceptions, and opinions. Therefore, the will of God and the self of man are ever contrary to each other. If we are in the self, we are out of God's will. It

is impossible to have His will and keep the self. Each time we accept God's will, it kills the self. If we stand on the ground of death, accepting the cross, we will understand God's will. All who do not accept, or are not willing to accept, the killing of the cross cannot understand or receive God's will.

Miss M. E. Barber, who served the Lord in China, said that if one is willing to deny and reject his self, he has already ninety-nine per cent passed through the path of knowing God's will, and the one percent left is just to know it. This has proven to be true in our experience. Besides denying self, there is no other way for us to understand the will of God.

Deal with the Heart

The basic requirements for knowing the will of God are: presenting ourselves as a sacrifice and denying our self. The next step is to deal with the heart. Even though this step is not as basic as the first two requirements, it is still very important in the matter of knowing God's will.

As previously mentioned, the heart, spirit, and mind are organs for us to know God's will. The condition of the heart, whether aimed in the right direction or occupied by various involvements, vitally determines our knowing of God's will. The following four quotations from the Scriptures clearly show the relationship between the heart and the knowing of God's will, and especially the importance of dealing with our hearts.

2 Corinthians 3:16: "But whenever their heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." If our heart fails to turn toward the Lord, it becomes a veil to cover us and keep us from seeing the light; hence, we have no way to know God's will. When our heart is not turned toward God, we cannot see. But when we turn our heart toward God, we see. Thus, it is imperative that our heart be absolutely turned toward God.

2 Corinthians 11:3: "But I fear, lest somehow...your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ." A lack of simplicity and purity means that we are corrupted and have another goal besides God. God alone should be our goal. Once we pay more attention to other people, matters, and activities, immediately our heart becomes corrupted and thus loses its simplicity and purity. Consequently, we cannot understand God's will. Again, we are told that our heart must be absolutely turned toward God.

Matthew 6:21-23: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be

dark." These verses mention first the matter of our heart going after the treasure; then the light and darkness involving the eye follow. If our heart is set on God, our vision is clear; if our heart is set on other matters, our eye is evil and fails to see God's will. Here, again, is an exhortation to have our heart absolutely turned toward God.

Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The pure in heart are those who have no mixture in the heart. Their heart is single and pure, desiring nothing else but God. Many people are seeking and desiring something other than God Himself. Therefore, lacking a pure heart, they can neither see God nor understand His will. By this we see that our heart must be definitely turned toward God and desire nothing but God.

These four passages show that the relationship between the heart and knowing God's will is determined by the condition of the heart—whether it is absolutely turned toward God. Just as the compass, regardless of the changes in the surroundings, always points to the north, so also our heart should always turn toward God and take God as our goal. Thus, we can understand His will. We regret, however, that among God's children there are very few whose hearts are absolutely turned toward Him. The hearts of the majority are turned either to the left or to the right; they are never absolutely turned toward God in simplicity. These people not only fail to see God, but their consecration and denial of self are a problem. Since their heart is not right before God, their consecration is full of reservations, and their self stubbornly retains its own ideas and opinions. Therefore, it is impossible for them to understand God's will.

The dealing with the heart, although not as basic as consecration and the denial of self, is, however, very fine and deep. We ought to bring all the details and hidden areas of our heart into the light of God, letting the Holy Spirit examine and correct us until our heart is completely toward God, and desires and chooses only God.

Exercise the Spirit

Once our heart has God as its goal, we can touch the will of God in a practical way. At this time we need to exercise our spirit. Since God and His will are inseparable, and since God dwells in our spirit as the Holy Spirit, our first practice in understanding God's will must be the exercise of our spirit to touch the feeling of the Holy Spirit in the depths of our spirit. Under normal conditions this feeling in our spirit is God's will.

However, our problem is not only that our heart is not absolute, but also that our spirit is too weak. A heart that is not absolute causes us to be confused and unclear about God's will. A spirit that is weak causes us to be numb and

dull in knowing God's will. This is why, when God's will is revealed unto us, we are frequently unconscious of it.

