

Excursus: Notes on I Corinthians 1 and the Will of God

The Apostle Paul begins his first¹ inspired epistle to the church at Corinth with an included reference to the will of God.² We understand Paul's letter to be a corrective epistle, as the church of God at Corinth³ was at times both in the will of God and out of God's revealed will as recorded in Scripture. Paul's reference to it⁴ concerns his own calling⁵ to be an Apostle, which was divinely appointed to him by the resurrected Christ Himself in contrast to the original twelve who were Baptist disciples and who eyewitnessed the resurrected Christ.

Christians often express concern as to whether or not specific life choices they are making are in conformity with the will of God, especially in light of Christ's statement, "whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and my mother," and John's statement, "he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."⁶ The following principles are ones that the author has employed in nearly 30 years of ministry decisions, and while he has made plenty of poor choices for which no one is to blame but himself, the guidelines below have proven to be a source of help in pondering the path of his feet. The list of eleven principles is alliterated for mnemonic purposes.

- (1) Christ - Does my decision have Christ at the center and reflect a desire to know the triune God of the Bible and make Him known to the world.⁷

¹ I Corinthians 5:9 makes abundantly clear that the book of First Corinthians is at least the second epistle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, and 7:1 indicates that the church had sent correspondence to Paul as well.

² The phrase "the will of God" occurs 23 times in our English Bible, mainly used by Paul (though Christ, Peter, and John also employ it) often within his salutations. The phrase τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ refers to God's wishes, purposes, determinations, etc. Theological approaches to it include the direct / revealed will of God, the perceived will of God, the permissive will of God, etc. Paul said that the inspired Scriptures were sufficient for the man of God to live a complete (KJV "perfect") life (cf. II Tim. 3:16).

³ The intended audience of the epistle is recorded in verse 2, "unto the church of God which is at Corinth." Therefore, every occurrence of the second person plural pronoun, represented in the KJV by "ye," should be understood as referring to "the church of God which is at Corinth," for instance 12:27, "Now ye (the church of God which is at Corinth) are the body of Christ, and members in particular." The church of God which was at Corinth was an immersionist assembly (Baptist Church) as were all of the NT churches (ἐκκλησίαι) of which Christ was Head (cf. Eph. 1:22, 5:23, Col. 1:18, et.al.).

⁴ "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother," I Cor. 1:1.

⁵ Cf. Tyndale's translation nearly 100 years before the KJV, "'Paul, by vocation an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and brother Sosthenes."

⁶ Cf. Mark 3:35 and I John 2:17

⁷ Cf. I John 5:7, Philippians 1:21, Colossians 3:1-3

- (2) Conformity - Is my decision in conformity to the letter of the word of God? And is it in conformity to the spirit of the word of God?⁸
- (3) Counsel - Have I talked to several wise counselors and listened to them?⁹
- (4) Circumstances - Are the situations surrounding the decision making it a possibility?¹⁰
- (5) Compulsion - Do I have a desire to do this or is my heart not in it?¹¹
- (6) Consideration - Have I evaluated how others will be affected by my decision?¹²
- (7) Confirmation - Is God confirming my decision with providential equipping, abilities, blessing and provision, and even satanic opposition?¹³
- (8) Calmness and Conscience - Do I sense the peace of God as I proceed?¹⁴
- (9) Championship - Is it the best use of my time and energy?¹⁵
- (10) Contemplation - Have I pondered the path of my feet and thought long and hard about my decision?¹⁶
- (11) Call - Have I called on God in prayer and asked for wisdom?¹⁷
- (12) Capability - Am I actually able to do what I am thinking about doing?
Case study in Acts 16

⁸ Cf. Isaiah 8:20, John 10:27, II Timothy 3:15-17. Note: the Spirit of God speaks today through the written word of God, not through audible voices or the temporary sign gifts of the Apostolic era.

⁹ Cf. Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6

¹⁰ Cf. Psalm 148:8, Philippians 1:12

¹¹ Cf. Psalm 37:4, I Timothy 3:1

¹² Cf. Matthew 7:12, Romans 14:14-15

¹³ Cf. Mark 16:20, I Corinthians 1:6, I Timothy 3:2. Note: the sign gifts of Mark 16 were a temporary authentication of the Apostolic ministry and inscripturation of the word of God

¹⁴ Cf. Colossians 3:15

¹⁵ Cf. Philippians 1:10

¹⁶ Cf. Proverbs 4:26

¹⁷ Cf. Jeremiah 33:3, James 1:5