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R. C. SPROUL

Can I Know God's Will?

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Chapter One

The Meaning of God's Will

Lost in Wonderland, Alice came to a fork in the road. Icy panic stung her as she stood frozen by indecision. She lifted her eyes toward heaven, looking for guidance. Her eyes did not find God, only the Cheshire cat leering at her from his perch in the tree above.

“Which way should I go?” Alice blurted.

“That depends,” said the cat, fixing a sardonic smile on the confused girl.

“On what?” Alice managed to reply.

“It depends on your destination. Where are you going?” the cat asked.

“I don't know,” Alice stammered.

“Then,” said the cat, his grin spreading wider, “it doesn't matter which way you go.”

The destination matters to the Christian. We are a pilgrim people. Though we do not wander in a wilderness in route to the Promised Land, we seek a better country, an eternal city whose builder and maker is God. Someday He will take us home to His kingdom.

So the ultimate destination is clear. We are certain that there is a glorious future for the people of God. However, what of tomorrow? We feel anxious about the immediate future, just as unbelievers do. The specifics of our personal futures are unknown to us. Like children we ask: “Will I be happy? Will I be rich? What will happen to me?” We must walk by faith rather than by sight.

As long as there have been people, there have been soothsayers and wizards exploiting our anxieties. If prostitution is the world's oldest profession, surely fortune-telling is the second oldest. “Tell me of tomorrow” is the plea of the stock market speculator, the competitive businessman,

the sports forecaster, and the young couple in love. The student asks, "Will I graduate?" The manager muses, "Will I be promoted?" The person in the doctor's waiting room clenches his hands and asks, "Is it cancer or indigestion?" People have examined lizard entrails, snakeskins, the bones of owls, the Ouija board, the daily horoscope, and the predictions of sports handicappers—all to gain a small margin of insurance against an unknown future.

The Christian feels the same curiosity, but frames the question differently. He asks: "What is the will of God for my life?" To search for the will of God can be an exercise in piety or impiety, an act of humble submission or outrageous arrogance—depending on what will of God we seek. To try to look behind the veil at what God has not been pleased to reveal is to tamper with holy things that are out of bounds. John Calvin said that when God "closes his holy mouth," we should desist from inquiry (*Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen [reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 2003], 354).

On the other hand, God delights to hear the prayers of His people when they individually ask, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" The Christian pursues God, looking for His marching orders, seeking to know what course of

action is pleasing to Him. This search for the will of God is a holy quest—a pursuit that is to be undertaken with vigor by the godly person.

The Biblical Meaning of the Will of God

We yearn for simple answers to difficult questions. We want clarity. We desire to cut through the entanglements to the heart of the question. Sometimes the answers are simple enough in themselves, but the process of finding them is laborious and confusing. Sometimes the answers are simplistic, giving us temporary relief from the pressures and the burdens of confusing questions.

However, there is a profound difference between the *simple* answer and the *simplistic* answer. The simple answer is correct; it accounts for all the data found in the complex problem. It is clear and can be easily grasped in its fullness. It abides, being able to stand the test of rigorous questioning. The simplistic answer is a counterfeit. On the surface it appears to be the genuine article, but under closer scrutiny it yields its bogus flaws. The simplistic answer may account for some of the data but not all of it. It remains fuzzy. Worst of all, it does not abide; it fails the test of deeper questioning. It does not satisfy in the long haul.

The Meaning of God's Will

One of the most excruciating questions in theology is, “Why did Adam fall?” The simplistic answer, commonly heard, is that Adam fell by his own free will. Such an answer is satisfying until we probe the question more deeply. Suppose we ask: “How could a righteous creature made by a perfect Creator sin? How could Adam make an evil choice while possessing no prior inclination or disposition to evil? Was he simply deceived or coerced by Satan? If so, why would Adam then be blameworthy?” If he was merely deceived, then the fault is all Satan’s. If he was coerced, then it was not a free choice. If he sinned because he had a prior desire or inclination to sin, then we must ask: “What was the source of his evil desire? Did God put it there?” If so, then we cast a shadow on the integrity of the Creator.

