

# Understanding God's Will

Ephesians 5:17

*Halifax: 6 July 2008*

Today we have the encouragement of welcoming Rebecca Gillingham into the membership of this congregation.

- This is an immense privilege for us because Rebecca comes to us by profession of faith.
- We celebrate with her the glorious fact that having now trusted in Christ,
  - She shares with us in the hope of eternal life—
  - As our sister in Christ, she is going to live in God's house—as God's own daughter—for all eternity...
    - Through the blood of Christ, all of her sins have been forgiven...
    - And by the working of the Holy Spirit, she is able to begin to live a whole new life of fruitfulness for the Lord, walking with Him and knowing Him.

It is a marvellous reality for all of you who are truly trusting in Jesus Christ that you also have been brought from the darkness to live in the light...

- You are able to live a whole new life—
  - a life growing into the fullness of God's likeness—
  - a life that sheds off the old ways and puts on the new ways.
- You are being renewed so that you are becoming more and more like Jesus!
  - Just think what it will be to love God as Jesus loves God!
    - to be done with all your selfishness, all your doubts, all your murmurings, all your greediness, all your lust...
    - to be holy as Christ is holy...
    - to adore the Father as He adores to the Father...
    - to love one another as He loves us...
      - This is the life that God has called you to live...
      - And this is the life that He is growing you into by His power and grace!
        - He has promised it!

And if you are a Christian, He has put it into your heart to yearn for this glorious new life—

- You are now a person who delights in becoming all that God has called you to be...
- You struggle because you have not yet attained,
  - but you press on in hope, looking to Him to do all that He has promised concerning you!

And this being so,

- It behoves you to be careful about how you walk—because the days are evil...
  - There are enemies who want to lead you away from God’s calling...
    - there are temptations, there are sinful lusts within you, there are trials and hardships...
    - and so as we saw last week in Eph. 5:15—
      - You need to walk circumspectly—carefully—
        - not as a fool who acts as if there are no dangers!
      - You have to be on guard, to watch your own heart...
        - lest you begin to drawn away and enticed...
        - lest you grow cold and lose your zeal for all that God has for you.
- It is for you to redeem every moment—
  - To see to it that you make the most of your time...
    - You will only be here in this world for a short time—and then death and after that the judgement will come...
    - It is here, in this world, that you have opportunity to bear fruit that will remain for eternal life...
      - This is the time to bear the fruit in preparation for the harvest at the last day.
      - It’s only in this world that you are able to bear the cross, to suffer with Christ, to suffer for Christ, to love when love is not returned, to go on when it is hard...
        - Whatever you do now will count for all eternity...
        - Surely, you want to make the most of every minute!

But if you are going to do this, it is essential that you know the will of God—

- that, as verse 17 says, you *understand* the will of God.
- If you are going to walk circumspectly and if you are going to redeem the time,
  - you have know what the Lord wants of you...

- And if you remember, I told you last week that “understanding the will of God” is such an important topic—
  - and yet such a misunderstood topic...
    - that I wanted to devote a whole sermon to it.
    - So that is what I am going to do today...

TRANS> And so to start off, I want to show you that:

**I. It is essential for you to know the will of God if you are going to walk circumspectly, redeeming the time.**

- This is obvious, isn't it?
  - If you don't understand the will of God, you can't do the will of God...
- A. If you don't know what is pleasing to the LORD, you may end up doing what He hates without even realising it...
  - even when you are trying to please Him.
- 1. He is God, and we are fallen sinful creatures...
  - a. As fallen creatures, we don't always know what He wants...
    - We don't understand Him as we should...
    - We confuse evil and good.
    - We have an attraction for evil...
      - and sometimes we are so twisted that we actually think we are doing the will of God when we are doing the opposite...
  - b. In John 16, Jesus told His disciples that they would be persecuted,
    - and that some of the people who persecuted them would honestly think they were doing the will of God...
      - Here his disciples would be telling the world about the glorious salvation that God had accomplished,
        - and these perverted souls would honestly think they were serving God by opposing them...
    - The Apostle Paul was like that before his conversion...
      - He went around imprisoning the followers of Christ and even having a hand in the murder of them—
        - And he tells us that he did it ignorantly and in unbelief...
        - He actually thought he was serving God.

