
We have been on a fascinating journey understanding how God views us from His perspective where the spiritual world is our reality and this physical world is merely the temporary field upon which the spiritual drama is played out. I reminded you of this last week and I probably will each week as we complete this letter; as seeing from God's eyes, and not our own, is essential to understanding (without corrupting the message) all that He is communicating to us.

Remember, we are spiritual beings—we are sons of God—who have been made righteous, holy, and true and our lives are to prove out all that is good, right and true, for such is the fruit of light (**4:24; 5:9**). We are to live a life worthy of our calling, we are to be imitators of God in everything, we are to walk in love as Christ loved us, and we are to put on the *new self* because we, who were chosen before the foundations of the world and have been blessed with every spiritual blessing, have been sent here to fulfill the Father's purposes so that His will in heaven is done here on earth. As such, we are to present ourselves as a fragrant offering and sacrifice unto God (**4:1; 5:1-2; 4:24; 1:3-4; 2:10**). It is all very extra-terrestrial like.

With these truths in mind, tonight we are going to address a topic that has proven to be very problematic within the circles of Christianity and that is the issue of knowing the will of God. Pretty much every believer I have ever met wanted to know the will of God for their life. Unfortunately, this is one of those areas in which we tend to let our experience determine our reality rather than being guided by what the Bible says. In our experience, if there is a will of God for our lives, He sure seems to like to play a serious game of hide and seek and keeps pretty much everyone in the dark as to what He really wants. Oh sure, there

seems to be a few people who “know” but for the most part we struggle and strive attempting to discern the will of God for our own lives.

Can you imagine the peace that would ensue if you were to know—I mean really confidently know—what God wanted for you in your “today?” It would be wonderful, so wonderful.

Ephesians 5:17-20

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Now, if we detour even for a moment and examine this passage through the eyes of the physical, attempting to pull the spiritual down into our lives in order to know the will of God, we will miss the entire insight into this passage and probably end up with a real twisted interpretation that will still leave us wanting. Especially considering that this passage seems to contain a random connection of thoughts: the will of the Lord, getting drunk, debauchery (or dissipation as some translations put it), being filled with the Spirit, talking to each other in psalms and spiritual songs, and singing and making melody to the Lord.

How random is that? At least to me, from a surface view, it appears random and just slightly connected. It looks like I am going to have to either take some big

conceptual leaps to make the connection or else I will have to just teach each item as a separate mini sermon.

Accordingly, first we will consider this issue of knowing the will of the Lord. What are you doing with your life? Should you be in ministry and “serving” God? Should you be in the mission field? Who does He want you to date or marry; and, if you are with someone, was it the will of God? What about your job? What about this and what about that? Is anyone panicking yet? This line of thinking can drive you crazy. Are we to ask Him about absolutely everything? How far does this “will” thing really go? Does this mean that I need to ask Him what socks I should choose each day or when and if I should brush my teeth?

Does it really matter anyways? Since most of us don’t ever get an answer to these questions, we spiritualize this text and do not live as if we believe the Lord has a will for us to know. So we make our own decisions and we ask the Lord to bless us; after all, we are doing it “for Him.”

Second, we can move to this issue of getting drunk. It is pretty clear from this passage that we are not to get drunk with wine (beer, vodka, whisky, that seems ok, just not wine). After all that is dissipation or debauchery (not sure what that means, but it sounds ominous). So with this clear instruction, let’s draw our boxes of right and wrong and decide what we can drink, who can drink, how much we can drink, and so on. After all, as one infamous pastor has boldly said, a little legalism never hurt anyone.

Third, we can talk about being filled with the Spirit. I am not sure what to say about that but I leave you with the admonition: go and be filled with the Spirit! Oh, and sing songs to each other and memorize a few psalms and sprinkle them in

as well when your hanging out together.

Clearly all of that was foolish talk, but I wanted to exaggerate some of the ways we tend to deal with this passage when we view it from the vantage point of trying to bring down the spiritual into our physical lives. If we look at life from the vantage point of what we must “do” for God we will be perpetually frustrated, confused, and usually wind up with some form of legalistic application which will always lead to bondage and not to freedom and life. In fact, it will never lead us to knowing what the will of the Lord is for our lives. Therefore, we must, we must, we must, increase our understanding of how destructive it is to our souls when we live first from the physical and then from the spiritual. It needs to be the other way around.

