

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "God's Way to Know God's Will is Through God's Word"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 7/12/2009

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Introduction

We're continuing our study of Colossians chapter one, verse nine, focusing on the very important matter of knowing God's will. I want to read the sentence that begins in verse nine, as we resume our study today.

- 9. For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;**
- 10. that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**
- 11. strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;**
- 12. giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.**

We've been considering six propositions drawn from the original language of chapter one, verse nine, and I want to recap them briefly for you. We've covered the first five, and today we come to the last one, number six.

Number one: Believing the Gospel of Christ is what makes knowledge of God's will possible. That's what opens the door. You can't know God's will unless you are a Christian.

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Proposition number two is that precise and correct knowledge of God's will is possible. Not some nebulous knowledge, but precise and correct knowledge. That's the word that's used for knowledge here in verse nine. It is not *gnosis*, general knowledge, but *epignosis*, full knowledge, complete knowledge, accurate knowledge.

Our third proposition is that precise and correct knowledge of God's will – knowledge that is not merely *gnosis* but *epignosis* – that kind of knowledge comes because of two things: proper prayer, that is, prayer that God's will shall be done; and the reading and study of the Word of God. The two go hand in hand. They are inseparable in the Christian life.

Proposition number four is that knowledge of God's will involves *wisdom* in the *general* sense. It has to do with general principles.

And proposition number five is the companion to it: Knowledge of God's will involves *understanding* in the *specific* sense, and it is an understanding that involves joining aspects of God's revelation together in the mind. And it has to do with taking the knowledge that we derive from God's revelation in Scripture, and applying it to particular cases, particular situations.

Now, we've covered those propositions in our previous three messages. Today we come to proposition number six, and it is this: The Christian's knowledge of God's will is superior to the world's false and speculative knowledge and wisdom. The Christian's knowledge of God's will is superior to the world's false and speculative knowledge and wisdom. That is our focus today.

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Misconceptions About God's Will

This is a most important thing for every Christian to really get hold of. Why is that? The reason is that the ultimate cause of many problems in the Christian life is the failure to have a knowledge of God's will, and often we neglect God's ordained means of knowing His will because we think something else is superior. The fact is, nothing is superior to God's way.

There are so many misconceptions among Christians today about this issue. Today, many people hear an evangelistic message where they are given the impression that if you become a Christian, every problem in life is automatically going to be solved. There will be no more problems with your husband, or your wife, or your children, or your parents, or your in-laws. All of your financial issues will be taken care of. All of your problems at work will disappear; and so on.

And as soon as a new Christian realizes that these things are not going to be true, if those kinds of expectations have been set for you, when you received Christ, then it's very easy for you to fall into Satan's trap of thinking that you're not really saved, you're not really a Christian at all. And the root of the problem is that you haven't been taught how to know God's will.

Well, what is the answer to this problem? How does the Christian become filled with the knowledge of the will of God, in all spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding? Before I give you the answer, let me say that it is an answer that is both too simple, and too profound, for many Christians to want to accept.

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God's Word Concerning God's Will: Some Examples

The answer to all of this is the teaching of the Bible itself; what the Word of God actually has to say about these matters. And first of all, the Bible says that we Christians are in a warfare. We read of this in Ephesians chapter six, beginning at verse ten. The Apostle Paul says there:

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

That is the nature of the Christian life. It is a warfare. It involves wrestling. But the thing we need to understand is that it is not a warfare against flesh and blood, but against the forces of Satan himself. We're not warring against human nature, or human forces. We are engaged in a tremendous spiritual battle, against a strong enemy. And the warfare never lets up, because the enemy never lets up.

And what does God tell us to do in this battle? "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of *His* might." Don't go into the warfare in reliance your own strength – not your own spiritual strength, not your own physical strength, not your own intellectual strength. Be strong *in the Lord, and in the power of His might*.

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And how are we to do that? We are to put on the whole armor of God, Paul says in Ephesians 6:13. And what is the one offensive weapon that we are to take into the battle? We read of it in Ephesians chapter six, verse 17. We are to take "the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

The most important thing, and the most practical thing that you can do as a Christian, is to prayerfully read and study and internalize the Word of God. That is how you will gain the knowledge of the will of God, and it is a knowledge that is far superior to the world's false and speculative knowledge and wisdom. That kind of knowledge and wisdom is not going to help us in the conflict we are in.

I want to mention just a few things that the Bible tells us about the will of God. We've seen, first of all, that it is the will of God for you as a Christian to be in a life-long spiritual conflict. That's what we find in Ephesians chapter six, and in other passages such as Romans chapters six and seven.

But in this life-long conflict, God's Word tells us that we are being made more like Christ (Romans 8:29). And while we are engaging in conflict with the enemy, at the same time we are resting in Christ. Our salvation is secure in Christ. And one of the things the enemy is going to try to do is to tell you in various ways and through various means that you are not secure in Christ. And so you need to know what God's Word says about God's will regarding your salvation. Romans and Galatians tell you that you are no longer under the curse and bondage of the law; Satan has no standing, no basis, on which to accuse you. You have the rock-solid answer when the

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enemy raises that accusation against you, as he will in various and clever ways. You have the answer, the Sword of the Spirit. Your answer is Jesus Christ, the preeminent Christ, what Christ has done for you by His death, burial, and resurrection.

