

# Finding Our Identity in Jesus Series

## Blessed with a Knowledge of His Will (Ephesians 1:9-10)

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By  
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### At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
- II. Blessed with Knowledge of God's Will
- III. Blessed with Reconciliation and Peace (v. 10)
- IV. Conclusion

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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# Blessed with a Knowledge of His Will

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Blessed with a Billboard?

1. Where God has put a period, do not change it to a question mark.<sup>1</sup> As I've walked with Jesus for a long time and observed many other people doing the same, the wisdom of this advice may not be easily recognized but it is brilliant. When followed, refusing to put a question mark where God put a period avoids much confusion and heartache. But, what does this actually mean?
2. In one Christian book we are given the message  
 God isn't likely to put road signs along your morning commute route that reveal His will. So you probably won't see a billboard that says: "I've heard your prayers. The answers are *yes* to the job change, *wait* on the marriage proposal, and buy the *midnight blue* Camry."<sup>2</sup>
3. In another Christian book we can find the following story,
  - a. One night as I was returning home from a meeting, I was praying, asking God for some help, a sign, anything to end the misery of indecision. Then I saw it, a huge billboard high above me. It was lit bright against the black sky: "Go for it."
  - b. That was all it said, and I just knew it was for me...This was that inner voice, with the help of a prop, that spoke clearly to me.<sup>3</sup>

B. Kevin DeYoung didn't exaggerate when he said, "'The will of God' is one of the most confusing phrases in the Christian vocabulary.<sup>4</sup> The will of God can be used to talk about the meaning of words on the page of the Bible all the way to how a person is feeling about a situation they are facing. Not only do we use different meanings for the will of God, but we also have a large variety of methods for trying to discover what the will of God is. The result? The "will of God" is the most confusing phrases we run into as we hear people talking about it.

C. In Ephesians 1:9-10, the apostle Paul makes some surprising and possibly startling claims about the will of God. Claims that seem to stand in tension with the way some people understand the will of God and how God works in our lives.<sup>5</sup> Paul tells us God has put a period on discovering His will instead of a question mark. How we view knowing the will of God will greatly influence

<sup>1</sup> Quote from T.J. Back from Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz, [\*Growing as a Christian 101: A Guide to Stronger Faith in Plain Language\*](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), 250.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz, [\*Growing as a Christian 101: A Guide to Stronger Faith in Plain Language\*](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), 250.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hull, [\*Christlike: The Pursuit of Uncomplicated Obedience\*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 138–139.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin DeYoung, [\*Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will\*](#), ed. Jim Vincent (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 16.

<sup>5</sup> For those who may be interested in learning more about the will of God and how to find it from a Biblical perspective can read Kevin DeYoung, [\*Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will\*](#), ed. Jim Vincent (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), Gary Friesen, [\*Decision Making and the Will of God\*](#), 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2004), Bruce K. Waltke, [\*Finding the Will of God: A Paagan Notion?\*](#), Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 2009), J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, [\*God's Will: Finding Guidance for Everyday Decisions\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), John McArthur [\*Found: God's Will—Find the Direction and Purpose God Wants for Your Life\*](#), (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook Publishing), 2012.

the way we live the Christian life. For some people, the will of God is forever hidden and they give up trying to find it out of frustration and discouragement. For others, the will of God is a source of freedom, and they live confidently knowing they are doing what God wants. Which one are you?

## II. Blessed with Knowledge of God’s Will

- A. This series is continuing to encourage and provide opportunities for the children of God to think about and ground their sense of self in what God says is true about them. The identity of the children of God is being communicated in the hope that it will result in disciples who live consistently with the word of God on a regular basis so there will not be a disconnect between the message of the Bible and the way individuals are living. If the Christian life is going to be lived effectively and successfully, we can’t forget the identity we have in Jesus. As children of God live their new life in Jesus, they come to understand they have been given every spiritual benefit they need for life and godliness including holiness and blamelessness, being adopted and living in the favor of God, as well as being redeemed and forgiven.
- B. Another blessing found in the long list of spiritual benefits provided by God is:
 

