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Knowing God's Will Philippians 3:15-16

Intro: We have now come to v15, having just looked at some of the most profound statements made concerning the Christian life by the apostle Paul in vs7-14. At first glance, v15 merely looks like a summary verse, a way for Paul to wrap up one section and move on to another but that is not the case at all. By its own right, this passage also has important information to convey to believers of all ages and if we take the time to dig a little deeper under the surface then we may find that our text today is just as profound and important as all that has come before it. But, before we get out our digging implements, let's deal with the obvious topics of this verse.

15 – mind – Paul's desire was that the believers in Philippi would have this mind. What mind is he referring to? Well, since the very beginning of the letter, Paul has been exhorting them to strive for Christian unity, to not just focus on their own needs but to see to the needs and benefits of others as well. His classic example of this is to refer to it as the mind of Christ, who willingly set aside His rightful, heavenly glory to become a man and die for our sins.

Most recently, in the previous passage, Paul describes the goals and aspirations that should determine our conduct and characterize our Christian life. More specifically, letting the past be the past and focusing on living for the Lord in the present, pressing on - striving to run the race that God Himself has laid out before him. We, like Paul, should be discontented with any style of living that fails to grasp hold the very purpose for which Jesus Christ has grabbed hold of us. Paul was willing to go anywhere for Jesus as long as it was forward.

Now, knowing that this should be the desire of every believer, Paul also realizes that it will most likely only show up in the lives of mature believers. What constitutes a mature believer? One who has been long in the faith, has studied the Word deeply and consistently, one who has had many experiences of God working in and through their lives? Well, you would hope that a person like that would be mature but that is not always the case. Spiritual maturity does not occur over time, it doesn't happen automatically

like physical maturity – “They’ll eventually grow into it!” No, they won’t because spiritual maturity doesn’t come from marking time or reading books or listening to worship music. It comes from pressing into your relationship with Christ and being obedient to whatever light you have received from God’s Word. That’s why it is possible for new believers to often achieve more for the Lord in a short time than many who are long in the tooth.

Of course, Paul isn’t giving us the qualifications for spiritual maturity here, just the evidence of it. He is simply saying that those who are spiritually mature will have this mind, they will already be practicing the things he has been writing about, even if they were unable to articulate them as clearly as he has, because they have been cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and His presence and influence will produce the same attitudes and desires in their hearts that it has produced in Paul’s heart.

But, Paul is confident of 2 things in this verse: **1)** that those who are really spiritually mature will have this mind and; **2)** if they didn’t, Paul trusted that God would soon reveal to them the necessity and blessing of possessing this mind.

Here we see another side of Paul’s great faith and confidence in God. Paul had an unyielding trust in the ability of the Lord to deal with His own people. We have already seen his declaration of this trust in **1:6**. This was not just a great concept Paul included in this letter to shore up the faith of the Philippian Christians; Paul believed and relied on this truth. It never entered his mind that if he failed to convince these believers then they would never be convinced. Paul knew the Lord could work effectively in their lives with him or without him.

16 – In **v15**, Paul gives allowance for the possibility of a lack of understanding on the part of mature believers, knowing that the Lord will make up for that lack. But here, Paul refuses to allow any lack of understanding to be used as an excuse by any believer for not doing what they did know to be the Lord’s will. What we don’t know about the Bible and the deep doctrines of the faith can never excuse us from failing to fulfill what we do know we’re supposed to do. The reality is, we can only walk in the light that we have but, by the same token, we are still responsible for walking in the light that we have been given. Part of walking in the light is being of the same mind.

This is a call to unity that points back to 2:1-2 and 3:12-13. This is a reference to a unity of truth, in contrast to the potential divisions brought on by the false doctrines of the Judaizers. The problem of unity in Philippi wasn't the result of carnality in the church as it was in Corinth. Rather, it seems to have been a danger brought on by both external and internal pressures. Paul wanted to make sure that these pressures pushed the believers in Philippi together instead of driving them apart. That's why it was necessary for them all to be of the same mind.