Therefore, to know God's will our spirit must be strengthened by the constant practice of exercising it. The best way to do this is to have much fellowship and prayer with the Lord. If we can set aside an hour a day to enter into the inner chamber for prayer and fellowship with the Lord, after a certain period of time, our spirit will most assuredly be strengthened and become very keen.

Besides setting a certain time aside for prayer and fellowship with the Lord, we need to practice exercising our spirit in all matters of our daily living. On one hand, we need to deny the self in order to sense the feeling of the Holy Spirit; on the other hand, we need to walk in obedience to this feeling. For example, if someone should discuss business with us, our natural disposition would immediately express our own feeling and opinion. However, if we exercise our spirit to reject our feeling and opinion and seek the mind of God in our spirit, we will touch the feeling of God regarding this very matter. Once we have obtained this feeling and are clear about God's mind, we will speak and act according to this feeling. We will not employ craftiness or guile, but merely conduct ourselves in a truthful manner according to the spirit. As a result, such exercise of the spirit will lead to a more strengthened and sensitive spirit. Then, knowing God's will is not difficult.

Train the Mind

After having contacted God and obtained the feeling in our spirit, we still need our mind to interpret and apprehend His will practically. Otherwise, the feeling in our spirit is but an unknown burden, and it is not meaningful to our understanding. Hence, we will not know God's will. For example, if we listen to a speech given in a foreign language, we hear the voice, but if our mind has little training in that language, we can neither interpret the meaning nor understand the mind of the speaker. Thus, the interpretation by the mind is an indispensable factor in the understanding of God's will. If our mind has not been trained in spiritual things, we have no access to this realm and no way to understand God's will.

It is regrettable that with many brothers and sisters there is a serious lack of training of the mind in the spiritual realm. Some brothers, when predicting the fluctuations in the stock market and calculating profits and loss, have very

clever minds. In addition, some sisters, when chatting with their neighbors, display a very active mind. But when they sit in a meeting and listen to a message, they are incapable of understanding it. It is neither that they are unwilling to listen nor that the message is too profound, but that their mind simply cannot grasp the spiritual content. Even though they strive to concentrate, before long they become very sleepy and doze off. Their mind has not been trained in spiritual things; therefore, they are very ignorant and dull.

The training of the mind is the work of the Holy Spirit. The more the Holy Spirit renews the mind, the more it becomes spiritual and able to cooperate with our spirit. We also have our responsibility, which is to exercise our mind in spiritual matters, set our mind on them, and always turn to the spirit, paying attention to the movements therein. In this way, because our mind is always in contact with the spiritual realm, it becomes keen and living in understanding the feeling in our spirit, and thereby it understands God's will.

A practical understanding of God's will in our daily living demands fellowship with God. Those who lack fellowship with God cannot touch the feeling of the Holy Spirit or be led by Him. Fellowship with God is a vital key to understanding His will.

Fellowship with God and Study the Inward Feeling

A practical understanding of God's will in our daily living demands fellowship with God. Those who lack fellowship with God are unable to understand creation and the Bible. Moreover, they cannot have a normal heart, spirit, or mind; neither can they touch the feeling of the Holy Spirit or be led by

Him. Fellowship with God is one of the vital keys to understanding His will. A person who understands God's will must be one who has continual fellowship with God.

To set aside a certain time for prayer and fellowship with God is insufficient. We must have continual fellowship throughout our daily living. Furthermore, we need to grow and increasingly touch the Lord through this fellowship. When we touch the Lord in fellowship, we thereby have an inward feeling. We should study this feeling in order to understand the will of God.

However, we generally have a common problem which causes us to be unable either to understand the feeling or to understand it accurately. The problem is that we do not believe what we feel. We usually over-analyze the feeling, fearing it is either not from God or a wrong feeling. Often our fear is not that we may be wrong and sin against God, but that the outcome may not be to our advantage. Such a fear proves that we are considering our own gain or loss. If so, it makes it difficult for us to understand God's will.

