

Acts 1:15-26

“My sheep hear my voice.”

(We can cultivate “ears to hear” the Spirit of the ascended Lord.)

See also theology note files #205, #306 on apptoteach.org

1. David Lockerby wrote an important book with the title “Experiencing God.”
 - a. In it he underscores the importance of finding out where God is moving and then going there to participate.
 - b. But how are we to know where God is working or wanting to work? We have a tendency to confuse our personal agenda with God’s where we project our will on a situation and claim it is God’s.
 - c. When we “hear God’s voice” does He sound like a cheerleader for our preferences? How often do we hear God challenge our preferences?
2. Some popular “Christian” approaches to decision-making. (Should a mother work outside the home?)
 - a. Apply the Scripture superficially – Titus 2:5 “workers at home”
 - b. Pray for revelation then look for a verse, sign, or feeling.
 - c. Let social science guide you.
 - d. Follow the leader’s advice.
3. The disciples faced a dilemma after the ascension. How does Jesus speak in his absence?
 - a. When Jesus was alive he chose the twelve by calling them as anyone else would be called. How would Jesus now call a replacement for Judas?
 - b. We face the same question as we seek to follow Christ today. “Discerning God’s voice” is a popular theme for authors.

Garry Friesen’s Decision Making & the Will of God is a good book if you want a study of the subject.
4. The Bible speak of God’s will in different contexts.
 - a. **Matt.18:14** “Thus **it is not the will of your Father** who is in heaven **that one of these little ones perish.**”
 - b. **I Thess.4:3** “For **this is the will of God, your sanctification**; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.”
 - c. **John 17:15** “I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but **to keep them from the evil one.**”
 - d. **Acts 4:27-28** “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do **whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**”
 - e. **Eph.5:17** “So then do not be foolish, but **understand what the will of the Lord is.**”
 - f. **II Pet.3:9** “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**” (I Cor.12:11)

- uses the same Greek word — “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He **wills.**”)
- g. **Lk.18:5** “yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, **lest by continually coming she wear me out.**”
5. If we are going to fully appreciate vs. 15-20 we must recognize Four aspects of God’s will –
- His **DECREED WILL** or His **SOVEREIGN WILL** is that which is preordained and mysterious to us until after the fact.
 - His **DECLARED WILL** or His **MORAL WILL** is that which is expressed as His desire for what people should believe and how they should act and why they should do so.
 - His **DYNAMIC WILL** or His **CHANGING WILL** is that response to our actions that is in keeping with the personal interrelationship between God and His people (who are free moral agents).
 - His **DETAILED WILL** or His **PERSONAL WILL** is that specific life plan for an individual.

Pont #1

God may use things that are not part of His declared will to accomplish his decreed will.

“¹⁵ And at this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry. ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ For it is written in the book of Psalms, '*Let his homestead be made desolate, And let no man dwell in it*'; and, '*His office let another man take.*'

1. Illustrations of differences between declared and decreed will.

- Jesus prayed for unity in his church and it did not happen.
- The Scripture makes it clear that it is God’s will that we be perfect and yet we are not.- that all be saved and yet all are not.
- Jesus chose Judas – it looked like a mistake yet it was in some strange way a part of God’s will that he betray Jesus.
- Judas’ betrayal was predicted by the prophets 100s of years prior to the event.
 1. Judas looked like a real disciple but was not. Judas seemed to have made free choices from genuine motives and personal attitudes.
 2. Judas served a very important purpose and had a huge role in the story of Jesus’ ministry.
 3. The quotations from Ps.69 and 109 come from a context of betrayal. For more information on imprecatory Psalms see theology notes #905

2. This paradox raises some interesting questions. Are we really sure that a Christian president will serve God's purposes best. While striving for justice and peace we must be prepared to live with events that are not positive or good in and of themselves but can serve a bigger purpose in God's plan. Perhaps this is why Paul could face evil circumstances like prison, rejection, and a "thorn in the flesh" without losing hope or faith.

Pont #2

Our "mind set" or "world view" will dictate a lot of what we understand to be God's will.

21 It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us- 22 beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us- one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection."