In the Greek, “do not be foolish” is a command in the present middle voice. Thus, it is to be understood to say: do not make yourself a fool—do not! Whereas, “understand what the will of the Lord is” is also a command, but it is in the present active tense. Therefore, there is not to be a moment in our “now” where we become content, having made ourselves a fool, aimlessly meandering through life never understanding the will of the Lord. We are to know; always!

How is that for a contrast? Did you notice there is no middle ground of goodness and the Spirit did not give any extra credit for good effort or for trying very hard to know what God wants? The Spirit says you either understand the Lord’s will or you are a fool! Unfortunately, many of us—sons of God—have spent way too much time playing the part of a fool. Again, do not be misled, there is no middle ground. It does not matter how much we wrap things up in good Christian behavior and Christian lingo, either we know the will of the Lord or we are fools.

In a peculiar sense, understanding the will of the Lord is the will of the Lord for our lives. Therefore, we have to realize that this passage is not commanding us to go and figure out what we must “do” for the Lord; **no**, that is a misnomer and would be a complete waste of time. So how are we to understand this passage?

First, we must know that this is not a random sporadic set of instructions but each line is part and parcel of the same message. To understand the connection, however, we have to go back to our very first teaching on Ephesians where I spent some time talking about the religious culture in Ephesus and specifically all the gods that they used to worship. One of those God’s I mentioned was Dionysos or Bacchus (which was the name adopted by the Romans). Understanding the Dionysos mythology is tantamount to our understanding this passage as these scriptures are a total play on the mythology which surrounded the Bacchian cult. So we are going to learn about Greek mythology as this was a cultural religious phenomenon that had massive implications for the church. The story of Dionysos strangely parallels the story of Jesus and was an attempt by the devil to deceive believers through popular religion.

Dionysos was half god and half man. His father was Zeus but his mother was a human named Semele. The mythology has it that Semele was a virgin and was impregnated by Zeus; but before she could have the baby Zeus’ wife, Hera, was very jealous and tricked Semele into asking Zeus to reveal himself and prove his divinity. But since no human could stand in the presence of an unveiled god, Semele was instantly destroyed (which is what Hera had hoped for). But right before she was evaporated by the blaze of glory, Zeus grabbed Dionysos and sewed him into his thigh and kept him there until he was to be born.

A few months later, Zeus released the then fully grown baby from his thigh. Thus, it was said that Dionysos was “twice born” once from Semele and once from Zeus. Are you starting to get the parallels between Dionysos and Jesus (god, man, the virgin birth, born of a woman, born of god)?

Now, according to the myth, as a young child, Dionysos was kidnapped by the Titans and while he was gazing at his own image in a mirror, the Titans sliced his throat with a sacrificial knife. The child-Dionysos was then cut up into pieces and first boiled and then roasted. Zeus was attracted by the smell of cooking and when he realized what was being cooked he kills the Titans with a thunderbolt and resurrects Dionysos. According to some variants of the story, this is when man first appeared on the earth—born from the ashes of the burned Titans. So Dionysos is the god who dies and is reborn and from his death—from his sacrifice—humanity comes into being. That is why He is depicted wearing fawn-skins for they were an ancient symbol of “new life.”

Archeologists have even found inscriptions on gold leaves in tombs which say: “now you are dead, and now you are born on this very day, thrice blessed. Tell Persephone, that Bacchus himself has redeemed you.” The parallels are getting even more vivid for from Jesus’ death and resurrection, the new man—the ***new self***—is born and we, His children, are redeemed from death and given new life.

Death actually forms a major part of the worship of Dionysos. In general, most of the Olympian gods seemed to disapprove of murder and cannibalism but Dionysos seems to revel in human sacrifice. There are a number of myths which involve women whom he has driven mad as a punishment and they tear apart their children with their bare hands and later, occasionally, eat them.

The best known example is that of woman named Agave whose son Pentheus opposed Dionysos' worship. Agave and her sisters tore apart Pentheus with their bare hands, scattering the pieces of his body all over the mountainside. Thus, Dionysos' worship was founded on the theme of killing opposition. But the story has even deeper implications as Pentheus was dressed up in the same costume of fawn skin that the god himself wears. It has been said that he is serving as a stand-in for the god, dying the death of Dionysos at the hands of his mother rather than the Titans.

The parallel is now screaming at us. Death is a central theme of Christianity. Jesus demands that we offer ourselves up as a living sacrifice and an offering to him so that we can share in the fellowship of his sufferings. It is a violent killing of opposition; death of our *old sinful nature* so that the ***new self*** can live.

Now Dionysos was the wine-god which gives us insight into his nature. Wine, on the one hand, can be both medicinal and so enjoyable greatly enhancing the pleasure of a meal; but, on the other hand, it also makes people drunk and causes them to behave in some very strange and unusual ways.

