

S T U D Y G U I D E



Dealing with Difficult Problems

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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Knowing the Will of God

INTRODUCTION

Before we can understand the answer to the question: “How can I know the will of God for my life?,” we must understand the question itself. What do we mean when we say the will of God? In this lesson, Dr. Sproul will deal with some of the underlying issues that contribute to the problems in our lives, as he begins looking at “Knowing the Will of God.”

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the variety of ways the Bible uses the concept of the will of God
2. To show how the Scriptures provide wisdom and guiding principles by which to discern the will of God upon our lives
3. To know that the ultimate will of God is our sanctification

SCRIPTURE READING

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

—Deuteronomy 29:29

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

—1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. How to know the will of God is a common question for Christians.
1. The Bible speaks about the will of God in several different ways.
 - a. The English word *will* translates two different Greek words.
 - b. The “will of God” can refer to “the counsel of God,” or to “the plan of God,” or to “the desire of God.”
 - c. *Deus revelatus* refers to the revealed will of God which He has made clear.
 - d. *Deus absconditus* refers to the hidden will of God which He has chosen not to reveal to us.
 - e. The “active will of God” refers to His bringing about certain events under His sovereignty.
 - f. The “passive (or permissive) will of God” describes cases in which He allows some things to take place.
 - g. The “decretive will of God” pertains to God’s sovereign decree, which is unchangeable and must come to pass.
 - h. The “preceptive will of God” pertains to the laws that God has ordained for men, but that we choose whether or not to follow.
 - i. The “will of disposition” expresses God’s attitudes, desires, and delights.
 2. The passive/permissive will of God often results in confusion for theologians.
 - a. It does not suggest that things that take place completely outside the scope of God’s providential government.
 - b. There are times when God actively involves Himself directly in the affairs of men and in the course of human history.
 - c. Permissive does not mean that He ever grants permission to sin but He sometimes does not intervene to stop us from violating His law.
 3. The preceptive will of God should be our focus.
 - a. When God expresses His law to us, it is an expression of His will for His people.
 - b. The Old Testament saints realized that the law of God flowed from His character out of His goodness defining what is pleasing to God.
- B. The Scriptures provide wisdom and principles by which we are to make evaluations.
1. All gifts come from God allowing us to discern His call upon our lives.
 - a. Searching God’s principles leads to application for our lives.
 - b. Some moral dilemmas must be decided upon the basis of principle.
 2. People often look for an escape hatch to shape things to fit their desires.
 - a. We should never look to the Almighty to sanction a sinful enterprise.
 - b. Too often we try to get the will of God to fit what we want to do.
 - c. It must be a priority to know God’s precepts, desires, and Word.
- C. There is a liberating dimension of the law of God concerning His will.
1. Studying the law of God leads to the freedom to make proper decisions.
 2. Things done unto the Lord are to be performed with a responsible judgment.

D. Ultimately, the will of God is our sanctification.

1. God wants a life of obedience.
 - a. Seeking after the kingdom of God and of His righteousness should be the main and central business of our lives.
 - b. We should fix our faces as flints towards that goal of seeking the righteousness of the kingdom of God because this is the will of God.
2. Conformity to the image of Christ through our obedience is His will and the rest should be left to the providence of God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

