

# God's Guidance Today

*The Holy Spirit Today*

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Well, thank you all for being with us here today and joining us over the live stream. It's a concluding message today for our series that we've titled "The Holy Spirit Today," and we've done a lot of heavy lifting in this series and I appreciate the feedback and I appreciate the patience that everyone has shown as we've gone through these matters of such foundational importance. Where is it that God has spoken? Where do we find the will of God? Where has he revealed himself? Those are the most fundamental questions that a man could ask and act upon is where can I find God? Where can I find that God is speaking? Where can I find that he has made himself known? Where can I find that which I must do in order to be reconciled to him and having been reconciled to him, to please him in my life? Those are most fundamental matters and it would be easy to take the answer for granted but I don't want to do that here today.

You know, I realize as we all do, that if you're a true Christian, one of the fundamental animating desires of your heart is this: you want to please God with your life. That is a true Christian's heart. A true Christian who truly recognizes that Christ has redeemed him from sin and did so at great personal cost at the cross of Calvary, the true Christian who realizes that he had previously been doomed to suffer eternal damnation for his sins and now is safe in the arms of God, has now been justified and reconciled to God through the work and the righteousness of someone else, the Lord Jesus Christ on his behalf, when you recognize those things, when you recognize what Christ has done for you, there wells up within you for the true Christian, a surpassing desire to glorify God in response to such a great salvation having been given to you. There is no other possible response to understanding the greatness of salvation than that and one of the ways that a person could test whether he is a true Christian or not is to ask that fundamental question: is there somewhere within my heart a desire to glorify Christ because I realize that I would be lost without him? And those themes have very fundamental force in shaping our affections and the choices that we make in life, and it becomes a question of how do I follow God now? How do I follow his will? How do I know his will? How can I know his will and do it so that I can live a life that I know is pleasing to God in response to this salvation that he has given to me?

Well, today I want to do a final message, after having done 10 in this series, I want to do a final message that I've titled "God's Guidance Today." God's guidance today, a most practical and important message for us all to come together around and to understand,

and it is here, beloved, I'm making a very important shift in what I'm about to say here, an important pivot point in the message here. We have laid the foundation not only here but on Tuesday nights for the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, that it is in Scripture alone that we find the will of God revealed to us. It is in the Bible alone, the 66 and no more books of the Bible where God has revealed himself and made himself known in the present age, and it is there and there alone that we find what God's will is. Now here in this idea of how do I know God's will for my life, where do I find God's will for my life, how can I know that I'm pleasing God with my life, it is right here, beloved, in that theme that you find a very practical outworking of the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. This is very foundational and for those of you that will embrace it, you will find that it is greatly liberating to your life. This simplifies things so greatly and shows us how gracious God has been to us, not only in our salvation but in giving us a book that we can read and understand that gives us everything that we need to know to please him.

Now I've quoted the last week or two from the 1689 Baptist Confession, the language is identical in the Westminster Confession of an earlier time, but it says this and listen to it as I read it once more as we close this series out. "The whole counsel of God," I'm quoting now, "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture unto which nothing at any time is to be added whether by new revelation of the Spirit or traditions of men." What it's saying is this, is that the fullness and the finality of God's revelation is found in the 66 books of Scripture. It is there where God has spoken. It is there where we, as his people, look to find his will expressed for our lives, not only his will for our lives but it is there and there alone where you find what is necessary to receive salvation in Jesus Christ. It is in the Bible and in the Bible alone.

Now we've taught on this authority of Scripture many times and it's because it's so very important and foundational, but it is essential for us to realize the uniqueness of this book; that this book stands above and it stands alone. It is separate and apart from everything else and we are not to confuse or water down the Scriptures by adding things into it, by adding foreign elements to what we call the revelation of God and saying that these things are also necessary. Sola Scriptura refutes everything that the Roman Catholic Church has added to it in the subsequent centuries following the completion of the canon. Sola Scriptura refutes and silences all of the nonsense that you see going on in charismatic circles and all of these claims to additional revelation and things of that nature. We see that and what I meant to say is having taught on this so many times, I'm not going to review the foundation of that because we've done it so many times, but to recognize that in this doctrine of Sola Scriptura, in the word of God, we have God's final word. He is not going to continue speaking beyond what he has already said in Scripture and that has implications of great magnitude for our Christian life as well and this is glorious, this is wonderful, this is liberating, this is empowering what I'm about to say: everything that is necessary for you to please God as a Christian is found in the pages of Scripture. You don't need stuff beyond that.