The story goes that Dionysos paid a visit to horticulturist, Ikarios. He left this man with a vine telling him that if he followed the instructions he would be able to extract from the plant an unusual drink. Ikarios planted the vine, harvested the grapes and fermented the liquid as instructed. He then invited his neighbors over to taste the new wine. The fragrance of the drink amazed them, and before long they were singing its praises. Then suddenly the drinkers began to collapse, falling over in drunken stupor. Those left standing accused Ikarios of poisoning them and they beat him to death throwing his mutilated body into a well.

This, according to myth, was the first manifestation of Dionysos—the benefactor of mankind—the giver of good things. Wine became so popular that Dionysos became known as the great liberator—the one who will free you from your own mind and from your “normal self” by madness and ecstasy of wine. The divine mission of Dionysos was to mingle the music and song with wine in order to bring an end to care and worry.

Jesus brought us *new wine*, the Holy Spirit, to free our minds from our *old self* and renew our minds, transform our souls, and He bring us into an ecstasy, so to speak, of oneness with Him where we address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord. He brings us to a place where we are not controlled by our cares and worries, as we cast them upon Him, freeing us up to worship and enjoy Him and each other.

In Ephesus (as well as most of Asia Minor), Dionysos worship became part of the Cybelene rituals (Cybele was the central goddess that was worshiped in Ephesus). However, the Bacchian rituals, or the “Dionysian mysteries” as they were called, were the deepest and most secretive of mysteries and ritual practices. Dionysus was believed to be connected to the “cult of the souls” as he presided over communication between the living and the dead. In fact, it was in the mad crazy drunken stupors that his followers were said to reach a state of ecstasy where they could actually communicate with the dead in order to divine their future and know what they should do with their lives.

Yes, people would go to the festivals and get absolutely plastered on wine believing that if they got out of control and sick enough to be separated from their rational mind that they would be able to hear what the gods had to say. It

was their method for “understanding the will of the Lord” so to speak.

In many ways, walking in the Spirit of God is also one of the deepest mysteries in the realm of Christianity, as experientially it has been largely unknown. And walking in the Spirit of God requires both separation from our natural mind and communion with the Spirit of God in order for us to know the will of God. It requires us to be filled completely with “new wine” so we can have the mind of Christ and understand the secret wisdom of God; for the Spirit searches out everything and shows us even God’s deep secrets. And God has actually given us His Spirit so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us (**1 Corinthians 2**). The parallel is scary.

One final point I want to make about the Dionysos mythology. Dionysos made a habit of stealing the identities of his worshipers. They are depicted in the stories as dancing on the mountainside with no separate personalities; they are mad, crazed and they have been taken over by the god—and they are all alike. Agave and her sisters were certainly not themselves when they acted in unison and tore her son to pieces.

In this respect Dionysos worshippers behave in the same way crowds often do, in which the individual is absorbed into the mob. Dionysos induces mass hysteria; he is the god of mob fury. All individuality and willpower must be given up to Dionysos. This loss of individuality is demonstrated in the theatre where they portray these stories not only by the masks which the actors wear, but also by the chorus. They dance and sing in unison, all chanting the same words. The members of the chorus have no identity; each is merely an insignificant part of the whole, with no separate will.

In this the parallel starts to weaken. The Spirit gifts us individually, even though we are to move together as a body in unison, and everyone has their separate and unique function in the body. Not everyone is expected to do the same thing or behave in the same way. In addition, we operate within the body of Christ with self-control (as it is a fruit of the Spirit) and not in some mass frenzied hysteria. Yes, we surrender our identity to Jesus but He retains for us the unique and individual way He has made each one of us and He expresses Himself uniquely through each personality that is surrendered to Him.

So with this as our cultural religious background, do you understand why the Spirit had to address this message to those not only in Ephesus but to all who lived in Asia Minor where Dionysos was worshiped? There was the potential for believers to be seduced and deceived back into their old religious practices not really thinking there is much of a difference between the worship of Jesus (walking in the Spirit of God) and the worship of Dionysos.

Therefore, in this passage the Spirit goes for the throat of this cultic worship and says that, as sons of God, the will of the Lord cannot be divined through any of those futile religious rituals. But there is only one way to discern and know the will of the Lord and that is to be filled with the Spirit. There is no understanding that can be gained through any other means or through any attempt to connect with the “other side.”

