

Vision and the Christian Life

(Part 10)

The Christian Perception of the Will of God

For a Christian, the “*bottom line*” of life is to do the will of God.

This is the measure of what we call holiness.

For a Christian doing the will of God is the only measure of success in life.

John 4:34 [NIV] “*My food,*” said Jesus, “*is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*”

If we are following Jesus Christ this is our substance, the reason to exist.

Seeking and embracing the will of God is the hallmark of Christian maturity.

The mature Christian has moved from the position of making our own plans and asking God to support them to the position of asking God openly and honestly.

“What are your plans? I would like to be a part of them.”

Our morning prayer should be “*Good morning God. Thank you for loving me. What have you got going today that I can be a part of?*”

Misunderstanding of the will of God.

All too often at a time of suffering or tragedy the “*will of God*” is brought into the discussion.

The “*will of God*” is often bottled with the label on the bottle, ‘*To be taken when things get rough.*’

This crisis application of the will of God is a big misunderstanding of the will of God.

John 10:9-10 [NIV] “*I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*”

Jesus is the good shepherd who has come to bring us abundant life. This is the true will of God.

God created us to share His life of love and joy.

It is a serious misunderstanding of the will of God if we associate it only with suffering, loneliness and grief.

The physical analogy of the parent-child relationship where almost all parents want happiness and fulfilment in the life of their children is helpful in knowing the will of God.

This parental desire for their children at times involves painful correction.

Hebrews 12:5-11 [NIV] “*And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not*

*true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but **God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

It is out of His love for us, His will for us, that God gives us a course correction at times.

God cannot be wrong. He knows much better than we what will make us happy in the end.

One man I heard of had been debilitated all his life with one illness after another, but he refused to be depressed or bitter.

In answer to my question of this attitude of mind he replied: *“These are the cards that God has lovingly dealt me, and these are the cards I will lovingly play.”*

I believe that God has a general and a specific will for each of us.

It is obvious that a necessary part of maturing is the chance to make our own decisions and choices.

Genesis 1:27 [NIV] *“So **God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**”*

The ability to make personal decisions and choices is part of our being created in the “*image*” of God.

Job 32:8 [NIV] *“But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.”*

The “*spirit*” in us gives us this ability to make decisions and choices.

We as human beings will make some poor decisions and choices in our life.

Just as a human parent allows their children to mature by making their own choices as they grow up.

The only reason a person would believe that God had a definite and detailed will in all aspects of their life would be to escape from responsibility of their actions.

Such a belief will be the formula for a stagnant life and perpetual immaturity.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 [NIV] *“**There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.**”*

I believe that the general will of God for each of us is to do something loving in our lives to help others and glorify God by using all the gifts He has given us to the full.

God is asking us to use these gifts wisely and lovingly to extend His Kingdom, His created family.

This is the general life commandment, God’s will, to make our lives an act of love for other humans, but God leaves us to decide how we will do this, only giving us general guidelines in His Word.

Love is **not** a simple matter.

We must listen empathically to the other person and their needs in order to understand where they are and what is their immediate need.

Matthew 22:37-40 [NIV] *“Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

At the same time as loving my neighbour I must love God and myself.

Consequently, I must weigh my own needs against that of my neighbour.

Which are the most urgent?

I must also consider the needs of God’s Kingdom in most of my decisions.

This general will of God that we make our lives an act of love allows us much room for the healthy exercise of maturity.

John 14:26 [NIV] *“But the Counsellor, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and **will remind you of everything I have said to you.**”*

We obviously need God’s enlightenment when we are trying to make these decisions of love.

The Holy Spirit will bring to our mind the words and actions of Jesus to guide us in these decisions.

The Holy Spirit will help us gain a needed perspective, to take a longer and wider view when we are making these decisions.

But the final decision will always be ours.

There is also in our lives times when God has a specific will for us personally.

A call to do something very specific.

While most of our life we live under the general will of God, the directive of making our lives an act of love.

There will be a time when God will open for us a very specific door and ask us to go through it.

There will be some deeds and accomplishments which are specifically entrusted to us.

No-one else has been prepared by God to accomplish them for Him.

I think that all of us have to watch and pray to be ready to say “yes” when God’s language is concrete and His request is specific.

Discernment of the specific will of God.

I believe that the only person who can successfully and safely discern the specific will of God is the one who really wants to know and to do the will of God above everything else in their lives.

Luke 14:26-27 [NIV] *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*

It is the true disciples of Jesus Christ who will be shown the specific will of God in their lives.

Luke 14:28-30 [NIV] *“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not*

able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'"

Those who are willing to pay the full cost of doing the will of God.

When we are moving in the will of God we will experience an inner harmony and peace of mind.

John 14:27 [NIV] *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

This is in the context of being guided by the Holy Spirit.

We have to ask ourselves, *"am I willing to suspend or at least hold in check my own desires until I have found out God's desires?"*

Am I ready to *"open my hands"* to God?

Is my central and strongest prayer, *"Thy will be done"*?

This desire to always do the will of God is the most important part of our discernment of the specific will of God.

Only when we want God's will before all else in our lives can we safely consult our deepest desires and inclinations, trusting that these desires and inclinations have been borne of grace.

Trusting in God.

There is an ancient directive, *"we pray as though everything depends on God but work as though everything depends on ourselves."*

Wanting the will of God can never be a substitute for personal determination and hard work.

God helps those who help themselves.

Trusting in God should never be a cover for our own laziness.

The Christian who has really put on the mind of Christ knows that Jesus never really spoke of success, but only of faithfulness.

When we see our Christian lives in the perspective of the gospel message, faithfulness to God's will is the only real, eternal crown of success.