

## The Christian Life: God's Will

# 1. How Can I Know God's Will for the Future?

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From the **TeachingtheWord** Bible Knowledgebase

Part one of a series

**In this series we shall examine the riches of Paul's great prayer, in Colossians chapter one, that believers will be filled with the knowledge of God's will.**

### Looking Back, Looking Forward

Many of us look back over events we view as high points and successes in our lives, for which we thank God. Perhaps within the recent past you completed your education, got married, were blessed by the birth of a child or grandchild, or achieved some personal or business goal. Perhaps there were blessings of a spiritual nature - the long-desired conversion of a friend or loved one, personal growth in the Word in a particular area, progress in a matter of sanctification with which you have especially struggled, or steps forward in the spiritual training of your children. Perhaps God has brought you particular peace in the midst of some hardship. Perhaps you look toward the future with anticipation that these blessings may form the foundation of others yet to come.

Such reflections should be a time for recognizing how blessed we have been, and to recognize with the psalmist that the blessings of God did not come by our own strength: "But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance" (Psalm 44:3).

But just as often - and for many of us it is more often the case - our minds turn to the things we consider to have been low points and failures. Perhaps you have experienced material and financial hardships. Perhaps you have suffered serious personal loss. Perhaps you have an ongoing struggle with some thorn in the flesh. Perhaps some of your most fervent prayers have gone long unanswered.

Perhaps you have a strong sense of regret about things that you said or did. Perhaps there were things you very much wanted to do, but you did not do them or were not able to do them. Perhaps you have nagging doubts about choices that you made, or you know that some of them were in fact wrong in the eyes of God. Perhaps you feel that you have made no progress at all, or perhaps even regressed, in the greatest spiritual battles of your life.

Perhaps you view the recent or even longer past with a sense that, on balance, it has been a time of failure; you feel you have failed God, or failed others. Perhaps you feel that others have failed you. Perhaps you feel that God has failed you. Perhaps you feel that, like Israel of old, you are now "planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land" (Ezekiel 19:13).

If we step back and carefully examine this swirl of thoughts and emotions in the light of Scripture, we find both that which is sound and that which is untrustworthy. We find both the Biblical and the un-Biblical. Often these conflicts of the soul revolve around a single heart-cry: *How can I know God's will?* Can I, in fact, know God's will? Can I know that I am doing God's will?

### **Paul's Great Prayer for the Colossian Believers**

In Colossians chapter one beginning at verse nine, the Apostle Paul addressed these questions. The fledgling church at Colosse lived in the midst of a spiritual battleground where both Jewish and pagan elements sought to shipwreck their faith in Christ and His Word. Although we do not know the exact timing, we know that Paul wrote his epistle to them shortly before a devastating earthquake struck their city. Paul wrote to them as a man who had experienced much conflict of the soul. As he wrote to the Corinthian church, "our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us..." (2 Corinthians 7:5-6).

To the Colossian church, Paul wrote:

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; 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. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.  
(Colossians 1:9-14)

Paul tells the Colossian believers that his great desire is that they should know the will of God. Note this well: Paul is not praying for the impossible. What Paul desires for them is not something they are to seek after but will only rarely, if ever, find. It is not something that can only be attained by a few spiritually elite individuals. It is not something mystical or illusory. In the first chapter of his letter, Paul is telling the Colossian believers that the Gospel of Christ has changed everything for them. One of the greatest changes that has occurred is that they, as believers, can now know the will of God.

At the beginning of verse nine, Paul is saying this - and now I am giving you a bit of an expanded translation of the original Greek text: "On account of the hope that is laid up for you - the inheritance that is yours because you are in Christ - on account of that, Timothy and I, from the day we heard about the fact that you have trusted in Christ, we do not permit ourselves to cease praying for you."

And then Paul tells them what, specifically, he and Timothy are asking the Lord to do for them. Again, I am giving you an expanded translation of the Greek. We are praying, Paul says, "desiring that you may be liberally supplied with the precise, correct, and thorough knowledge of His will - that is, Christ's will and intent and purpose - in all spiritual wisdom in the broad sense, and in all spiritual understanding in the more specific sense, joining together in your minds the things that you have learned, are learning, and will learn about God."

That is a very weighty statement. We need to break it down into digestible parts. We can do that by forming the details of verse nine into a set of six declarative statements, plus a seventh based on the remaining verses in the passage:

1. Believing the Gospel of Christ is what makes knowledge of God's will possible.
2. Precise and correct knowledge of God's will is possible.
3. Precise and correct knowledge of God's will comes because of two things - prayer and study of the Word of God.
4. Knowledge of God's will involves wisdom in the general sense.
5. Knowledge of God's will involves understanding in the specific sense, and it is an understanding that involves joining various aspects of God's revelation together in the mind.
6. The Christian's knowledge of God's will is superior to the world's false and speculative knowledge and wisdom.
7. Knowledge of God's will has a specific purpose.

This article, and those to follow, will form a study of each of these points as the Holy Spirit reveals them in Colossians chapter one as well as a number of related Scriptures. May these studies be an encouragement to you as you contemplate days past and anticipate the days that lie ahead, while we await the upward call into Christ's glorious presence.

**Next: [What Makes Knowledge of God's Will Possible?](#)**

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