TRANS> How awful it would be to spend your time zealously serving God and then find out at the end that everything you had done was offensive to Him!

2. But don't think this is something that only happened in the time of the apostles!
  - a. My brothers and sisters, there are thousands, even millions of people in the world today who think God is pleased with them when in fact they are under His condemnation!
    - 1) There are those who do not know that our persons and our works and our service are unacceptable to God because of sin...
      - They do not know how offensive it is for them to go on without even dealing with their sin—
      - for them to dare to worship God when they are not reconciled to Him—
      - as if everything is okay when there is so much that is not okay!
    - 2) They are like the guy I have told you about before who murders your family and burns down your house,
      - and then comes the next day and expects you to be pleased with him because he offers to mow the grass for you...
      - That's what people are like who try to serve God without being reconciled to Him—
      - except worse...
        - Because the God they have sinned against is holy—
        - and they are acting as if He is not holy...
        - and as if their sin that was so offensive that it required the death of God's Son to take it away is but a trivial matter!
        - This is a great affront to the Living God.
        - We are all so corrupt by nature that we don't even see our offence until the Lord opens our eyes...
  - b. There are many who think their works are acceptable to God without a Redeemer...
    - many who think their worship is acceptable to Him who have never been converted and turned to Jesus Christ...
    - many who rejoice in a personal relationship with Christ when they have in fact never really trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins...
    - many who will say to Him at the last day,

- Matthew 7:22-23: ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’
- And to whom He will declare:
  - ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

TRANS> Truly this is a fearful thing, and we are inclined to cry out “unfair!”

- But it is not unfair when you understand the demerit of human sin...
    - The Bible says that there are many who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.
    - Let this remind you how important it is to spread the message of the gospel to all.
      - Many will perish because of their ignorance...
      - They will perish because they do not know the will of God.
3. But there can also be a problem with ignorance after you have become a believer...
- a. Of course this is not nearly as serious a problem as trying to worship and serve God without Christ...
    - but it still hinders you from bearing fruit and from growing into the fullness of the Christian life.
    - Walking carefully involves making sure that you understand what is pleasing to the Lord—
      - making sure that you understand what the will of the Lord is so that you won’t be wasting away your life...
  - b. Let me give you an example from the Old Testament of believers displeasing God when they thought they were serving Him...
    - 1) Consider the worship at the high places in the Old Testament...
      - Under every King but two in the 400 years or so from Saul until the captivity, Israel worshipped at the high places...
      - The majority of the people did not think they were doing anything wrong...
        - They were worshipping God in the places where the Canaanites had worshipped their Gods...
        - They were claiming for God what had belonged to idols.
        - They were zealously offering sacrifices and burning incense and showing their love and devotion to the LORD...

TRANS> The majority of the people were honestly trying to worship Jehovah...

2) But in the history of the kings of Israel, we are told again and again that this worship did not please God...

- He had commanded that no sacrifice be offered except at the temple in Jerusalem.
- They had forgotten that commandment and so had their leaders.
- Again and again we read comments like this comment about Asa in 1 Kings 15:
  - 1 Kings 15:11-14: Asa did *what was* right in the eyes of the LORD, as *did* his father David. And he banished the perverted persons from the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made...But the high places were not removed.
- Now you must not think that all these people were going to all this effort to worship God at the high places,
  - all the while thinking—"God will not approve of this worship."
  - No, in fact, when Hezekiah understood the will of the Lord and removed worship at the high places,
    - it was something the King of Assyria used to get political support from the people of Judah.
    - He knew that many of them had been offended by Hezekiah's reforms...
    - In an effort to put fear in them, he asked how they could expect the Lord defend them when Hezekiah had taken down his places of worship.
    - You can be sure that he said that because his analysts had informed him that there was a lot of opposition to these reforms.

3) I would submit to you that there is a lot of worship like this today as well.