In all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He set forth in Him, <sup>10</sup> regarding *His* plan of the fullness of the times, to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. (Eph. 1:9-10)
- C. The list of spiritual blessings provided by Jesus to the children of God keeps growing, the next one on the long list is a knowledge of God’s will (“He made known to us the mystery of His will”, v. 9). God revealing and communicating His will to those who belong to Him caused God to feel great delight and satisfaction (“according to His good pleasure”, v. 9).<sup>6</sup> God has not kept us in the dark. Jesus affirmed that His disciples know what God the Father wanted to communicate to them which is why Jesus calls His disciples friends (Jn. 15:14-15). Children of God who know the Bible possess a knowledge of the will of God. They are familiar with God, His plan for our world, the things God is actively doing in people’s lives, and the direction human history is moving in the end. The Bible expresses God’s plan from start to finish.
- D. When the New Testament, and Paul in particular, refers to a “mystery” he is not talking about something that is difficult to understand or something that is hidden or unexplained as is common in English. Biblically, a mystery is a message that was once hidden but has now been revealed by God (Col. 1:26). Notice this is exactly what Paul says about the “mystery” of God’s will (“He made known to us the mystery”, v. 9). The mystery is not a mystery because it is unknown but rather because it is known. God’s will, plan, and actions connected to Jesus are all synonyms here and they are used interchangeably.
- E. To cut through some of this confusion, it will be helpful to do a little theology. While some people may groan internally when they hear the word theology the reality is every person who thinks about God is a theologian. If we have any ideas about God, we are a theologian. The only question is whether we will be a good theologian or bad one. When attempting to think about

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<sup>6</sup> Glenn Graham, [\*An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians\*](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 27.

and clarify the will of God, theologians talk about and provide helpful categories and distinctions that are very useful. When the Bible describes the will of God, these categories can be observed to help clarify how the will of God is explained in Scripture. If we are going to understand the will of God, we must be informed about these important distinctions.

- F. The first distinction that helps us think clearly about what Paul is saying here about the will of God is by realizing there are intentions and actions of God that God keeps to Himself and there are elements of God's will that He shares with humanity and communicates them to us. Those secrets that God keeps to Himself is referred to as the hidden will of God and those elements of God's activity that He communicates and shares is called the revealed will of God. God decides what He will hide from us and what He will share with us. There is nothing we can do as human beings to change these categories. These categories related to the will of God can be clearly seen in Scripture,

<sup>29</sup> The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, so that we may follow all the words of this Law. (Dt. 29:29)<sup>7</sup>

- G. A second important distinction that helps us clarify our understanding of the will of God is knowing the different ways God wills something. God might will something in terms of knowing an event will occur, allowing that event to occur, and including the event that occurs in part of His overall plan for people and the world. This is called God's sovereign will.<sup>8</sup> Everything that happens in our lives and in our world come into reality because God allows them to happen. God's overall allowance and control of human affairs and events in this world are part of God's sovereignty which is clearly affirmed in Scripture,

<sup>11</sup> In Him we also have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things in accordance with the plan of His will, (Eph. 1:11)<sup>9</sup>

- H. On the other side of this distinction is what theologians call God's moral will.<sup>10</sup> While God might will an event to happen as part of His plan, it doesn't mean everything that happens is morally good—approved by God's moral standards and something God desires to happen. God allows individuals to rebel against His moral desires and do wrong. God's moral will includes actions that God desires people to do that are morally good and God gives people the freedom to either obey or disobey. Unlike God's sovereign will, God's moral will has the potential to be violated and therefore doesn't always happen. Once again God's moral will is clearly expressed in Scripture,

<sup>5</sup> Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; <sup>6</sup> not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. (Eph. 6:5-6)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Mark 13:32, Acts 1:7, John 15:14-15

<sup>8</sup> Also called God's will of decree or decretive will

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 10:29

<sup>10</sup> Also called God's will of desire or preceptive will

<sup>11</sup> Mark 3:35, 1 John 2:17

- I. God’s sovereign will may be contrary to His moral will. An immoral action, say unjustly murdering Jesus, can be included in God’s sovereign will for the purpose of bringing about good outcomes—bringing salvation to the world. While this may seem confusing and paradoxical, this is how the will of God works in the real world. Does this mean God’ contradicts Himself? No, it means God’s decision-making process can be very complicated to figure out in a broken world. God allows events to happen in the world and in our lives for His purposes that God desires not to happen in a moral sense. However, in the world that is coming, God’s sovereign will and moral will are guaranteed to be perfectly aligned so only morally good actions and events occur. The distinctions between God’s hidden and revealed will along with God’s sovereign and moral will should help clarify how we understand the will of God.
- J. Now that we have these critical categories in place, we are better positioned to understand what Paul is communicating when He says that God’s will has been revealed. Biblically informed children of God know everything God wants us to know to live an obedient and faithful life (2 Tim. 3:15). We have the “whole purpose” of God in this sense (Ac. 20:26-27). God’s word is enough to prepare us for every good work that God wants us to do (Eph. 2:10, 2 Tim. 2:21, 3:16-17). God’s moral will has been revealed but elements of God’s sovereign will remain hidden until the events occur. We don’t need to know the sovereign will of God for that sovereign will to play out in our lives. God is the One who guarantees His sovereign plan will be fulfilled, we don’t. This should take a large amount of the pressure we feel to know the will of God off our shoulders.<sup>12</sup>
- K. God’s full moral will—that He wanted us to know—has been revealed to the children of God through the word of God even though God has not shared all His sovereign will.<sup>13</sup> Children of God do not know everything God is doing or everything God knows. We don’t know everything God is thinking and planning for our lives, the lives of others, or this world. God will not give us all the information and answers we may want. We still need to realize there are decisions and actions of God we will never know except as situations play out. This is why we need to rely on the Holy Spirit to help us in our prayer life, so we ask for the right things according to the will and plan of God for each situation (Rm. 8:26-27).
- L. As children of God, we have the responsibility to be informed and know the will of God—children of God are commanded to know the will of God (Eph. 5:15-17). How could we be commanded to know the will of God unless every child of God already has access to the will of God? Of course, this command implies the assumption that we already have access to the will of God as God wants us to know it. Essentially, if we don’t know the will of God it is our fault because God has made it known to us. Notice also the connection between wisdom and knowing the will of God as Paul says,