Look at 2 Timothy 3, a verse that everybody in here should be familiar with. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and actually let's start a little further back. I hadn't planned to do this but it will

be good for us to set the stage a little further back. The Bible anticipates the fact that there will be impostors in the spiritual realm, there will be false teachers, there will be false prophets, there will be wicked evil men and the spiritual danger of the environment is great. It's as though you're walking through a battlefield and bullets are flying and arrows are being shot and we're vulnerable in the midst of that if we don't know how to respond and in 2 Timothy 3:13 it says, "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." There will be a decline, there will be a progression in the deception, a progression in the difficulty in living for Christ as time goes on, and as I get a little bit older and as my kids have become adults and as I see young people in the church coming up, it's constantly on my mind that they're facing a more difficult battle coming ahead than what I faced in my own lifetime, than what I experienced and expected. So it's very urgent to me as a pastor to prepare everyone the best that I know how with words that would equip you for this.

Now in verse 14, there in 2 Timothy 3:14 it says, "You, however," by contrast, in other words, you stand apart from that, you do something different, "You continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." In the Scripture you have everything that is necessary for a man to truly find Christ, to know him, to repent and to believe in him savingly; that he would be delivered from the guilt and condemnation that his sins deserve. This is crucial and Paul says in no uncertain terms in the final letter that he wrote in his apostolic ministry, he said the Scriptures, the sacred writings have everything that is necessary for a man to find salvation in Christ. That's pretty important, isn't it? That means that this book is the pivot point of eternal destiny for us. If we must know Christ in order to be saved and he is found in the pages of Scripture, then what that means is the knowledge and understanding of this book, the message of the Bible is the distinguishing mark that is going to lead men either to Christ and salvation and eternal deliverance or the ignorance of it, or the twisting of it, or the distorting of it, or disobedience to it is going to lead a man into eternal destruction. The Bible is so important, beloved.

But that's not all he said. He goes on in verse 16. He gives us a confidence of the divine origin of the Bible when he says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness," and then look at what he says in verse 17 which is most pertinent for our topic this morning, "so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." That is a staggering claim and the implications of it are so vast for us to come to grips with. It says that in the Bible alone, Scripture alone, you have what is necessary to prepare you for every good work that would be possible for you to do in the life that God gives to you. It is in the Scripture where you find that which equips you, prepares you, so that you are able to live a life that is pleasing to God. Everything necessary for faith and life is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the holy Scripture and nothing is to be added to it whether by new revelation of the Spirit or traditions of men.

Now let's just walk through this a little bit more and think about the fullness of the message of Scripture. Scripture claims for itself a complete sufficiency to know Christ and to live for him, okay? Now, that explains, that helps us understand, that gives us a perspective on a very important point. That is why the Bible repeatedly again and again and again points us as the people of God back to the word to know him, to live for him, to be that which would animate our minds and control our thinking and direct our thoughts in our response to life.

Look at the book of Psalms, if you would, Psalm 1 just as a beginning point here. Psalm 1 in the first two verses of the opening Psalm of the 150 books in the Psalter, and I just want you to see the breadth of the claims that Scripture makes for itself, and that as believers in Christ, it is our responsibility, it is our duty and obligation and privilege, even, to believe this and to respond to it and to shape our lives by it.

Verse 1, Psalm 1, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers." Do you see it? This is a claim for the sufficiency of Scripture right there in the opening verses of the Psalter. He's saying in whatever he does he prospers as his mind is devoted to a meditation on the word of God day and night as that word of God becomes that which courses through his mind as truth, as that which is to be believed, that which is to be obeyed, that which is to be trusted.

So Scripture says that you go to this word of God, you delight in it, you receive it, you submit to it, you yield to it, and as you read it, as you meditate on it, as you grow in your understanding of it, there is this promise of life that whatever comes down the pike to your life God will enable you to respond to it in a way that is pleasing to him and brings blessing to you. It's in the word of God, pointing us to the word of God alone.

Now turn to Psalm 119:105 and think about this as we think about the superiority, the ultimate nature of Scripture, the longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119, 176 verses, and it is exclusively devoted to the priority, the trustworthiness, the authority of God's word. So God has zeroed in on his word and has given us a chapter of 176 verses talking about the sweetness and the greatness of the word of God. This is not just a passing matter to our heavenly Father, this isn't a side issue, this is the issue. Where has God spoken and is it enough for us to live our lives in an acceptable and pleasing way to him?

Well, look at verse 97. I said 105 but, you know, if I keep going at this rate, I'll get all the way back to verse 1 and we'll just read all 176 verses here. Let's not do that, although there would be merit even in that. Look at the desire, the love, the sufficiency of Scripture that's laid out for us in this passage. Verse 97, "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." That's Psalm 1:1-3, isn't it, and yet he dwells in it all day, day and night.

Verse 98, "Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word. I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way." Verse 105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path." Indicating, "The course of my life is guided by Your word and it is sufficient for me. I love it. It guides me. It gives me everything that I need to know to live acceptably before You."

This is the testimony of the word of God to itself and, beloved, if we believe the word of God, as most of you do and even more of you claim to do, when we truly believe the word of God, then part of our response to it in trust and faith and obedience is to believe what it says about itself and that what it says about itself is that it is enough and that it is enough to rejoice our hearts, to guide us in all of our paths, to prosper us in all of our ways, not necessarily material prosperity but the prosperity of living a life that is blessed by God and is pleasing to him even if it is sometimes difficult. That is the testimony of the word of God to itself.