- a) Christians have this idea (like the Old Testament believers did) that God does not care how we appear before Him as long as we are sincere.
  - We even think He will be extra pleased with our creativity in worship...

b) And so you have everything

- from Bobo the clown, to sophisticated musical performances...
- from stand up comedy, to men with robes waving incense around...
- from an altar call to a pep rally...
- from prayers to the saints, to tongues that cannot be understood...
- from singing uninspired songs, to reading from uninspired books, as if these were equal to scripture...

c) Like Israel of old, we greatly err in assuming that God is pleased with our innovations when in fact...

- He has told us how He wants to be worshipped and has commanded us to neither add nor take away from what He has appointed.

c. And this is just one example of our ignorance as believers before God...

B. All this goes to show that as believers, you need to be sure that you understand what God's will is...

1. If you do not know better,

- you might think you were doing a great service to God by marrying an unbeliever...
  - in order that you might lead them to Christ.
  - Or you might think that it would pleasing to the Lord to live in a commune where wives, husbands, property, and children are all shared...

2. You need to know what God wants so that you can redeem the time and walk in His way...

- being careful to do what He wants.

3. You have to be able to understand the difference between what is right and what is wrong,

- What is good and what is evil...
- Not based upon your own judgement...
  - you are not the judge...
  - but based upon God's judgement...

TRANS> And the good news is,

- You do not have to be ignorant....
- And that brings us to our second heading this morning...

## II. God has revealed to you all that you need to know in order that you might do His will in His Word...

A. I don't say that He has revealed everything about everything, but everything you need to know in order to do His will...in order to serve Him and please Him...

1. Deuteronomy 29:29 explains this. It says:

- Deut 29:29: "The secret *things belong* to the LORD our God, but those *things which are revealed belong* to us and to our children forever, that *we* may do all the words of this law."

a. There are a lot of people that want God to tell them the future...

- They are more concerned about what God is going to do than they are about what He has given them to do...
- They want to pry into his secrets to find out who he is going to save...
  - or if today is their lucky day—

b. This is a large part of what pagan spirituality is all about...

- getting an inside line with God...
  - finding out if the car you are about to purchase is the best one or if you should buy another...
- It is sad to see Christians doing this...
  - They look for pointers and indicators of God's will in circumstances...
  - They look for affirmations and signs...
    - There is a lot of valuable time wasted on such things!

c. You see that Deut 29:29 says that the secret things belong to God and that He has given us what we need—

- not to buy the best car, but to serve Him—
  - to do what is pleasing to Him!
  - to live in communion with Him and to bear much fruit for His glory.

2. God has revealed all of this to us in His Word.

- That is where you find everything you need to know to understand His will!

a. 2 Tim 3:15-17 tells us that scripture is God breathed and wholly sufficient,

- not only to make us wise for salvation—to show us the way of salvation...
  - but also to teach us, to show us what is wrong with us, to show us how to make it right, and guide us into the right way...



- 2 Tim 3:15-17 says: “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
  - doctrine is teaching...
  - reproof is showing us what is wrong with us...
  - correction is showing us how to make it right...
  - and instruction in righteousness is guiding us or training us in the right way.
- According to this verse,
  - there is nothing missing from the Bible that you need to know for the proper understanding of God’s will.
  - The word translated “thoroughly equipped” was used to describe the outfitting of ship before it went to sea...
    - It had to be thoroughly equipped because after you get out to sea, you can’t run down to the store to pick up a few things...
    - The point is that in the Bible you have everything you need!
- b. If you want to understand God’s will, then, you must consult God’s Word, given to us in the pages of Scripture.
  - Let me give you a few examples...
    - 1) It reveals to you God’s will about how to treat a personal enemy—
      - It tells you to love him to give him something to eat if he is hungry.
    - 2) It tells you God’s will about whom to marry—
      - not the specific person (which is the information some seek),
      - but that you are not marry an unbeliever—
      - and that a woman is to gain the consent of her father before she marries...
    - 3) It tells you God’s will about work—
      - not exactly which job to take or what day to plant your corn...
      - but about how you are to do your work with honesty and integrity
      - and how you are to do it diligently with an eye to please God—
      - and without complaining...

- and that you are not to do work that is dishonest or that will violate God's commandments...