Do you now understand how dealing with this text from the physical vantage point is so limiting? It has nothing to do with instruction on drinking or even a command to go and figure out what you must “do” for the Lord. And despite the historical framework, don’t be mistaken, this instruction is for us today. The Spirit

is going for the throat of futile religious practices. The Spirit is concerned that we believers will be deceived and seduced back into our old religious rituals not really thinking there is much of a difference between walking in the Spirit and the practices and disciplines of the “religion” of Christianity.

Let’s put this instruction of discerning the will of the Lord in today’s terms. I think the instruction “do not get drunk with wine” (wine being the medium for determining the future) can be understood as follows:

- Do not do a cost benefit analysis of your choices to determine which option is the better option based on perceived blessing.
- Do not just take the door that seems open to you at the moment and decide that it must be the will of the Lord since the door has swung wide open and all the others have stayed closed.
- Do not strive to determine what the will of the Lord is by any manner of religious practice or ritual like putting out a fleece or some other method of testing God to determine what He wants.
- Do not start reading your Bible hoping to find a magic verse to tell you what to do.
- Don’t do the old “drop the Bible and see what page it opens to and then look for a verse that will speak to your circumstances.”
- Don’t start asking, and asking, and asking, and asking God believing that if you ask enough times and are persistent enough that He will be so annoyed that He will finally answer you.
- Do not just take control and decide what you want to do and then ask

God for His blessing after the fact.

- Do not just blindly take the direction of those who have been given charge to lead you as if they are your gateway to discerning the will of the Lord.
- Do not just rely on the wisdom of your own natural mind and your talents to determine what you should do.
- Do not rely on your feelings, no matter how powerful they may be, to decide an issue.

I am sure there are a number of other “do not’s” that we can come up with as people do all sorts of crazy things to try and discern the will of the Lord. However, all of these methods are simply foolish and are not that different to the Dionysos mysteries; it’s just that instead of being drunk on wine we become drunk on religious sensuality and our culturally accepted methods for divining the will of God. These methods have become a substitute for being filled with the Spirit and are therefore nothing more than mere mythology.

I am sorry, but there really is no substitute for having an in depth and intimate relationship with God as your Father, your lover, your daddy, and with Jesus as not just your Savior (the one who died for you) but also your Lord (the one who gets to call and direct all the steps of your life) and your friend, and with the Spirit as your Comforter, Counselor and Provider of all wisdom.

With that said, the answer to the great mystery about understanding the will of the Lord is very simple; it is to be filled with the Spirit. And since this command is

in the present passive tense, it is to be understood as follows: every moment of every day we are to let the Spirit fill us—literally to be crammed full replete within us. Instead of being filled with wine (or religious sensuality for that matter), for that is dissipation or a total waste of our time and effort, we must be imbibed with the ***new wine***—the Holy Spirit of God.

So how do we become filled replete with the Spirit or better said, how do we let the Spirit fill us every moment of every day? We do this by trusting ourselves to Jesus in every room of our heart within the corridor of our soul. Yes, we must once again circle right back around to this overriding theme that that we have studied throughout the book of Ephesians. Our life in Christianity is to be about trusting ourselves to Jesus so He can literally possess us and His Spirit can fill every nook and cranny within our being. Jesus wants the ***new self***—the ***new creation***—to dominate and rule within our bodies and the pathway is through trust.

Some of us however have the Spirit quenched way down into our little finger. Sure we are Christians; but we don't really know Jesus as a person and we don't know the Spirit as a person. We have no idea why we can trust Jesus much less how to trust Him. So instead of being filled with the Spirit we are filled with ourselves and therefore are not in the relational position to even hear what the will of the Lord is no matter how hard we try and discover it.

I want to stop for a moment and review some scriptures in order to reframe the entire dynamic that you probably have in your head about the mysterious “will” of the Lord. **In fact, I am going to be so bold as to say that understanding the will of the Lord is not something for which we have to “seek” and “search;” rather, it is a fruit or a byproduct of being filled with the Spirit.** In these scriptures we will

see the clear instruction that we are to trust ourselves to God and the clear result of our trust will be that God will do His part in guiding our lives.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Psalm 32:8-10

I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you. Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him.

Proverbs 16:9

The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

Isaiah 48:17-18

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go." "If only you had paid attention to My commandments!"

James 1:5-8

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

And finally one of my favorite passages that describe the intimacy of the relationship between God and Isaiah (which is also a description of the relationship between God and Jesus) and the way that God disclosed to him everything he needed because Isaiah (and Jesus) did not trust in his own wisdom.