Now then with all of that background, that's all by way of introduction. What can we say about the will of God for our lives, then? What can we say about the will of God for our lives, then? Where do we find the guidance that we need in the things that we do? I want to break this out in two parts. Just as a matter of the background of this series, there is a real sense in which this message here is the reason that we did the other 10. Throughout all of this, there has been this pastoral goal and climax that we were moving toward and I wanted to do this message a while back and then I realized that I needed to lay the foundation for it so that it could be better received and better understood and that we would have a context for accepting it and receiving it, because what we're going to say here today runs counter to a lot of things that you hear in other Christian circles, but I want you to see that we have laid a foundation for the assertions and the claims that we're going to make here for God's word and that there's a context of these prior messages that lay the groundwork for what we're about to say here.

Point 1 for today. Write this down. Memorize it. Let it be your guiding light for your life as a Christian as a sincere believer who just genuinely wants to please God with your life. This simplifies things, what I'm about to say, and it is grounded in all of these assertions that we prefaced it with. Point 1: God's word is his will for your life. God's word is his will for your life. We're going to work all of this out. We're going to unpack this as we go along. God's word is his will for your life.

Now, I'm using the word "word," I'm using the term "word" in two senses as I say that. God's Word Incarnate and God's word written. The Incarnate Word and the written word is God's will for your life, okay? The Incarnate Word and the written word is God's will for your life. Jesus Christ is the Word of God Incarnate. John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." John 1:14, "And the

Word became flesh and dwelt among us." So the Bible describes Jesus Christ as the Word of God made flesh; that Jesus Christ is the apex, the climax, the ultimate revelation of God. And what do we find Scripture saying about the will of God in reference to the Son of God, the Incarnate Word of God? Beloved, mark it down. Those of you that as elders we pray for again and again and again because you show no real interest in Christ because your life shows that you are not interested in the things of God, those of you who are conscious of the fact that you are rejecting Christ and resisting his authority even if perhaps you are cloaking that in an outward sense of morality and compliance but you know that your heart is cold and dead to Christ, you know that you have no desire for the word of God like what we have been describing earlier in this message, I've got a word for you about the will of God. I have God's will for you right here, right now. God's will for you is to repent of your sins and to receive Christ. It does you no good whatsoever in that spiritually dead condition to think about God's will for your life in terms of a job or a career or where you're going to go to school or who you're going to marry. None of that matters if you are spiritually dead. None of that matters if you are rejecting Christ, my friends.

Look at the Gospel of John 6:40. Jesus Christ said this, he said, "this is the will of My Father," this is what My Father commands, this is what My Father wants, this is the word of My Father to you in your unbelieving condition, "that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." Beloved, the word of Christ, the Gospel, comes to you and pronounces to you the good news that Jesus Christ has died for sinners; that Jesus Christ is the sufficient and only sacrifice by which sinful men can be reconciled to God; and the response to that comes to you in the form of a command, an imperative, a divine "must" upon your heart and conscience when Jesus Christ says, "Repent and believe in the Gospel. Repent and believe in Me." That is God's will revealed to everyone anywhere on the face of the earth. And we could make this corollary statement which I say with a measure of sorrow and tinged with regret knowing that there are some in here to whom this applies: every unbeliever everywhere is sinning against the revealed will of God. Jesus Christ says, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," and the non-Christian says, "No, I won't. I refuse. I will not have that man reign over me." There is no greater rebellion against God than is shown by the unbeliever saying, "I will not repent."

You see, God's will for every man everywhere starts with Jesus Christ, starts with a call to come to faith in him, to come and to submit to him as Lord, to reject your prior life, to reject the world and say, "My heart and affections belong to You and to You alone. No one else matters by comparison. I submit to You. The fullness of who I am belongs to You and no one else. Won't You save me based on Your work at Calvary?" That's God's will for you. He has come in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and he calls all men to himself.

Look at the book of Acts 17:30, speaking to a bunch of pagans, the Apostle Paul says this, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having

furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." All men everywhere commanded to repent because there is a coming day of judgment in the hands of Christ who is God's appointed representative, "All judgment has been given to Me," Christ said.

So God's will starts with him. Do you know him? Have you cried out to him for mercy? Have you approached Christ with a sense, you say, "I'm struggling here," have you approached him with a sense that says, "I believe. Help my unbelief. I see this command. I need Your grace to follow through. God, help me, be merciful to me, a sinner." In the words of the tax collector who was pounding his chest under his conviction of sin. You know, it doesn't do any good to live an outwardly moral life if you have rejected Christ, if you've not come to him in this way. So God's word is God's will for your life and to unbelievers we say God's word is expressed in the person of Christ and it starts there. He is the gate, he is the narrow gate through which alone you can find reconciliation with God, and if you have not come to Christ, you are outside the will of God. You are sinning against him. Your life is an offense to him no matter how self-righteous you may think that you are.