4) The scriptures tell you what to do when you are anxious and worried...

- To focus on what God has given you to do today and trust him with the future...
- to pray and focus your mind on the things that are good and lovely rather than on your fears...

B. How do the Scriptures reveal God's will to you?

1. First of all, from the clear and direct commandments God has given to us...

a. Just glance back over the material we have covered in the last few weeks in Ephesians 4-5...

- There is a wealth of counsel here from God, telling us how He wants us to live...
  - In unity with one another...
  - In unity that is based upon the truth of His Word...
  - He tells us to put off the old man and put on the new man who is to become like Christ...
    - He tells us to speak the truth,
    - to replace ungodly anger,
    - to stop stealing and start working,
    - to be done with rotten words and speak gracious words, to put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking... and to forgive as Christ forgave us...
    - to be completely clear of sexual immorality and live in gratitude instead...
    - to walk in the light and expose the works of darkness...
    - to walk circumspectly, redeeming the time...

b. Then there are places like the Ten Commandments or the call of Jesus to love each other as He has loved us...

- There are the many exhortations to praise God...
- And of course the most basic call of all—to repent of your sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ...
- In these commands you have the will of God laid out for you.

2. But there are also other ways that we are shown the will of God in Scripture...

- There are many accounts that are full of examples for us to learn from...
  - We have Abraham learning to trust God...
  - We have Job patiently bearing his afflictions...
  - We have the negative example of Israel's worship at the high places...
  - We have the admonitions and warnings of the prophets.
  - We have the example of Jesus Christ...
  - We have the revelation of the life of Jesus Christ that presents Him as our Saviour so that we will learn to trust in Him.
  
- All of this is part of the complete revelation of God's will for you that you are to understand in order that you might do it.

C. How do you go about gaining an understanding of God's will from the Scriptures?

1. You must seek to understand God's will through personal study.
  - a. Don't just read the Bible as a spiritual exercise or ritual...
    - Study it with a view to putting what you learn into practice...
    - Hunger for wisdom as one seeking treasure... the way Proverbs speaks about...
  
  - b. And come to the scriptures with questions—what to do questions...
    - Search to discover how God wants you to manage your home...
      - how He directs you to worship Him...
      - and so on.

TRANS> But not only should there be personal study...

2. You must seek to understand God's will through diligent attention to preaching...
  - a. God has ordained preaching to reveal His will to His people.
    - I was amazed to discover a few years ago that there is much more said about God's word preached than there is about personal study and reading...
  
  - b. God has sent forth preaches to preach the gospel in all the world—
    - and part of their mandate is to teach those who believe to do all that Christ has commanded—to do the will of God...
    - In Romans 16:25, Paul says:
      - Ro 16:25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ,

- And in Romans 10:14, he shows that it is through preaching that Christ is heard...
    - Roman 10:14: How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?
    - This literally says,
      - “How shall they believe in Him whom (not “**of whom**”, but “**whom**”) they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher.”
      - He is showing that we actually hear Christ through preaching...
        - That by the Spirit’s working, the Word of Christ comes to us.
        - We will look more at this tonight...
- c. You are to give diligent attention to word preached, for that is how God has appointed to make His will known to His people.
- I don’t have time to go into all that the scriptures say about this...
    - but you have a duty to place yourself under sound preaching and to listen diligently to it as if Christ Himself were speaking to you.
    - I don’t mean that you aren’t to test what is preached to see that it conforms to the word of God...
      - You are...
      - Isaiah says, “If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is not light in them...”
      - And Paul commends the Bereans for checking out what he said from the Scripture...
        - But if preaching is true to the word of God,
          - you are to receive it as if Christ Himself had spoken to you...
          - because that is the way He has chosen to speak and to reveal His will in this age...
            - through the mouths of preachers.

TRANS> But personal study and preaching does not exhaust the way to understand God’s will from His word.