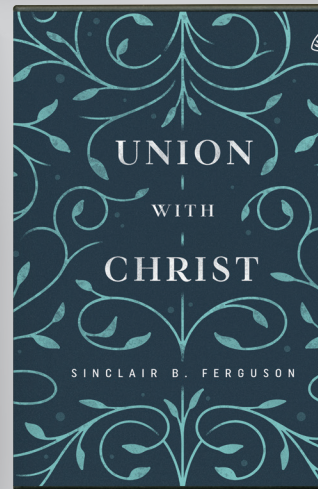
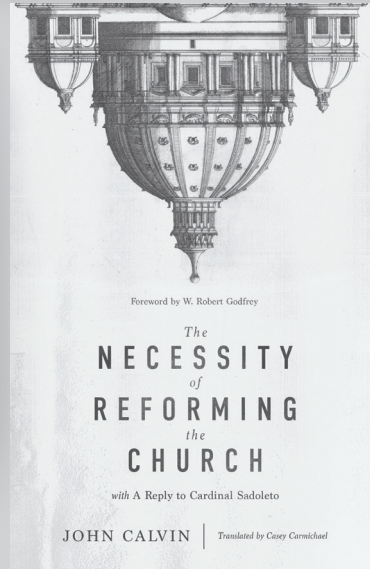
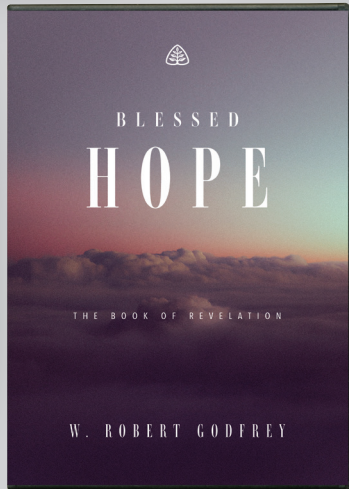
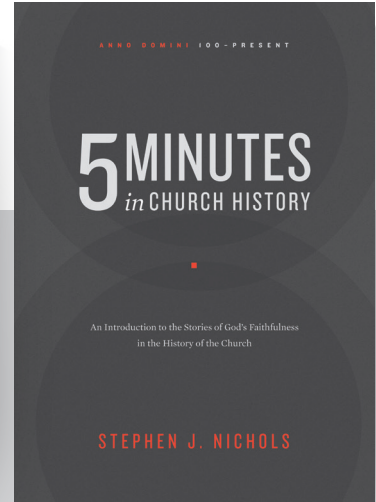
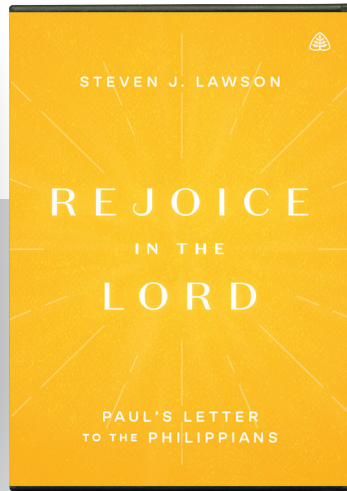
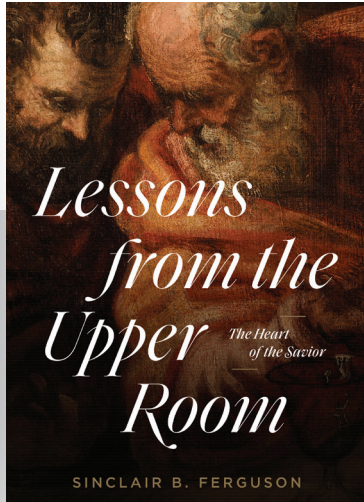
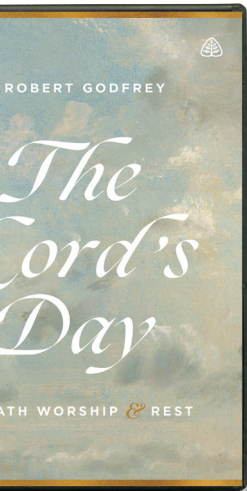
1. Which of the following is the most common question Christians ask Dr. Sproul?
 - a. How can I be saved?
 - b. What is God's will for my life?
 - c. What vocation should I choose?
 - d. Whom shall I marry?
2. Which of the following translations of the Greek word for "will" does Dr. Sproul not mention?
 - a. Counsel
 - b. Desire
 - c. Plan
 - d. Resolution
3. Which of the following refers to the "hiddenness" of God?
 - a. *Deus absconditus*
 - b. *Deus revelatus*
 - c. *Protos*
 - d. *Thelema*
4. When people disobey God and resist His will, that means God has granted moral permission for their sin.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. The aspect of God's will that brings to pass His sovereign decrees is which of the following?
 - a. Decretive will of God
 - b. God's hidden will
 - c. God's will of providence
 - d. Preceptive will of God

6. The aspect of the will of God that refers to the commands of God is which of the following?
 - a. God's will of disposition
 - b. Immutable will of God
 - c. Preceptive will of God
 - d. Salvific will of God

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of any incidents in your life in which biblical principles clearly revealed what you should do in a specific situation? What current decisions or circumstances are causing you to seek God's will? Which biblical principles clearly address those situations?
2. When you face a choice between two rival goods, what are three specific steps you should take before making the decision? Having done these, if you still cannot determine which would be the better choice, what should you do?
3. What specifically did the saints of the Old Testament turn to when struggling with questions about personal guidance? Is it any different for New Testament saints or for us today?
4. Why is your sanctification mentioned as an overarching principle of God's will for the life of His people?

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