Isaiah 50:4-5; 10-11

The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom, so that I know how to comfort the weary. Morning by morning he wakens me and opens my understanding to his will. The Sovereign Lord has spoken to me, and I have listened. I have not rebelled or turned away...Who among you fears the Lord and obeys his servant? If you are walking in darkness, without a ray of light, trust in the Lord and rely on your God. But watch out, you who live in your own light and warm yourselves by your own fires. This is the reward you will receive from me: You will soon fall down in great torment.

Are you beginning to understand that instead of “seeking” the will of the Lord for your life you are to seek the Lord and He will disclose to you His will for your life? Don’t get me wrong, that does not mean that you don’t ask, it just means that your priority is not to be focused on what you are to do but it is to be about knowing Him and He will give you understanding. Consider the following: “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart (**Jeremiah 29:13**); and “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (**James 4:8**).

The will of the Lord will be discerned or understood in relationship. Even in the definition of the word “*theleema*” translated “will” this idea of relationship is expressed. The literal meaning of this word is to bring together or join that which has been sent. In other words, God has sent forth direction for our lives and we are to join in with His ways or we are to be brought together into Him—our ways become one with His ways. I think that is pretty cool.

So going back to what we said at the beginning, we are to understand this passage from the spiritual into the physical and not the other way around. We are not to be striving to know what to “do.” Rather, our first and only priority is to be in a deep intimate relationship with Jesus so we can know Him as a person and join ourselves together with what He is doing as He reveals Himself to us. Jesus said it this way (and, remember, we are to follow His example in all things):

John 5:19-20

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things

the Son also does in like manner. "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.

Jesus joined Himself to the work that He saw His Father doing. In the same manner, the Father will show us; but we have to be in the same kind of sold-out relationship that Jesus was with the Father. Jesus said: "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (**John 5:30**). Imagine that. Jesus, the Son of God, did nothing without first consulting the Father—He did nothing on His own initiative; nothing! That means that He asked about everything and then He waited until the Father showed Him what He wanted.

Yes, He waited. I know we all hate that word, but it is part and parcel of understanding the will of God and being in relationship with Him. The only reason we hate waiting is because we have not joined ourselves to the Father's timing for our lives and we want things to happen now. But we belong to Him and so He gets to establish the what, the how, and the when. Imagine, Jesus had to wait 30 years to do even one act of "ministry" and to say even one thing about who He was and why He had come. Yes, it was 30-long years of waiting; but Jesus would rather wait and wait and wait than do one thing without His Father's permission.

I find it fascinating that in John **5:30** the Greek word Jesus used for seek "*zeetoo*" is a Hebraism which means to worship. Seeking not our own will but the will of God is the worship of God. Thus, it is in the intimacy of worshipping God that we will come to "know" the will of the Lord. He will do His part and He will

lead us and guide our steps when we do our part and join together with Him.

This brings to Jesus' command in **John 15:5** to abide in Him. Everything about whom and what we are must result from being attached to the vine (which is Jesus) and receiving the life giving nourishment (which is the Spirit). The whole vine image is a cool metaphor, but do not lose sight of what it means: you must trust in the Lord with your whole heart and not lean on your own understanding. You must know why you can trust yourself to Jesus and how to trust yourself to Him in every place within your heart where you have chosen to be your own god.

You might be thinking how I can know those areas. Well, first of all, if you ask, the Lord will show you; but you must stop having conversation with your *old self* and begin having conversation with God as to the "why" and the "how" and He will answer. If you draw near to Him He will draw near to you. Do not be afraid. If you seek Him you will find Him.

In addition, it is pretty obvious when you stop and take an honest look in the mirror. Without much effort, you can do a little personal inventory and see what parts of your life and relationships are ruled by His peace and the presence of His agape love and what parts are governed by stress, anxiety, worry, control, self-protection, and so on. It is actually pretty easy to know where you have relied upon your own wisdom and not God's wisdom: the proof is in the fruit.

Galatians 5:25

Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives

Therefore, be filled with the Spirit in every part of your life and in contrast with the Bacchian rituals who used wine and music to bring them into a strange conforming unity of worship, the Spirit will bring us into a unique unity whereby we are completely sold-out to Jesus and that will be reflected in our relationships.

Instead of corrupting talk and hurting each other, we will build each other up by encouraging one another with psalms and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all our heart because all of our heart will be filled by the Spirit who loves to glorify the Lord. Further, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be the central theme of our songs and our conversation. This is how we are to live from the reality of the spiritual played out in the temporary realm of the physical.

Let's Pray