So the Incarnate Word, it starts there. Well, let's go a little further and our motto, our tagline at Truth Community Church is teaching God's people God's word and we approach the pulpit in that primary way, speaking primarily to Christians and seeking to build up the body of Christ and to edify them in a Colossians 1:28 sort of way. Now we come into this pastoral realm that I think can be so very helpful to you, especially those of you that have come out of charismatic environments or perhaps haven't worked through all of that and you're still trying to come to grips with where does God speak and how does that work and how do I know the will of God. Let me give you a really simple statement here. As a Christian, God's written word is his will for your life. God's written word is his will for your life.

Scripture has said, now this is a massive point that I am about to make here, this defines the way that we think about life and the way that we make decisions and defines everything. It is the starting point for how we determine everything that we do as Christians. Scripture has said – I'm repeating myself here gladly – Scripture has said that it is sufficient to make you adequate for every good work; that in the Bible there is enough for you to respond rightly to God in your life. That has consequences. It means that everything that is necessary for you to please God has already been revealed in the Bible. It has already been set forth by God in his word through his apostles and the through the prophets in the Old Testament. We could define it this way, we could call this God's moral will. God's moral will, and God's moral will refers to those commands in Scripture for his people to conduct themselves by if they would act rightly before him. God's moral will has been set forth for you in the Bible and it's the same for all of us. There are not individual different standards that some apply to you and some don't apply to me and vice versa. God has given a revelation that applies to all of his people that we are to seek and to understand, to teach and to receive, to believe and to trust and to obey.

Let me just give you a couple of examples, a couple of illustrations about how plain this is. These are just illustrations, is all. Go to the book of 1 Thessalonians 4 with me, please.

1 Thessalonians 4 which is just after the book of Colossians that we read earlier in the service. 1 Thessalonians 4 where God sets forth his will for our lives. 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality." It is God's will for you as a Christian to live a sexually chaste life; to live a sexually pure life; to avoid any manner of sexual intimacy with another person outside the bonds of marriage, one man to one woman, for all of life, till death do us part. That is God's will for your life. Jesus expands it even further in Matthew 5 when he says, "Anyone who looks upon a woman to lust for her has committed adultery in his heart." It is God's will for us to be sexually pure; to be chaste; to be responsive to his word which in the 10 Commandments said, "You shall not commit adultery."

Now that has a lot of implications. That hits a lot of us right where we live and think and the things and temptations that we deal with, but it is God's will for us to be sexually pure as those who are followers of Christ. The point here is greater than sexual morality, the point is that God has made his will known and expressed it in the written pages of Scripture. There is no need to fuss over what God's will is for your career choice if you are a sexually impure person. You need to start back. You need to go back and realize that this is a greater priority than what you do for a career because God's word, what he has revealed is an expression of his will for your life.

Now, you go on to chapter 5, verse 18, you see another expression of God's will for your life. We can even expand it to verse 16 where Paul says, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." God has declared what kind of person, what kind of demeanor, what kind of disposition you are to carry through life regardless of what the external circumstances of your life may be. You are to be a person of joy, a person of prayer. You are to be a person of gratitude before him. This is the disposition that he has defined, that he has declared. "This is My will for My people. They will be sexually pure. They will be people marked by joy and gratitude and prayer." That is his will for your life. It is written in the word of God. There is no debating over this, there is simply repentance and obedience where we fall short, and what I want you to see, again these are illustrations of a greater point, is that God has spoken with clarity in a way that you and I can go, we can sit down, we can open a Bible and we can read it and say, "Here is God's will for my life." It could not be set out with any greater clarity and plainness than that.

Now if you would, turn back to Colossians for just a moment as we see as we build on these themes of joy and gratitude, to just see that the word of God is wrapped around all of those aspects, that demeanor in life. Colossians 3:16-17 says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed," whatever you do, you see, there's this broadness to it, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Let this attitude of gratitude informed by the word of God, cause you to live a life that is devoted to the glory of Jesus Christ. That's God's will for your life. That's set forth in the pages of Scripture.