Perhaps the simplest way to expose the weak character of the simplistic answer that Adam fell by his own free will is to ask our question another way: “Why did Adam exercise his own free will to sin?” It simply won’t do to answer, “Because he chose to.” This answer is a mere repetition of the question in a declarative form.

I would like to offer a simple answer to the difficult question of Adam’s fall, but I simply can’t. The only response I can give to the question is that I don’t know the answer.

Some readers will surely chasten me at this point by saying to themselves: "I know the answer! Adam fell because it was the will of God."

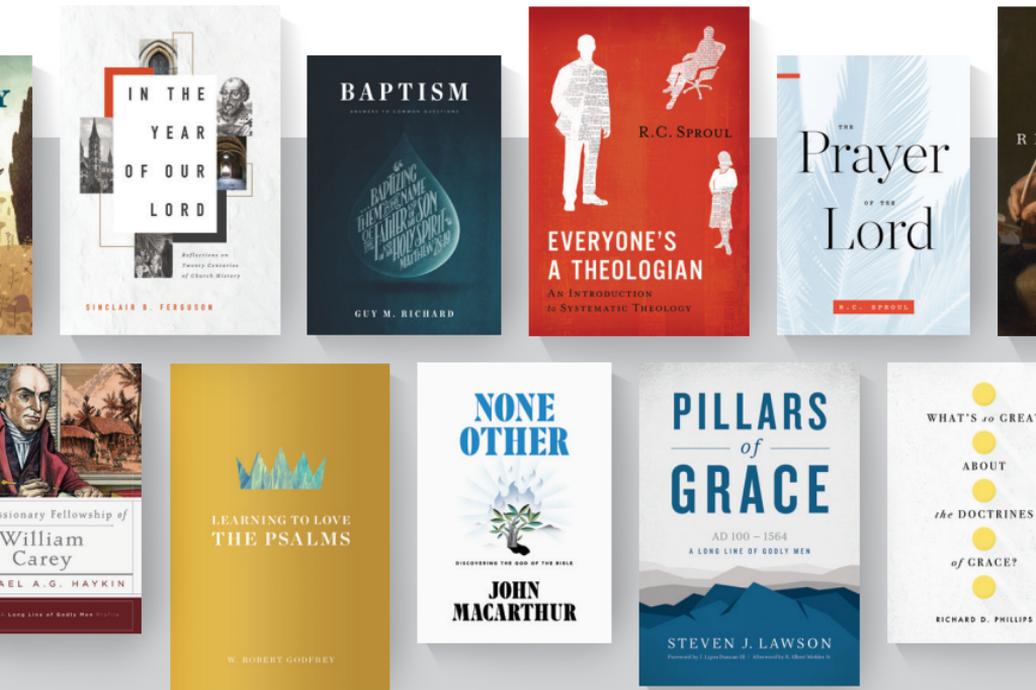
I immediately ask: "In what sense was Adam's fall the will of God? Did God *force* Adam to fall and then punish him for doing what he had no power to avoid?" To ask such an impious question is to answer it. Certainly the fall must have been the "will of God" in some sense, but the crucial question remains, "In what sense?"

So here we are, pressed squarely against a biting question that involves the matter of the will of God. We want to know how the will of God worked in Adam's life; but more personally, we want to know how the will of God works in our own lives.

When questions are difficult and complex, it is a good rule to collect as much data about them as possible. The more clues the detective has to work with, the easier it usually is to solve the crime (note the word *usually*). Sometimes the detective suffers from too many clues, which only serve to compound the difficulty of the solution. The corporate executive faced with major decision-making responsibilities knows the importance of sufficient data- and record-keeping. His maxim may be: "If you have

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How should I decide what to do?

Christians should aim to lead lives that please God, regardless of their circumstances. But when facing major life decisions, we often wonder what God wants us to do.

In this booklet, Dr. R.C. Sproul outlines timeless principles for discovering and applying God's will in our day-to-day decisions. He illustrates how these principles inform two significant decisions—the choice of a career and the choice of a spouse.

The Crucial Questions booklet series by Dr. R.C. Sproul offers succinct answers to important questions often asked by Christians and thoughtful inquirers.

Dr. R.C. Sproul was founder of Ligonier Ministries, founding pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and first president of Reformation Bible College. He was author of more than one hundred books, including *The Holiness of God*.



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