

Determining God's Will

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How can people know what God approves or disapproves? God's will is revealed in His Holy Word, and man must go to the Bible to determine if actions or thoughts are in harmony with God's will (John 12:48; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; James 1:18-25). All men are amenable to the New Testament Law of Christ, and all men must have the authority of Christ behind every choice they make (Col. 3:17). If their actions do not align with God's Word, they commit sin which separates them from God (Isa. 59:1-2; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 17:30-31; Rom. 6:23; Gal. 6:2; 1 John 3:4).

It can generally be said that God expresses His will for man in the Bible through the following means:

- 1) **Direct Commands/Statements** (cf. Mark 16:16)
- 2) **Implications** (which cause a necessary inference, such as inferring that Lot must have gone into Egypt from Genesis 13:1)
- 3) **Approved Examples** (cf. Acts 20:7)

Not only are these ways that God expresses His will in the Bible, but these are general principles understood and used in many aspects of life.

Things Not Explicitly Condemned

What if something is not explicitly addressed in the Bible as being right or wrong? There are many things one could do that God has not explicitly condemned or approved. Man must use the teachings of the Bible to determine if such a practice complies with God's will. For example, there is no command in the Bible stating, "Thou shalt not view pornography on the Internet," but passages such as Matthew 5:28, Galatians 5:19-21, and others would clearly condemn such. Principles and teachings of the Scriptures must be carefully considered, instead of haphazardly authorizing anything in the world God has not explicitly condemned.

The account of Noah's ark can help clarify this principle. God gave a "specific command" when he specified the type of wood to be used (gopher wood, Gen. 6:14). Here is a question to consider: Since God did not say to Noah, "Thou shalt not make the ark of pine wood; thou shalt not make the ark of oak wood, etc.," did Noah have the authority to use other types of

wood? Out of over 100,000 types of trees in the world, was God required to list every type of wood NOT to be used, or could He simply specify the one type to be used? Listing every type of tree would have made that seven word command become twice as large as the New Testament Scriptures! If God were required to tell man every thing in the world he is NOT to do, the Bible would be so large and heavy that no man could pick it up! That is not how God communicates His will to man. God's specificity ruled out any other types of wood, and if Noah had used another type of wood, he would have disobeyed (sinned). Therefore, one is in error if he says, "Well, God did not say, 'Thou shalt not,' so it must be OK."

The writer of Hebrews references this principle in Hebrews 7:14: "*For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.*" God did not have to explicitly say, "The tribe of Judah shall not be priests" under the Law of Moses. God had already specified the one priestly tribe (the Levites); therefore, every other tribe was excluded. The lesson is this: When God specifies what He wants, everything else is forbidden!

New Testament examples of God's specificity include the items used in the Lord's Supper (unleavened bread and fruit of the vine). The specifying of these items by Jesus excludes any other food options. This is simple to understand, but many fail to follow the same logic when it comes to other acts of worship, like singing. The specific command to "*sing*" under the New Testament eliminates any other types of music (Matt. 26:30; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12; James 5:13, etc.). Many more examples like this could be noted.

Things Not Explicitly Authorized

There are also many authorized things that God has not explicitly approved, such as, "You may use an airplane while spreading the Gospel." Using an airplane would be authorized by the general command to "*go ye into all the world*" (Mark 16:15-16). Since God did not specify *how* man must go, this has been left to man's judgment to make expedient choices for carrying out God's command. Going back to the example of Noah, God gave Noah a "general command" to make rooms in the ark, and apparently the number of rooms was left to Noah's judgment (Gen. 6:14). When God does not specify exactly how a command is to be carried out, it is left to man's judgment to

carry it out in an expedient way that does not violate other passages of God's Word. That is one reason why having at least a general understanding of the entire Bible is so important.

Other Considerations

When determining God's will for man today from the Bible, context is key. It is critical to answer such questions as:

- 1) When were these words written?
- 2) To whom was this written?
- 3) Under which law were they living?
- 4) Why was this written?
- 5) Who is doing the speaking in this context, and to whom?, etc.

Such questions will help us understand why we are not building an ark like Noah's today, why we are not following the Law of Moses today, why the dead are not being raised today, and many other pertinent questions. Not everything recorded in the Bible was meant to be a pattern for all future generations.

There are also many figures of speech used in the Bible, and certain types of language that are not meant to be taken literally, like much of the Book of Revelation. Difficult passages (such as some in Romans and Revelation) should always be interpreted in a way that harmonizes with the very clear passages of God's Word (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15-18; 2 Pet. 3:15-18). Also, the same word can have different meanings, based on how it is used in the context (e.g., spirit, works, believe, faith, church, god/God, etc.).

Conclusion

The Christian must grow in knowledge of God's Word to know God's will and be able to discern right from wrong (Matt. 22:29; Heb. 5:12-14; 2 Pet. 2:2; 3:15-18). Men will be unable to please God and recognize error if they do not learn the Truth and learn how to wield God's powerful Sword properly (John 8:31-32; 2 Tim. 2:15; Eph. 3:4; 5:17; 6:17; Heb. 4:12).

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