3. Thirdly, you must seek to learn God’s will through godly counsel...

a. Prov. 11:14 says:

- Pr 11:14 Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.
- b. Sometimes you have questions about God's will and you are unable to find answers in God's Word—you don't know where to look...
- This is when you do well to seek guidance from others—pastors, elders, parents, friends...
  - but here again, you must make sure that what they tell you is true the word of God.
4. Fourthly, you must seek to learn God's will from the word through prayer...
- a. It is vain to come to scriptures, whether in private study, preaching, or counsel unless God's Spirit works in you to enable you to understand...
- Many distort the scriptures and misapply them...
  - That is why you need to pray and ask to give you understanding of His word.
  - We are given an example of such a prayer in Psalm 25, our Psalm of Focus...
  - Psalm 25:4-5: Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day.
- b. There are many other examples of prayer for understanding and for wisdom,
- but always remember that the wisdom you need is wisdom from the scriptures...
  - Don't pray for understanding through mystical means, but through scripture...
  - Pray that God will enable you to understand His will through His Word.
5. Fifthly, you must seek to learn God's will through meditation...
- a. Psalm 1 speaks about how the godly man meditates on God's word day and night...
- b. But what does this mean?
- You need to understand that New Age meditation based on Hinduism or Buddhism is very different than Biblical meditation...
  - In New Age mediation, you try to empty your mind, but in Biblical meditation, you take God's Word and you look at it from all different angles...

- Your goal is to apply it to your life...
  - It is one thing to memorize a bunch of verses, but it is another to understand how they affect the way you do your work—
    - or the way you speak to your mother...
  - In meditation, you are seeking to understand how to apply the scriptures in your everyday life.
    - I have known people who knew a whole lot of Bible,
      - but did not know how to apply it at all—
      - They weren't bringing it into life...

TRANS> So you see that knowing God's will is quite straightforward...

- It all comes down to seeking His will as He has revealed it to us—from Scripture...
  - It is a lifelong process as there is always more for us to learn, and you will have to work hard if you are going to make progress...
  - But God promises to show His will to you if you will seek it, and He will...
    - He has given you the heart to seek Him and He will show you His way...
    - That is the promise of Psalm 25.
- But I want you to notice what else Paul says in Ephesians 5:17—
  - He not only tells you to understand what the will of the Lord is, but he also tells you to not be unwise...
    - Now of course the most obvious way to be unwise is to avoid finding out what the will of God is altogether...
      - But I have already spoken about the importance of knowing His will...
      - But even after you are committed to finding out what His will is,
        - You can be very foolish in the way you attempt to understand it.
    - I tell you, there is no shortage of foolishness when it comes to ways that Christians attempt to understand the will of God!

### **III. So now let me show you foolish ways to avoid in understanding God's will...**

A. First, do not use your feelings as the basis for guidance.

1. People will say things like, "I just knew this was right."
  - or perhaps, "I felt a real peace about this decision."
  - And then you hear that the thing they felt peace about was to leave their husband when they had no real grounds for it...

- or that they “just felt like it was wrong” to chastise their children...even though the Bible says otherwise.
- This is no way to determine the will of the Lord.
  - Proverbs 14:12 warns:
    - Pr 14:12: There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.
  - The truth is not found within you, it is found from God.
    - Jeremiah tells us that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked.
    - That is why we need the Bible.
- 2. However, it is true that you should not violate your conscience—if you want to call that your feelings...
  - The thing is, though, if you are a Christian, your mind has been renewed by the Spirit of God so that your conscience is bound to the word of God...
    - You have learned that the Bible is God’s Word so that if you think something is wrong that God says is right,
      - or vice versa, your conscience is obligated to submit to the word.
      - You have to struggle for a bit to be convinced that the Bible really says what it says, but at last, you have to bring your conscience under the Word.
  - Feelings and even conscience are not to be your ultimate guide,
    - but the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures.

B. Secondly, do not use impressions as the basis for guidance

1. When we were in Alberta,
  - we met a woman who had gone into the ministry, and this is the reason she gave.
    - She said, “I never wanted to be a pastor, but God had other plans.
      - I could not refuse because that is what He told me to do.”
  - This is a classic case of relying on impressions rather than the scripture...
    - for the scripture says that a woman is not to teach in the church or to exercise authority.
    - Whatever voice this woman heard telling her to go into the ministry, it was not God’s voice—
      - because God gave us the Bible and He does not contradict Himself.