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<sup>12</sup> For those who may be interested in learning more about this, a good place to start is Kevin DeYoung, [\*Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God’s Will\*](#), ed. Jim Vincent (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009)

<sup>13</sup> God has not revealed all His moral will either, God hasn’t given instruction or told us how He thinks about every possible moral decision or action. This is why we need to take the truth revealed in the Bible and the moral principles it affirms and apply these to situations that are not directly addressed in Scripture. Disciples can learn and grow in their moral understanding.

<sup>15</sup> So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of your time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. (Eph. 5:15-17)

- M. The primary way of knowing the will of God is by changing the way we think (Rm. 12:1-2). Renewing your mind by staying connected to the word of God (Jn. 8:31-32) and understanding the spiritual message it contains results in us developing the mind of Jesus (1 Cor. 2:10-16). By growing in spiritual wisdom and understanding, we come to know the will of God (Col. 1:9, Phil. 1:9-11). This is the reliable, primary, and universal way to know the will of God.<sup>14</sup> We will never know the will of God with confidence if we don't know the message of the Bible. By accurately understanding the message of the Bible a person will undeniably know the will of God.
- N. Those who are convinced that we already have access to the will of God and the means of gaining access to the will of God is the Bible, this understanding will positively impact the way they live their Christian life and eliminate a lot of unnecessary confusion. Our passion for the word of God will be ignited if we realize the primary way God makes His will known to us is not through prayer or learning to hear the voice of God but through the Bible. God's voice echoes through the pages of Scripture. Knowing the Bible is the best way to know the will of God (Isa. 8:19-20). Those who have a good understanding of what the Bible teaches will live a confident Christian life assured about the will of God instead of living in constant fear that they aren't doing what God wants them to do because they are making wrong decisions.

### III. Blessed with Reconciliation and Peace

- A. Knowing the will of God results in another blessing that includes reconciliation and peace, <sup>10</sup> regarding *His* plan of the fullness of the times, to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. (Eph. 1:10)
- B. A major element of God's will is His plan to bring all of creation into harmony under the authority and leadership of Jesus ("to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth", v. 10). Jesus is the King, Ruler, and Head not only of the church but also of everything that He created—all things. As the Head or manager of everything, all of creation will be gather up under the authority of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> In short, Jesus is in charge of the universe as it's supervisor. No one and no thing can avoid finding themselves accountable to Jesus and impacted by His evaluation or authority. Even spiritual beings or human beings who don't want Jesus to rule over them will find they can't escape His authority (Lk. 19:27, Mt. 8:29). Jesus rightly takes first place in everything as the Head of all that He created (Col. 1:15-17). God is going to sum up and tie up all loose ends through Jesus so that everything is brought back together in unity and harmony.

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<sup>14</sup> This doesn't mean that the Bible is the only way God reveals His will (Heb. 1:1-3). While there are methods of communicating His will outside of the Bible, these revelations are determined by God and are recognizable and obvious. A child of God doesn't need to be constantly "listening" and straining to hear God speaking to them. God is not continuously communicating to every disciple so that if we are not hearing God speaking to us it is because we are not listening carefully enough. Even those to whom God spoke didn't operate this way. God is powerful enough to get His message across to us if He wants to. If God says something, we will know it! Even unregenerate people recognized when God was speaking to them including Paul himself (Ac. 9:1-6).

<sup>15</sup> John R. W. Stott, [\*God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians\*](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 42.