This isn't difficult, is it? I mean, in one sense it's difficult as we battle our flesh and we deal with the remnants of our corruption and we get astray and all of that, but in terms of understanding it, this isn't difficult. This is pretty clear. You could set down a child of 10-12 years old and explain all of this and they could understand, "I get it here." This is not complicated. This is not hidden in the mists of shadows in a dark room for you to try to find out with a blindfold on and say, "I don't know where to find God's will." You should never say that. No Christian anywhere should ever say that because God has made his will known in his word, written and Incarnate. All of these things are just convenient illustrations, the point is this: God has told us in his word how we are to conduct ourselves in thought, word and deed as believers, as his people. God's word has made this plain and he said, "Your motivation in all of this is the glory of God. Do it all in the name of Christ Jesus; whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Now that's a show-stopping moment right there. Is that the animating passion of your life? Is that why you do what you do, that you want to glorify God in your life? Does that have anything to do with your aspirations or your day-to-day life? Does his word have any place in your life on a day-to-day basis? Any place at all, I'm asking. I'm not asking whether you spend two or three hours a day reading Scripture and praying. I realize that may not be feasible for everybody. I'm in a unique, I'm in a blessed position that this is what I'm supposed to do with my life and I realize that not everybody, indeed not most people, have that privilege to do what I do. I'm asking a different question. I'm asking whether you have any heart for that at all, whether God's word is important to you or not because that is the starting point for it all.

Now, I keep saying there are important pivot points here, this is an important pivot point what I'm about to say. Critically, very important, everything that God requires is in the Bible. Everything that he commands and demands is found in the Bible. That has to be true, beloved. If there were things that you needed to know to please God – follow me here, this is really important – if there were things that you had to know to please God but you could not find them in the Scripture, then God's word would not be complete, God's word would not be sufficient, it would not really and truly prepare you for every good work because there would be something else that you needed beyond that that wasn't found in Scripture. God's word compels us to the conclusion that it alone is sufficient for us to know God's will enough to please him.

Now, take a step back, take a deep breath if you want, then the question becomes: how do we find his will in his word? How do we know it, then? Well, start by reading it. You know, this isn't rocket science. You find God's will in his word by applying yourself to it patiently and consistently over time. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Be diligent. Apply yourself. Make this a priority in your life. I don't know how else to say this but if God's word is not somehow a priority in your life, somehow a priority in your life, you are not in the will of God because God's will is found in God's word and how can you expect to find it if your Bible is always closed? I ask you, explain that to me. Explain that to me. Explain that to me.

Explain something else to me, how is it that you can say that you've been born from God above and that you're a child of his and his Spirit indwells you and that you're indifferent to God's word? How could it be that that same God who wrote this book saved you but somehow didn't deposit within you a desire to know what he had revealed? That doesn't make any sense and the reason it doesn't make any sense is because it's not true. That's not true salvation, to be born again and to have no desire for God's word.

You see, this word is pretty important and so let's step back and ask a penetrating question. Beloved, look at your life honestly. Look at it honestly and ask yourself what role does God's word play in your life. Do you desire it? Do you read it? Or can you go blissfully along pursuing your own aspirations without any heed to it and that doesn't bother you, that doesn't stop your life, that doesn't change the way that you live? God's word is his will for your life, beloved, written and Incarnate. This is where he has made himself known and he has given us everything that we need.

Now, secondly, the second point for this morning, we realize that there are a lot of aspects of our lives that are not explicitly discussed in Scripture and that's what this part is going to address. Secondly, positive and the negative here in a very long point: wisdom, not private revelation is God's will for your life. Wisdom, not private revelation is God's will for your life and I'll expand and explain what I mean by that. The Bible does not address every life matter that we face. Should Susie marry Tim or Tom? Should Mark work in Columbus or Lexington? Should Jonathan go to engineering school or to medical school? Those kinds of critical life-determinative questions in a human, earthly, temporal realm are not addressed in Scripture and they have a big impact on life, don't they? What are we to think about those? If God's word doesn't tell me when I open it if I'm Susie and, you know, I can't open it and see Tim or Tom in bright, bold, flashing letters. How does God's word help me know who I am to marry, then, if there's not a direction that says, "The University of Cincinnati or Florida State," just picking a term, picking a school here, "for my engineering or medical school decisions. Then how am I to know what the best decision is, what the right way is, and how does God's will relate to that? How am I to find God's will for that? Should I be a missionary or should I stay here in the States? Should I go overseas?"

Well, let's try to deal with that a little bit and this is where we have the potential, maybe, to be a little more controversial in what we're about to say. There are some people, in fact it may be predominant, some people believe that God has a specific will for each of those decisions and it is your responsibility to find it. You must find the will of God for those non-revealed decisions, you must discover it or you're going to be outside of his will. Wow, really? How do you go about that? Well, you look at the Bible, you get counsel, you look for an inner sense of peace, which may or may not be lasting. Or there's talk of other matters of supernatural guidance, that God will speak to you and whisper softly in your ear, "Florida State," and speak to you in a way. You say, "Why are you fixated on Florida State here?" I don't know. I have a friend, you know him, Joe T., who is a big Florida State guy and Joe's on my mind this morning, I guess.