The principles set forth in these 2 verses are fairly straight forward and pretty compelling. Paul says quite a bit here that we are now not only knowledgeable of, but also responsible to God for (Thanks, Paul!) But there's an important topic still hidden in this passage that needs to be addressed. It something that nearly every believer puzzles over at some point in their lives: some more than they should and other, not nearly enough. The topic is hidden in the second half of v15, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. What Paul is saying is that, in spiritual matters, the believers in Philippi could be completely certain of God's guidance.

This truth addresses many of the greatest and most asked questions of the Christian experience. How can you know God's will? How is it possible for a person to know the mind of God? If God has a plan for my life, how will He reveal it to me? How does a sinful, finite human being come to know what a holy and infinite God desires? These are all honest and important questions that believers have struggled with since the time of Christ but there are answers to these questions and they are provided for us in God's Word. What's more, Paul may only be referring to spiritual matters here but the topic of God's will can be correctly applied to every aspect of the believer's life; since every area of our lives depends on God's calling.

A good illustration of the importance of God's guidance comes from the airline industry. How do the large jumbo jets stay on course? The human eye can only see so far and pilots can't always see what's coming, especially in bad weather. Yet pilots can fly safely in all kinds of weather, because the path is marked out by radar. If they deviate from that path in any way, the radar warns them accordingly. God guides us in a similar way. That doesn't mean we'll always be able to see more than one step ahead in

our Christian lives. It doesn't even mean we'll be able to see ahead at all. It does mean that God has a plan for our lives and He promises to reveal the steps of that plan to us.

How can Paul be so confident that God will reveal His will to His people? The basis for Paul's assurance of this lies in the very nature of God Himself because it is God's nature to reveal both Himself and His purposes to His people. In a sense, everything that God's ever done has been directed to this end. When God created the world it was to reveal Himself to those who would eventually live in it. Creation reveals God. Paul tells us this in **Rom 1:20**. When God inspired the Scriptures to be written, it was also to reveal Himself to us. Finally, just as God revealed His power in nature and His purposes in Scripture, so He revealed His personality in Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus could honestly say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (**John 14:9**). It's God's nature to reveal Himself, and that revelation always includes a disclosure of His will for the individual believer. On the basis of this truth you could say that it's actually impossible for a Christian who wants to know the will of God for their life not to know it.

That's a bold statement! But, it is never-the-less true! Of course, it may sound quite dubious to any Christian who has struggled with discovering the will of God for their life but that doesn't negate the truth. What it does do is point us to some qualifications that must be met or understood before that statement can become true in your life. The 1st qualification or biblical principle in coming to know God's will for your life beyond question is this: if you truly desire to know God's will, you must first be willing to do His will, even before you know what it is. Jesus taught this principle Himself in **Jn 7:17**. Note: willing comes before knowing. Knowing God's will mainly consists in being willing to do it

If you want to get to the point where you're willing in advance to do God's will, you must first recognize that your flesh doesn't want to do it. We're kind of like the Israelites when they first came out of Egypt. They were a massive group, probably around two million. This great mass had been led into the desert where the temperatures fluctuate from above 100 degrees in the daytime and often falls below freezing at night. In these circumstances the people would have perished from the extremes of temperature if God had not performed a miracle to save them.

The miracle was the cloud. It signified God's presence with the people and led them in their wanderings. The cloud was large enough to spread out over the Israelite camp. It provided shade during the day and gave warmth by night, when it turned into a pillar of fire. It was the banner by which they regulated their march. When the cloud moved the people moved, and when the cloud stopped they stopped. The cloud was the single most distinguishing feature of their encampment. But, for all its goodness, the cloud could also be a pain.