2. But what about those like the woman who tells you she received an impression from the Lord that her husband was in danger...
  - and stopped what she was doing to pray for him...
    - only to find out later that he was in a car accident and was rescued in answer to her prayers?
    - Was that not God impressing her to pray for her husband?
  - The answer to that is both yes and no...
    - “Yes,”
      - because in His providence, this woman received an impression that alerted her to the danger her husband was in...
    - But “no,”
      - because it was not God telling her pray for him—
        - not any more than a phone call alerting her that her husband had been in an accident would have been God telling her to pray for him—
      - Yes, in His providence, this woman received information that her husband was danger...
        - But that she should pray for him when she is informed that he is in danger is a directive from God’s Word.
3. Now you might say,
  - What does it matter if she says that God told her pray for him?
  - The danger is this...
    - If people see their impressions as God speaking to them, then those impressions become more important than God’s word in scripture...
      - If God speaks and tells Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice, it doesn’t matter if He has said not to murder in previous revelation to Noah...
      - A personal command from God is to be obeyed, regardless of the general prohibitions in the Word...
        - Is that not how a woman can overlook the prohibition for a woman to teach by saying that God has called her and so she has to obey?
    - The problem is, we are given guidelines in scripture of the selection of church officers...



- These guidelines do not apply to prophets or priests or kings that God directly and personally called in the scriptures...
  - but they do apply to the standing offices in the church—to the selection of pastors and elders and deacons...
    - and they cannot be disregarded without violating the will of God.
    - David, for example, would not qualify to be a pastor because he had more than one wife...
      - but God, by direct revelation, appointed him to be a king.
4. It is our belief that special revelation has ceased now that the scriptures are complete...
- This is the teaching of our Confession of what Scripture teaches...
  - But if someone wants to claim to receive special revelation today,
    - let him be put to the test given in Deuteronomy—
      - that he must never once err in his prophecies and that if he does, he must be dealt with as a false prophet.
      - Let him be confirmed by signs and wonders—real miracles—real healings, real prophecies...
    - God is very serious about someone making the claim that He is speaking for God!
      - He wants His revelation to us to be sure and certain...
        - That is why He dealt so severely with those who claimed to speak His word when they were not...
        - Those who so casually say that the Lord told them to do this or that have not stopped to consider what a serious thing it is to make such a claim!

C. Thirdly, do not use circumstances as the basis for guidance

1. Christians will sometimes say things like,
  - “I knew God wanted me to have this job because I saw a poster for it on my way home right after I lost my old job...
  - and when I went to apply, they told me that through an oversight, the poster I saw was the only advertising that got out...
  - They were afraid they would not be able to find anyone!”

- or “I started to go and reconcile with Jim, but God closed the door—I had a flat tire on the way to his house, so then I knew that the Lord does not want me to go yet—maybe next year...”
2. There was an opened door and a closed door...
- but the problem is, the open door and the closed door neither one have a directive from God written on it...
    - In both cases, the door was interpreted to mean something...
    - That interpretation must come from the scriptures—the door itself is not where the directive is found, but rather the Bible.
  - If the job is at escort service,
    - an open door is a door of temptation...
    - Yes, an open door is an opportunity, but it is not necessarily an opportunity that God wants you to enter...
      - it may be a test of your obedience.
  - If you are a fireman and the house is burning and there are people inside, a closed door is a door you are supposed to beat down with your axe!
    - Just because you have a flat tire when you are going to reconcile with a brother does not mean that God is telling you not to go...
      - Take a bus!
      - You are not to let anything stop you short of death if you need to reconcile with a brother...
        - The scripture is clear—it is something you are to do right away.

D. Fourthly, do not use experience as the basis for guidance

1. You have surely heard the Church growth experts tell you all the different ways that worked to increase attendance...
  - They actually do studies to decide how God is to be worshipped based upon how many people it will draw out to the service.
  - If something works—that is the way to do it!
    - If having the celebrity in or having the worship team or having the stand up comedian works, then it must be God’s will...
    - God has authorised it by blessing it, or at least, so the assumption goes.
  - This was the way the so called evangelist Charles Finney did things...
    - He adjusted his practices in order to get results, and at the end of the day, he had some of the worst theology you could ever find...