Is that the way that we find the way forward in those decisions? And attached to it is often an implied, sometimes expressly stated, sometimes implied or sometimes just underneath the current of it unexpressed but thinking people will realize the implications of what's being said. If you go to Cincinnati instead of Florida State when God specifically intended for you to go to Florida State, you have missed his will for your life and now you're living in the realm of second best, if that. And if you don't find these things out, if Susie doesn't get clarity on Tim or Tom from God beforehand, she might miss his will. Mark goes to Columbus when God intended him to go to Lexington. He goes north on 71, all the while God is slapping his forehead – I'm being ridiculous now – "No, no, no, you were supposed to go south!" Does this have any semblance of the great and sovereign God that we serve? Is God going to leave the actual outworking of his will in the lives of his people to mystical sources that they could never know for sure were accurate or not? This all sounds real pious and spiritual and intimate but it is a spiritual bog that denies the sufficiency of Scripture and it's dangerous and lives get ruined over these kinds of things. When you boil it down to its essence, this idea that there is a specific will of God that you are responsible to find before you make crucial life decisions, the message is you need something beyond Scripture to know God's will, then. So you're left trying to ascertain things in the shadows, trying to figure things out with a great sense of uncertainty, "I don't know," if you're honest, "I don't know if this is God's will for me or not." Not really. You can put on a brave front, you can make all kinds of assertions to people but you can't really know. For people that are grounded in this way of thinking, it is common for people in those circles to claim that God has spoken to their heart. "God spoke to me and let me know this or that and then I had this great glorious sense of peace until I realized I couldn't pay the rent. Then I was upset." Well, this is all so subjective. It's so mystical. It's so contrary to what God's word says about itself.

The idea that God would reveal something to you about your life outside the pages of Scripture that you must know in order to live acceptably before him, let's take a closer look at that. Are there reasons to be skeptical of that popular view? You'd better believe it or I wouldn't have raised the question. First of all, God has finished his revelation. Look at Hebrews 1. I realize that this message is going to fall into the hands of some people and be a total assault on their worldview and their understanding of their past life, okay, fine. God has finished his revelation. Hebrews 1:1-2, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days," this last time, "has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." In this age, God has spoken in his Son and he's done. That's the whole point of Sola Scriptura. That's what we've been talking about for weeks and weeks on end. God has spoken in his word and his word is enough and it is sufficient and we're not to seek and to pry into things that he has chosen not to reveal to us. Christ is the ultimate revelation. Scripture is the ultimate revelation. The word written and Incarnate are supreme and they are final and so we're not to be looking for other voices from God speaking to us outside of his word. Look to his word. It is enough.

Now, secondly, and this is humbling to us all but look at Proverbs 28. "God has spoken to my heart," people will say, "about what I am to do." Well, Scripture does not commend that idea at all. Scripture says in Proverbs 28:26 that, "He who trusts in his own heart is a

fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered." Wisdom is contrasted with trusting in your own heart. "God spoke to my heart." Beloved, that is not the place you want God speaking. You are prone to deception. You are prone to self-deceit. You can trick yourself into thinking something is true when it's not. You need revelation that is outside of yourself, that is fixed, that is unalterable, that stands the test of time.

You know, I'm being pejorative in what I'm about to say here but when you're just trying to guide your life by gooey inside feelings and you do it because you define that as a sense of peace from God, you are asking yourself, you are putting yourself into a very dangerous position of setting your life on your own thoughts and imaginations rather than the structured revealed word of God. You know, I can have a great sense of peace after I've just had a really good pizza. I feel content. The world is as it should be. But you get to me when I've missed lunch and supper's running a little bit late, not that Nancy ever does that, you know, but whatever, I'm not going to feel real peaceful there. The way you feel inside, your inner disposition is shifting sand and it is subject to a lot of variables that have nothing to do with God's revelation. You know, I wouldn't expect someone who had just buried their child after a horrific car crash to have a great sense of peace. Maybe they do but I certainly wouldn't demand it in that moment where grief would overwhelm a person, to demand them to say you must know God's will by peace in your heart when everything else in life is up for grabs, is cruel and directs their attention away from the word into inward looking into their own heart where Scripture says if you're trusting in that, you're a fool. This is not commended in Scripture at all.

Thirdly, and the idea, I guess the idea is, you know, you just kind of get these thoughts that pop into your mind and you're supposed to know by the way you feel about it whether it's from God or not and you have a sense of peace. Maybe it's consistent with Scripture, maybe that's not important to you. Well, beloved, do I need to remind you that Satan himself can disguise himself as an angel of light? Satan can come to us as an angel of light, 2 Corinthians 11:14. Satan is the master deceiver. The only way that we have discernment against Satan is by what God has revealed in his word. If we're just going by our senses, by the way things feel, by the way it seems to us, you don't know where these thoughts are coming from. You have thoughts in your mind, it could be just something that your own mind prompted. Maybe, maybe the Spirit of God placed something in your mind but maybe the devil did to deceive you. Maybe a demon is working to deceive you and lead you astray. The point is this, is that you cannot infallibly discern between those options. You do not have that capacity to trust in your heart to try to discern the outworking of those things. That's why Scripture points us, as I said earlier, don't forget what I said earlier, Scripture points us to itself. In his law he meditates day and night and he will be blessed and be like a tree by streams of water. "O God, how I delight in Your word." Your word, the revealed Scripture.