And God's Word also tell us that while we are in the conflict we are being disciplined and corrected along the way by a loving heavenly Father. It is God's will to discipline us, in order to make us more and more like His Son, and to make us stronger for the conflict, so that we will look unto "Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." We read of this in Hebrews chapter twelve, beginning at verse one.

And at the same time, it is God's will that we have an Intercessor who is touched with our infirmities, Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of God the Father. We read of this in Hebrews chapter four. It is God's will for us to come before His throne of grace boldly, that we may find grace to help in time of need.

And from a material and financial standpoint, there may be times of leanness and times of plenty. You will read of both frequently in the pages of Scripture. Beware of the trap of thinking that lack of materials things is a sign of God's displeasure, and also beware of thinking that material abundance is a sure indicator that all is well between you and your Father. God wants you to hold your life up to the mirror of His Word, so that you can please Him regardless of your material circumstances.

And it is God's will to use both want and plenty, both sickness and health, to conform you to the image of Christ and to test you and mature you. And as with the Apostle Paul, there may be thorns in the flesh that God will choose in His wisdom to

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remove, and there may be others that He decides in His wisdom to leave in place in order to show us the all-sufficiency of His grace.

God's Word tells us that it is God's will that there will be times when the pathway will seem dark; we see this often, for example, in the Psalms. But we also see that God has promised to guide us with His own eye (Psalm 32, verse 8). God says that in the dark places he will illuminate your pathway by the light of His Word. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).

Paul told Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:12, that "all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." That also is God's will. And that is why Paul tells Timothy in the very next verses that it is so important for him to stay in the Word of God, "continue in the things that you have learned and have been assured of." Keep being filled with the knowledge of God's will. All of these things, and I've just named a few, all of them have to do with the knowledge of God's will, this knowledge that is far and away superior to any wisdom and knowledge the world can offer.

Beware of Cheap Counterfeits

Now, we've been looking at this matter of knowing God's will in great detail. This is our fourth message on this one verse. And we've spent time on this just because it is so very important. Not understanding how to know God's will, not understanding what God's Word means when it speaks of spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding – not knowing these things is one of the greatest sources of

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misunderstanding, and one of the greatest sources of spiritual heartaches in the Christian life.

Notice the importance Paul places on this, here in Colossians chapter one. Paul is telling these new believers that he is praying for them about this, above and before anything else. This is the most important consideration: "that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." And why is it so? Verse ten: "that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light."

Let me say this once again. I cannot stress it enough: The most important thing, and the most practical thing that you can do as a Christian, is to prayerfully read and study and internalize the Word of God. That is how you will be filled with the knowledge of the will of God in all spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding – that knowledge which is far superior to the world's false and speculative knowledge and wisdom. It is that simple, and it is also that profound.

Now, as we close our study of Colossians 1:9, I want to talk briefly about some cheap substitutes for true knowledge of the will of God that are being sold in many churches today.

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A lot of people in the Evangelical church reject the kind of proposition we've talked about today. "Don't tell me that all I need is the Bible. That's an insult to my intelligence. It can't be that simple." And so instead, Christians today want to go after all kinds of how-to books and self-help books, and videos, and seminars. What do you find lining the shelves of religious bookstores today? Not Bibles mainly, not books to really help you study the Bible, but self-help books. How to manage your finances. How to raise your children. How to be a leader. How to get along with other people. How to have a better marriage. Do these five steps. Learn these ten principles. Use this formula. Say this prayer every day. And the list goes on, and on, and on.

Now, some of those books and programs – a very few of them – may be of some help. And I will say without fear of contradiction that if any few of them *are* truly helpful, it is because they explain what the Bible has to say about how to deal with these issues. In other words, they are designed to increase your knowledge of the will of God, which is found only in the pages of His Word.

But most of the programs that are being promoted in churches today, and sold in religious bookstores, quite frankly, they are not worth the cost of a match to set them on fire. They are not worth the powder to blow them up. They have little or no basis in the Bible. They are cheap and confusing substitutes for the Bible. They are nothing more than the same kinds of human philosophy and ethics that you find out in the lost world – just with some Christian words wrapped around them.

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These things are worse than worthless, because they actually confuse people. They confuse the issues. They lead people away from the Word of God, and they tell them to rely on something else, or worse yet, on *someone* else. Do this five-step program, or practice these ten principles, or repeat this prayer every day, or read this man's books, or this woman's books, or do whatever else it is that this or that program tells you to do.

Turn off your spiritual brain, and just do this. Understanding the Bible isn't enough, or it's too difficult. That takes too much time. Here's the easy way – or at least it's presented to you as the easy way. And then when people don't rely on God and His Word, sooner or later they wonder why this five-step program, or this self-help book, or these ten principles aren't doing the job. I'm right back in the same problem I was in before, and now maybe it's even worse.

And it's simply because these things are not God's way. They are cheap substitutes for God's way. God's way to know God's will is through God's Word.

Paul says he wants the Colossian believers to be filled with the knowledge of the will of God. In the Greek language, being filled with something was figurative language for being controlled by something. That is what the Apostle Paul is praying for, for the Colossian believers. That is what the Lord Jesus Christ wants for you. To be filled with – controlled by – the knowledge of God's will, in all spiritual wisdom, and in all spiritual understanding.

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“Be not conformed to this world,” Paul says in Romans chapter 12, “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove” – that you may examine, and test, and recognize as genuine – “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” Christian, transform your mind, examine, and test, and recognize the genuine will of God, by prayerfully seeking it in His Word, and in His Word alone.