1. The disciples assumed that a full quota of 12 witnesses was God's plan as Jesus chose 12. A large part of our decision making is guided by our assumptions about the options available to us. It is therefore important that we have a renewed mind with respect to the Kingdom's values. Rom.12:1-2
2. **Asking the right question is a most important step in listening to the Spirit.**
 - God more often wants to change my heart than my circumstances.
 - God more often wants to teach me how to respond to life's successes and failures rather than insure success and avoid all failure.
 - God more often wants to give me new dreams rather than resurrect my old dreams.
 - God more often wants to show His power in my weakness rather than increase my power.
3. **The qualifications of an Apostle.**
 - The meaning of witness = eyewitness to the resurrected Jesus. The replacement for Judas had to meet an important criteria. The disciples were looking for and valuing the power of an eyewitness.
 - The credibility of the gospel message was not in the ethical teaching of Jesus or the transformed lives of his followers, or the story of the cross so much as in the empty tomb. It rose and fell on the resurrection event.

Pont #3

Pentecost brought a dramatic change in the way God's people discerned the voice of the Spirit.

23 And they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. 24 And they prayed, and said, "Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen 25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which

Judas turned aside to go to his own place." 26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

1. External signs were replaced with internal wisdom.
2. Throughout Acts we will see the Spirit speaking in many different ways but never through the casting of lots. It will always be through the inner struggles of our heart, mind, and community.

3. **Overlooked examples of divine guidance in the Book of Acts**

Acts 1:15-26 "*they drew lots*"

- a. Under the Old Covenant (before Pentecost) God's guidance was different than under the New Covenant.
 1. In the Old Testament, God's guidance focused upon the details of daily life in a way that it did not (normally) in the New Testament.

Note: There are striking exceptions to this at times in the Apostle's lives where **visions** (Acts 9:10-16; 10:3-8; 10:17; 16:9-10; 18:9; 22:17-21), **angelic messengers** (Acts 8:26; 12:7-8; 27:23), **physical miracles** (Acts 8:39), **an audible voice from God** (Acts 8:29; 9:3-6; 10:19-20; 23:11), or a **prophet** who had received direct revelation (Acts 8:39) are noted.
 2. In the Old Testament, God's guidance was more empirical (immediately perceptible to the senses - ie. a pillar of fire) than in the New Testament
- b. **Jn.16:13** "*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.*"

Acts 13:2 "*And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'.*"

- a. This guidance comes while having attention focused on the Lord in worship.
- b. It apparently was a corporate decision.

Acts 15 "*And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. And after there had been much debate, ...*" (vs.6-7); "*Therefore it is my judgment that we ...*" (vs.19); "*Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose ...*" (vs.22); "*it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, ...*" (vs.25); "*For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...*" (vs.28).

- a. The language of vs.6-7 suggests disagreement and heated discussion which eventually led to consensus.
- b. Vs.36-41 illustrate the disagreement that existed between Paul & Barnabas.

Acts 16:10 "*And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*"

- a. The "we" refers to Paul and Luke who apparently interpreted the vision together.
- b. "*Concluding*" suggests that interpretation was necessary.

4. **A summary of Paul's pattern of decision-making.**

Garry Friesen ([Decision Making & the Will of God](#) p239) summarizes Paul's normal (when there was no supernatural revelation) decision-making process in this way:

- a. **PURPOSES:** Paul adopted spiritual goals that were based on Divine revelation. He had a renewed mind. Rom.12:1-2
- b. **PRIORITIES:** He arranged his goals into wise priorities determining what should be done first, second, third, etc. He mojured on majors.
- c. **PLANS:** Next, he devised plans that gave him a strategy for accomplishing his objectives. He took active responsibility to make things happen as a good steward. Matt.25:14-30
- d. **PRAYER:** Through prayer, he submitted himself and his plans to the sovereign will of God. No doubt, he also prayed for wisdom in the formulation of his plans, though not mentioned in this context. He believed that prayer was a part of his active responsibility in making things happen.
- e. **PERSEVERANCE:** When providentially hindered from accomplishing his plans, he assumed that the delay was God's sovereign will. This conviction freed him from discouragement. Since his plans were sound, the only thing he adjusted was the timetable. He was willing to endure hardship and set back without changing course.
- f. **PRESENTATION:** Paul explained his decisions on the basis of God's moral will and his own personal application of wisdom. He did not over theologize his decisions.

5. A parable on stewardship

Matthew 25:14-30

“¹⁴ For {it is} just like a man {about} to go on a journey, who called his own slaves, and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵ And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. . . . ²⁴ And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no {seed.} ²⁵ And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground; see, you have what is yours.’ ²⁶ But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no {seed.} ²⁷ Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my {money} back with interest. ²⁸ Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’ ²⁹ For to everyone who has shall {more} be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. ³⁰ And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

- a. Each slave understood that they were stewards.
- b. Each slave understood the master's objective.
- c. Each slave was free to creatively exercise his responsibility.
- d. Each slave was expected to be faithful within the limits of his resources.