I've given you three reasons to reject that: God has finished his revelation; your heart is not a fit vessel for revelation; thirdly, Satan counterfeits truth; fourthly, let's just be real practical here on something that I won't take the time to refer to Scripture on, these last two, because this is just undeniable, fourthly, this idea that God has spoken to me, somebody that thinks that, they become over time if not really quickly, unteachable and

divisive. "Who are you to tell me from God's word what I should do? God spoke to me. I have a word from God. This is what God told me. I don't need to hear anything else. God spoke right to me, bypassed the word and just spoke right to my heart." Really? Look, when I've met people that way in the past, I have specific people in mind that I won't name, none of them are in this room, I know as soon as people start talking that way, there's no point in arguing with them. They think God spoke to them. Do you know what? Jim Jones, Jamestown, 1978, told people God had spoken to him. You see the fruit of that. If you're not familiar with that story, Google it. A guy from Indianapolis takes his cult down after him, "God has spoken to me. By the way, it's God's will for us to drink this Kool-aid." Over 900 people went to their death in a jungle in Guyana. That's where this leads.

That brings me to my fifth and final point on this aspect of why we reject it, is that it invites spiritual abuse from so-called teachers. It invites spiritual abuse from so-called teachers. Look, this is really common. The book, "Jesus Calling," you know, this is what God, Jesus gave to me to write and to share with you. Teachers like Beth Moore and other places like this routinely talking about how God spoke to them and told them what to do, what to say, and God's message for the church. No. This is really worth flipping the pulpit over to make the point because taken to its rightful logical conclusion, if God has spoken to them, you are not at liberty to question them because where God speaks, God's authority is attached to what is spoken and God's authority is not to be rebelled against or disobeyed. So when someone, when a teacher especially says, "Oh, the Lord spoke to me this morning," do you mean that I should write down what you're about to say just after Revelation 22? Is it that kind of revelation that you're talking about?

Here's the really really really wicked and I mean the word wicked in its most expansive definition when I say that, here's the really wicked aspect of teachers claiming that God spoke to them and here is God's message for our congregation or here's God's message for your life today, here's what's really wicked about that, think about it with me: where now is the center of gravity in the revelation of God? Where now do we find the revelation of God? They don't make this explicit. By saying these things, they are turning your attention away from the word to them. "I am the prophet here. I am the one who has God's revelation. Listen to me." No. No. To the price of shedding blood, no. We don't do that. We do not give anybody any time, any place, anywhere the liberty to claim that God has spoken to them apart from the Bible. Never ever ever do we do that because we have to push aside God's word itself in order to receive that, and we put a man or a woman in a position of saying that God has given them revelation when everything that we've seen tells us that God closed his canon and said, "My revelation is done. You have what you need. Now go live by it."

I agree with John MacArthur in his book, "Strange Fire," when he said this. He said, "Those who seek fresh messages from God have, in effect, abandoned the absolute certainty and total sufficiency of the written word of God and they have set in its place their own fallen and fallible imaginations. We must guard carefully against allowing our experience and our own subjective thoughts and imaginations to eclipse the authority and the certainty of the more sure word." That's where our church stands. Right there.

Now, so I want to end on this most pastoral question: if we do not get individual private revelation, private messages from God, how then are we confident in making life-shaping decisions? How do we know what to do, then? Let me just go over a couple of things really quickly with you. What does Scripture say? Scripture tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ is like a Good Shepherd to us and he is with us always. He's our Savior. He saved us even when we stumbled. We're in good hands in Christ. He is guiding us not with new revelation but invisibly directing our lives through his providence and he said, "I'll be your Shepherd. I am the Good Shepherd." And we follow him as we look to his word, but beyond that, beyond that trust in Christ, beloved, as I said at the beginning of the point, wisdom, not private additional revelation is God's will for your life. Here's what I mean by that: where God's word speaks, your obedience is required. Absolutely. There is no discretion where God's word speaks. Sexual purity, thankful heart, glory of God, those things are revealed, those things are certain. That's what you are to do. But where God's word is silent, you have freedom to choose without fear of sinning against God in what you do. Susie, you want to marry Tim instead of Tom? If he's in the Lord, you can marry whomever you please. Mark, you want to go to work in Columbus instead of Lexington? You think that's the best thing for you? You're free to do that without fear of sinning against God. Jonathan, you want to go to medical school in Florida? God bless you as you go.

