

Discernment and Knowing the Will of God - By Pastor Phil Layton (8/31/2008)

A. The Importance of this Subject

Matthew 6:10, Mark 3:35, 1 John 2:17

B. A Key Passage on Discerning God's Will

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV) ¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

C. How can we discern God's Will in general and in specifics?

1. Be _____ - "I appeal to you ... brothers" (see John 6:39-40)
2. Be _____ - "therefore ... by the mercies of God" (NIV "in view of God's mercies")
Context of mercy & grace: 9:15-16, 11:5-6, 25-36 (see 1 Thess. 5:18)
3. Be _____ - "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice" (1 Pet 2:13-18, Mat 26:42)
4. Be _____ - "holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship" (Eph. 5:17-18)
5. Be _____ - "Do not be conformed to this world" (1 Peter 3:16-17, 4:1-4, 19)
6. Be _____ - "but be transformed" (1 Thess. 4:3-8)
7. Be _____ - "by the renewing of your mind" (Psalm 40:8, see also below)

D. The Result – "that by testing you may discern what is the will of God"

NASB: "so that you may prove [Greek word *dokimazo*] what the will of God is"

NIV "then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is" (NET note: "test so as to approve")

Discern – to distinguish or determine or judge or separate right from wrong, good from bad

Will of God (theologians usually distinguish two scriptural senses of the word)

Secret Will – also called sovereign will, providential, will of decree (all ordained circumstances)

Romans 1:10, 8:26-28, 15:30-32, Ephesians 1:11, Matthew 10:29-30

Revealed Will – also called moral will, preceptive, will of command (all inspired scripture)

Deuteronomy 29:29 (see Scriptures under "A" above as well, likely in this category)

God's "secret" will is by definition, secret ahead of time, so we must go to His revealed will in Scripture and obey it, trusting Him in the present, rather than obsessing about or presuming His will in the future (Matt. 6:33-34, James 4:13-17, cf. Acts 18:21, 21:14, Rom. 1:10, 15:30-32).

The emphasis in Scripture is not "discovering" a specific individualized will of God for my life through mysticism, feelings, impressions, peace or lack thereof, etc. Instead the emphasis is on "doing" His will that is clearly revealed in Scriptures above and others (note the many commands that follow in Romans 12). When we have studied and followed the biblical principles there is freedom (see Psalm 37:3-5) and trust that God will direct our path (Prov. 3:5-6) and work all things in His will (Rom. 8:28, Eph. 1:11)