- I think it is safe to say that the man was not a true believer!
  - He even denied the fact that Christ died on the cross to make atonement for our sins!
    - But sadly, to this very day there are many who follow him because he got results...
  - The emergent church movement is really just the same error with new clothing...
    - It is about using methods that will speak to our society even if those methods are not authorised by scripture.
    - Like Finney, there are great results,
      - but as with Finney, the very gospel for which all this is supposedly being done is compromised and in some cases entirely lost.
2. Of course experience can be useful—if the experience you have is experience in applying God’s Word...
- Yes, even tradition itself can be helpful in serving God... if the traditions have grown out of His word and are in conformity with His word...
    - For example, as Christians, we devise ways of doing family worship or ways of courtship...
    - These ways, if based upon scripture, can help us to do the will of God...
  - But the danger comes when we confuse tradition with scripture—
    - Or when we assume that what we are doing is right because it has stood the test of time...
    - The Roman Catholic Church has certain traditions that are just plain wrong—
      - traditions that have grown up around ideas that are not scriptural—
      - traditions like praying to Mary or the Saints that God has nowhere authorised in his word...
      - People feel comfortable with this because it has a long history...
  - You see, we naturally grow very comfortable with tradition because you don’t have to figure out how to do things—you’ve done it before so now you know what to do...
    - But if the tradition is wrong, it is very hard to shake people from it...
    - They want to latch on to it because it is so familiar and so comfortable...
      - We always need to be ready to evaluate what we do based upon scripture.

- Jesus accused the Jews of His day of making the word of God ineffectual by their traditions...

E. Fifthly, do not use counsel as the basis for guidance...

1. Counsel, if not according to scripture, is wrong...
  - a. Your dear old mother is wrong if she advises you to pray to a saint—
  - b. Your psychiatrist is wrong if his counsel is based on the presupposition that there is no such thing as sin—or that sin can be treated with medication...
    - It doesn't matter how many degrees he may have...
    - If he does not speak according to God's Word, there is no light in him.
  - c. Your pastor is wrong if he tells you that your problem is that you have a demon of anger... or a demon of lust...
    - There is not a single example in scripture of any such demon...
    - You don't have a problem with demons, you have a sin problem.
    - You don't need exorcisms, but repentance!
  - d. The parenting book is wrong if it tells you that your one year old cannot understand retribution...
    - or that spanking will damage your child...
    - or if it tells you that teenage rebellion is a healthy stage of growing up...
    - The Bible has a very different take on that and counsel is wrong if it does not square with scripture.
2. I have already spoken about the proper use of counsel—
  - When it is counsel that shows you God's will from God's word...it is good.
  - But there is this huge problem today of people receiving counsel that is not of God just because it comes from an expert...
    - Isaiah 8 must be remembered—no matter who it is...
      - Isaiah 8:20: To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.
  - Always measure what you are told by scripture.
    - The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice, and it is here that we learn the will of God.

## **Conclusion**

So my friends, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is!

- Surely all of you who belong to Him want to please Him...

- Surely you want to do those things that will lead you along in becoming more like Jesus Christ...

But as a first principle, remember...

- You can neither understand or do God's will apart from God's grace...
  - The only reason it is even possible to talk about understanding God's will and walking in it is because Christ has come and has given you life...
    - because He has given you His Spirit who is at work in you to make you like Him...
- Do not suppose for a moment that you can please God apart from His grace...
  - But understand how it is that He works in you...
  - He does not just zap you into a transformed life...
    - He brings His word to you...
    - He enables you to understand His Word...
    - And then He enables you to apply His Word to your life...
      - That is how grace and work go together...
      - You work by His grace...
- You can see in this how it is essential for you to understand His will...
  - He gives you this understanding as part of the process of transforming you into the likeness of Jesus Christ.
  - He gives you the desire to know His will and the ability to know it and then the ability to do it...
    - Trust in Him and He will give you understanding.