You see, when a Christian is consistently meditating on God's word, he has liberty to make life decisions, where there is no direct will of God expressed in Scripture, he has liberty to make life decisions without fear of sinning against God or somehow missing God's will. Period. End of story. If your mind is filled with God's word and you are seeking to live a repentant life, you have the freedom to make decisions and trust that as you do so, God is working out his will in the process, but you do not get advance notice in advance from God about these things. What that means is that you are free to live life with a sense of confidence. Yes, we pray for guidance but prayer is not designed to be a replacement for wisdom. So Susie, you want to marry Tim? He's a Christian? Great. Let me ask you a couple of questions. Does he have meaningful employment? Does he have a job? How old is he? What kind of church has he been attending? Oh, really? That may not be the best decision for you, Susie, because wisdom would say you'd want somebody that had some established life skill before you place yourself in submission to him for the rest of your life. Life may not go too well if you reject that.

Let me end on an illustration that has affected everyone in the room today. What I'm about to say has affected everybody in this room today, that's watching on the live stream, that will ever hear this message. It has affected everyone, what I'm about to describe. Sometimes the connection is really remote but you'll see what I mean by what I say. Tomorrow, December 17, will mark the seventh anniversary of the first meeting in Cincinnati that led to the ultimate founding of Truth Community Church. December 17, there were a group of about five families. I flew out from California, met with them, heard what they had to say. A few weeks later, those families signed a letter to me asking me to come and be the founding pastor of a Bible-teaching church in the Cincinnati area. Okay, that was cool. It was.

Now the question is this: why did I leave a stable life in California, the only home that some of my children ever knew, why did I leave a stable life in California to do that, to do this? Why did I do that? I had no word from God telling me to do it. There was no private revelation from God. No missive to my heart that whispered, "The Reds are going to be good one day. You don't want to miss that. Take the call. Be there when the Reds are good." I like the Reds just fine. I would love it if every member of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team attended here. I'd love that. We would welcome them with open arms. But I had no word from God like that. Beloved, I could have said no to that letter without sinning against God because there was nothing revealed in Scripture about whether I should do that or not. This was not a matter of the moral will of God to me.

So the question is: on what basis did I decide to do what we ended up doing? I don't mean to shock you with what I'm about to say but it is going to probably be shocking to a few of you, anyway. I want to tell you I did not agonize over mystically trying to ascertain the will of God as to what I should do here. I didn't agonize over that trying to find some kind of prior word from God before I made a decision. Yeah, I prayed about it. Talked with Nancy. We talked with our kids. I spoke with my dear friend, Chris Hamilton, whose impact on this church far exceeds what anybody knows. But in the end, beloved, I came to Cincinnati, I signed my letter of acceptance to that call because I wanted to. I wanted to and, look, it's like this, they wanted a Bible-teaching pastor. I was a Bible-teaching pastor and I thought in the end, you know, we checked it out, what are the resources here, what about some doctrinal issues here, what about the way we structure things here. We talked about all of those things. It was not a whimsical hasty decision at all, but in the end when it came down to choices, in essence I said to myself, "Why not? Let's do this and see how the story turns out."

That's how great our freedom is in moral choices. There was no fear of sinning against God by whatever decision I made because this was not a biblical matter that was stated. It was really really important, it's had a lot of implications for a lot of people, but it was not a moral choice revealed in the word of God. Beloved, your security in life comes from this, it comes not from having a private voice specifically directing you in the decisions that you make, but rather knowing that God has given you a sufficient word in which you can find his will, and as you live life according to the desires and the abilities as a Christian that God has given to you, as you follow those things, you have this confidence rooted in the massive truth of Romans that reaches a bit of a capstone in Romans 8:28 that, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." God works by his providence to accomplish his will in your life but you won't know in advance what the outcome of that is.

So here is what we do, do we want God's guidance today? Here's how you find it. You make the word of God written and Incarnate your primary focus. That's the defining nature of life for you. Then you make secondary choices, who you marry, what kind of job you take, where you're going to live, you make secondary choices that are not revealed in the word of God and conform them to the life, ability and desires that God has given to you. This is gloriously liberating because all of a sudden I don't have to live with

this weight of fear of missing God's will on those kinds of decisions, or sinning against him or missing his best for my life because I just didn't wait long enough for the pizza to digest before I determined that I had a sense of peace. This means that I can leave all of that subjective, guilt-ridden, manipulative stuff aside and not fear that I'm missing anything and make the choices according to the life, ability and desires that God has given to you, and then you trust God and give him glory as the consequences unfold before you see Christ face-to-face. And where do we find, a last bit of tag-on wisdom here, God gave a whole book in the Bible devoted to wisdom in life decisions, it's called Proverbs. There you find so much of what can guide you in those things that are not specific in God's will.

Beloved, if you are in Christ, God loves you. Christ loves you and has secured your eternal well-being and he is guiding you through everything that happens to accomplish his will. You don't need to fear a divine spanking in these non-moral areas but rather you can trust that a wise and divine hand is in a hidden way guiding you to the fulfillment of that which he appointed for your life before the foundation of the world.

Let's pray together.

*God, we've gone so very long here this morning. I pray that you would help us live according to that which would glorify you in all that we do, say and think. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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