- C. At some point in the future, Jesus is going to return to earth and directly enforce His authority and leadership over all creation, even using violence to remove anyone and anything that stands in His way (Mt. 25:31-46, Rev. 19:11-21). The culmination of gathering everything under the rule and authority of Jesus will occur at the end of this age (“regarding His plan of the fullness of the times”, v. 10). Right now, we live in a world experiencing war between two spiritual kingdoms, this worldwide spiritual conflict will not last forever. God and those on His side will defeat and get rid of those who are opposed to Him through Jesus. The human condition will be united, at peace, and harmonious with God when the time is fulfilled for Jesus to intervene and enforce His rule over all that has been created. Everything hostile to Jesus will be removed from His creation (Mt. 13:36-43).
- D. The implication of this creation wide work of God is that the children of God, have already been restored to God under the leadership and influence of Jesus. Disciples currently live in unity with Jesus, God the Father, and everyone who belongs to God amid a world full of people living in rebellion against God and His ways. We now operate our lives in the condition and according to the principles of reconciliation and peace. We are participants in the overarching plan of God for humanity and this world—harmoniously uniting all of creation under Jesus. Hostility, division, chaos, and the like are all contrary to the kingdom work God is doing in the world through Jesus. A utopian world peace is being built through Jesus that will one day completely renovate this world to the point that everything will be fixed and function the way God desires.
- E. Paul more fully explains what this reconciliation and peace looks like in other places (Eph. 1:18-23, 2:14-17, Phil. 2:1-11, Col. 1:17-20). Children of God are to do everything without complaining or arguing (Phil. 2:14), act without anger and dispute (1 Tim. 2:8), strive to live at peace with everyone (Rm. 12:18), and be guided by the principles that create peace taught by Jesus (Col. 3:15). Since we are at peace with God we are empowered to live at peace with others who are on God’s side. We begin living in the harmony of heaven in a broken and divided world.
- F. As children of God, we are reconciled, at peace with God and those who live under the influence of God, and we live as peacemakers.<sup>16</sup> This makes a profound and deep-seated difference in the way we experience life in this world. We are empowered by the Spirit of God to bring peace and harmony to other people and the situations of our lives as a regular outcome of the nature we have as a child of God. This is why we are told to be a peacemakers by decreasing and eliminating hostility with others (2 Cor. 5:18-20, Mt. 5:9). Children of God encourage others to be reconciled to God so they can enjoy the same quality of life—reconciled and at peace—that we experience from God. Jesus is restoring the unity that was broken by rebellion and sin.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Noble, [\*The Path of a Peacemaker: Your Biblical Guide to Healthy Relationships, Conflict Resolution, and a Life of Peace\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019), Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson, [\*Resolving Everyday Conflict\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), Ken Sande, [\*The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict\*](#), Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), Ken Sande and Tom Raabe [\*Peacemaking for Families\*](#), (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers), 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Foulkes, [\*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 60.

- G. Conflict, hostility, and anger is contrary to the type of life that comes to the child of God from the Spirit of God coming down to us from heaven. A person can't be a genuine child of God and regularly and consistently cause conflict and relational difficulty everywhere they go. Children of God are empowered by God to create and maintain harmonious and healthy relationships. It is part of their nature as a child of God. They are peacemakers and reconcilers—at least with those who share the values and priorities of God.
- H. Another critical point of application from this passage is the fact that all creation is being united under Jesus (“things in the heavens and things on the earth”, v. 10). This is Paul’s way of saying everything in every place that has been created by God will universally be brought into harmony with Jesus. There isn’t a single area of life that is not under the influence of Jesus. If we divide up our life between secular and sacred spaces, we don’t have a consistent Biblical worldview. The Bible and God’s wisdom has something to offer us in every area of life. No area of life should be disconnected from the influence Jesus.
- I. There tends to be a disconnect between the things in the heavens and things on the earth. Too many people operate their life under the assumption the things of heaven have no relevance or influence on the things of earth. Jesus is working to restore the unity between heaven and earth. Are you content living your life, spending your time and money in ways that are completely disconnected from God? How does God’s priorities and values impact your life? How does Jesus influence your activity here on earth?

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. A benefit that comes directly from Jesus to the children of God is knowing and understanding the will of God. Disciples have access to the thoughts, desires, intentions, and actions of God. We no longer required to live our lives in darkness wondering what God wants us to do so that we can please Him. God shares Himself clearly and convincingly in His word.
- B. When we understand the will of God, we also realize the children of God are participating in the work God is doing of reconciling His broken creation back to Himself in a harmonious and peaceful way. Everything that has been created will, by the power of Jesus, will be brought back into harmony with God at a definitive point in the future. Disciples live in this restored condition in the present and look forward to the day will everything contrary to God will be eliminated from their experience.