

Dear Friend,

Every true Christian wants to do the will of God. It is one of the chief effects of the new birth (Ezekiel 36:27). Jesus commands us to ask God every day that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Paul prays that the Colossians be filled with knowledge of God's will. Wanting to know and do God's will is to be the chief passion of our lives. However, how do we know what God's will is for us?

Most of us, when we ask that question are not thinking about God's will in the way that God thinks about his will. Most of us are asking questions like, whom does God want me to marry? Where does he want me to live? Does he want me to buy a new car or not? What job should I take? When God talks about his will being done on earth he is talking about people obeying his law in the daily circumstances of our lives. If you want to know if God wants you to commit adultery today or not, the Bible tells you, no, don't ever commit adultery. Should I be offended by my husband's inattentiveness and make him pay for it by giving him the cold shoulder? Should I lie about my income on my income tax returns? Should I read my Bible today or not? All of these questions are given clear answers in the Scriptures. God's will is quite clear and accessible to everyone who cares to know and obey.

Does God not care whom I marry or where I live or what job I take? Yes he does care. However, the way he leads his people in these smaller matters is not usually through some mystical, magical experience. The way God usually directs his people is through the ordinary course of human thinking, discussion and decision-making. He is not trying to hide his will from us so we have to search for it like a needle in a haystack. God promises to direct the steps of his people. "The mind of man plans his way but the Lord directs his steps."

This subject is of importance to us as a congregation because we are going to be deciding on February 8 whether or not to build a church building in 2004. Our ambition as a congregation is to do the Lord's will. However, he most likely is not going to tell us whether we should build or not by an audible voice. Rather, we are going to discuss the information gathered by the Building Committee and Elder Board and then we will vote. We are trusting that through this process, God will show us his will.

I want to show you a Biblical precedent for following this procedure. In Acts 15 the church in Israel is in an uproar. The apostle Paul and Barnabas have returned from a trip preaching the gospel primarily to Gentile people. He has formed congregations of Gentile converts upon their confession of faith in Christ. He has not required them to submit to any of the Jewish traditions or customs. In particular he did not require any of them to be circumcised. This was a scandal to the Jewish Christians in Palestine. They could not imagine anyone being accepted into God's kingdom without being circumcised and keeping the Jewish laws. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas' home church in Antioch sent them to Jerusalem to talk with the church there to find out if Gentiles needed to not only confess faith in Jesus but also adopt Jewish practices in order to be part of the true church.

As recorded in Acts 15:4, when they arrived in Jerusalem they were welcomed by the entire church. Then Paul and Barnabas shared about their experiences preaching to the Gentiles. After

them, those who felt that Gentiles must become Jewish to be part of God's kingdom stood up and spoke. Then Peter got up and told about his experience preaching the gospel to the Gentile household of Cornelius. Then Paul and Barnabas talked again.

Finally, after all this discussion, James who was the chief elder in the church in Jerusalem made a speech in which he offered his opinion that Gentiles did not have to become Jewish to be true Christians. This is the decision that the entire church agreed upon. In vv. 22-29 they write a letter and send it to the Gentile churches with their decision. Verse 28 is the important verse: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following directives..." We are not given the specifics about how they knew their decision "seemed good to the Holy Spirit" but it would appear that it was through discussion and then the consensus opinion of the gathered church. We are not told about any supernatural revelation, simply about men discussing the matter and applying the Scriptures to their experiences and so arriving at a decision of which the Holy Spirit approved.

Deciding whether or not God wants us to build is not even close to being as important as the decision with which the early church was faced. We cannot appeal to the Scriptures or to any special revelation, as they were able to appeal. However, the pattern of the church gathered to discuss and arrive at a mutually agreeable decision is worthy of our imitation. That is what we are going to do on February 1st and 8th. On the 1st we will discuss the recommendation of the Elder Board to proceed with building this year. Then on the 8th, after we've all had time to think and pray we will gather to discuss a final time and then vote. It is our ambition at the end of that vote to say "it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us that we..." either build now or wait. May the Lord have mercy upon our deliberations and lead us to the decision he has for us.

Seeking his will with you,