Therefore, each time we touch a feeling from our fellowship with God, as long as it is not in obvious conflict with the teaching of the Bible, we should believe and accept it as from God. Even though, due to our childish condition, we sometimes accept the feeling wrongly, we still have to believe that we are wrong in the hand of God, and God will still keep us. Although we may be wrong in a certain affair, yet our being and our spirit are still right, and God is still pleased with us.

Furthermore, there is another factor within us which hinders us from understanding the feeling; that is the self, which includes our opinions, ideas, prejudices, and concepts. These old things within us always keep us from studying the feeling we obtain while in fellowship or having a pure understanding of it, and thus they keep us from a clear perception of God's will. Therefore, we need to deal severely that we may not be bound or influenced by self. This allows the Holy Spirit to freely give us the feeling and guidance of God's will in a manifested and unlimited way.

Study the Bible

Another way of knowing God's will is to study the Bible, because God has revealed Himself and His will through His Word. We need to study carefully God's great revelations, such as His mysterious plan, the Body of Christ, etc. We also need to study the minor principles in the Bible, such as those concerning clothing, eating, spending money, etc., as well as teachings, illustrations, examples, prophecy, and types. Not only should we study the Scriptures daily, but also for special occasions. For example, when a brother who studies the Bible daily is contemplating marriage, he should also study the principles, detailed teachings, and examples of marriage given in the Bible. Then he needs to apply them so that he may realize the will of God about marriage.

Moreover, we should pay attention to messages given in meetings, read spiritual books, and take heed to the various kinds of fellowship and sharings. Since their origins are found in the Bible and are very applicable and practical in revealing God's will, they should be heeded.

It is not enough that we know God's will as revealed in His Word. We must also apply the principles and details in our daily life. Of course, when we apply the principles, we need the anointing. Then we will not be merely following the regulations of letters, but in the light of life walking according to the spirit.

Study the Environment

To know God's will more fully we need to study the environment. Remember, the environment is also a means by

which God reveals His will. When God leads and guides us according to His will, He usually arranges the appropriate environments for this purpose. For example, after Jacob remained twenty years with his uncle, Laban, God wanted him to return to his father's house. Hence, He caused the sons of Laban to utter words against Jacob, which resulted in Laban changing his countenance toward him (Gen. 31:1-3). Through this, God proved His will to Jacob. The environment is always a means by which God reveals His will and is also a proof of His will. Therefore, if we are to know God's will, we need to observe the environment which He arranges for us.

Environment is practical and is comprised of many phases; therefore, we need to seek out the spiritual meaning and God's will from the many phases. The practical environment includes the people about us and the existence of situations with their manifold variations. A Christian seeking to know God's will should not only study (1) his feeling within, and (2) the Bible without, but also (3) the environment about him. If one learns to study these three aspects thoroughly, he is to a great extent in the will of God.

Conclusion

Beginning with obeying the teaching of the anointing, the spiritual experience of a Christian gradually progresses to a higher ground. When we come to the experience of knowing God's will, its requirement of spiritual growth and strict dealing with the self surpasses all the previous lessons. If one is still living in the self and does everything for self, it is impossible for him to know God's will. Since God's will is lofty and eternal, man must come out of his own little circle and get into the larger circle of God. It is as he is brought into the great circle of God that he will see God's eternal plan and his part in it. This will cause him to deny the self and lay his self aside in order to fulfill God's will.

This lofty realization, once it is established in one's life, will solve all the basic difficulties in knowing God's will. He can then be regulated by God's will in his practical daily living—i.e., what God wants him to do and how he should live and behave himself. Because he is consecrated to the Lord and has committed himself to His eternal plan, when he has fellowship with God, he will spontaneously experience the anointing and know what he should do. Then all the feelings he experiences in fellowship with God can be counted as His will. Not only does he study the great revelations and truths in the Bible, but he also studies the minor teachings and principles of the believer's life and conduct so that he may know God's will in all things. Furthermore, he always watches his environment and God's sovereign arrangement of it. After he puts all these factors together, he can clearly understand God's will. **AF**