

Expressing God's Will

In body life it is often difficult to maintain the proper perspective on the distinction between man's ways and God's ways. Modern American culture relies heavily on the principles of the democratic process. As a result, we often find ourselves suggesting that process as a way for determining a path forward in church actions. As appropriate as that sounds, it misses the most critical difference between church actions and those of a secular organization. That difference is the need for the church to be obedient to God's manifest will whereas secular organizations aren't necessarily obliged to walk in that obedience. This isn't to say that Christians in secular organizations shouldn't work to get those organizations to obey God's commands. But lacking an allegiance to obey God in all things, organizations will more often follow the desires of the majority of their members or leaders. It is not to be that way in the church.

The church functions with Christ as her head and is to walk in obedience to God's will in everything she does. Nowhere in the bible are we instructed to vote on what path to follow. Throughout scripture, God's people are told to follow God's will and not their own. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to trust in God and not our own understanding and if we are sure to do that, He will direct our paths. Before the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God's people frequently cast lots as a way for God to express His desire in a matter. Since God's Spirit is now within each of His followers, we no longer need to cast lots. We can ask God directly and personally what His desire is in a certain issue. When we do that with clean hearts and a right spirit, God's own Spirit can guide us in His way, in every matter.

So how do we discern God's will for his church? We do that through expressions of affirmation. And we often do that on multiple levels or at various stages. For example, the pastors may feel that God is leading the church to take some action – perhaps a new outreach process. After praying over that and discussing how they each feel God is leading them, they may announce a new outreach program. The same thing might happen with actions taken by other committees or ministry teams. In other situations, the responsible committee may want additional confirmation of God's will in a matter, and they ask the church to express that collectively. The church ministry plan fits that category well. The Finance Team and the various ministry leaders pray over the plans they believe God has for the church. The finances for those plans are compiled and presented to the entire church. The church is then asked to pray over those plans and to express either that God is leading them as individuals to affirm that the proposed plan is His will, or to express that it is not God's will to follow that plan.

It's easy to confuse that affirmation with a vote in the traditional sense. There appear to be two choices, and members are asked to express one of the two choices. But unlike a vote that expresses the voter's own choice, in the affirmation process, the individual is expressing what God has shown them through His Spirit at work within them. We are not expressing our opinions. We are expressing God's will as revealed to us through prayer and studying His word. So, when it comes to expressing God's will for a matter there are really three expressions: affirm that God has shown you His will is to proceed, affirm that God has shown you His will is to not proceed, recognize that God may not have shown you His will so you make no affirmation to avoid imposing your own will.

Since this is an expression of God's will and not our own opinion, these affirmations should be made publicly and unashamedly. We are instructed repeatedly to make God's will known to others. Matthew 10 tells us, "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs." Our democratic process tells us we have a right to keep our votes to ourselves. But God's word instructs that we are to tell everyone what God has shown us.

So, what do I do if I sense God is telling me something that I think will be unpopular or out of favor with others? If that's the case, ask God to confirm what you think you are hearing. If you feel He has confirmed that, then ask for grace to express that to the congregation. Remember, Joshua and Caleb were in the minority, but they were still expressing God's will. The Israelites would have been so much better off if they hadn't been swayed by the majority.

Here are some passages that speak about this issue. God may bring others to mind as well. We encourage you to spend time studying God's word and asking Him to help you understand these principles from His perspective and not the world's.

Psalms 9:11

Matthew 10:26 – 28

Psalms 40:9

Acts 20:25 – 27

Psalms 71:15 – 16

1 John 1:1 – 3

Psalms 118:14 – 17

1 Corinthians 3:16 – 4:2

Psalms 145:3 – 6

Jerimiah 23:28

Isaiah 12:2 – 4

Romans 10:9 – 10