Ex 40 tells us that it was the cloud that guided the Israelites all during their wilderness wanderings. When the cloud moved, they had to move – it was their central air and heat unit! They wouldn't leave home without it. When the cloud stopped – they stopped. Now, just imagine how weary the people would have become of following that cloud. Sometimes the cloud moved often, other times not at all. Now, just imagine an Israelite version of the Griswald family coming to a stop under the cloud's guidance in the middle of a hot afternoon and immediately beginning to unpack. They break out everything and set up their tent. Then, no sooner has it all been arranged, than Russ says, "Hey Dad, the cloud's moving again." So they repack their baggage and start to go on again. An hour later the cloud stops so they leave their things packed and decide to just sleep on the ground. But the cloud stays that night and all the next day and all that week. As they are going into the second week the family says, "Well, we might as well get it over with." They unpack. Immediately the cloud begins to move again.

The people must have hated the moving of the cloud by which God guided them. But no matter how much they hated the cloud they still had to follow its guidance. By this means God was molding a nation of slaves into a disciplined force that would one day be able to conquer the land of Canaan. He was teaching them obedience. Why did God need to teach them obedience in such an exacting, tedious way? Remember, He had originally revealed His direct, specific will to them – their deliverance from Egypt was so they would be free to enter the Promise Land. Yet when the time came for them to step into the fulfillment of God's will for their nation – they refused to do it. So, the cloud was their drill instructor, teaching them to learn to depend on, look to and respond to God's guidance.

It's the same with us. None of us naturally want God's will. We want our will. We will always hate God's way, and particularly His way of training us to be

soldiers. But we must go through it for it's the only way we will learn to seek God's will. To know God's will, we must first come to the point where we want to do it.

The 2nd principle for knowing the will of God is accepting that nothing can be the will of God that's contrary to the Word of God. The God who's leading you now is the God who inspired the Bible then, and He doesn't contradict His commandments or principles. Thus, nothing can be the will of God for you that is not in accordance with His Word.

But, God's will is expressed in His Word in the form of great principles. **Jn 6:40** is the will of God for all unbelievers. If you're not a Christian, God's not interested in telling you where you should work or who you should marry or whether you should enlist in the army...etc. He's only interested in whether or not you will believe in Jesus and receive Him as your personal Savior. God's will for you starts at this point. You must accept this demand before you can begin to go forward on any other level.

On the other hand, **Rom 12:1-2** is an expression of God's will for Christians. If you're a Christian, you can take it as an unwavering principle that anything that contributes to your growth in holiness is an aspect of God's will for you. And anything that hinders your growth in holiness is not His will. God is interested in having you become like Jesus.

Col 3:23 is an expression of God's will for your work. This is especially applicable to young people. All too often young people interpret difficulty in their work or their schooling as an indication that they're not in God's will; when actually it's probably just God's indication that they should work harder at it. God wants us to do well in everything.

This principle is closely related to one found in **Eph 6:5-6**: This is for you if you have a difficult boss or teacher. The Bible says that it's God's will that you avoid gossiping about them and, instead, work as well as you are able under their guidance. And you should do it as working for the Lord, not for men.

Maybe you think these principles are good, but they don't address the small things you wrestle with in life. You want to know if you should go to certain movies as a Christian, make friends with certain people at work, join in social drinking, or some other thing. there is a final principle that covers

most of these. **Phil 4:8**: God says you're to pursue the best things in life. If these things are the best things for you, then do them. If not, then go another way. Just be sure that you take your guidelines from Scripture.

The 3rd principle is also important. It's that of daily and even hourly fellowship with the Lord. **Ps 32:8** states it this way: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye." Clearly, if God is to guide us with His eye, He must first catch our eye. This means that we must look to Him regularly throughout the day. The Lord knows we will often go astray because it's our nature. We will always do things that displease Him, but we must get into the habit of looking to Him often—in church, in our quiet time, at various times of the day—to catch His eye, to notice His signals. If we do, we'll find Him watching and He will direct us and guide us with His eye.

If you're serious about knowing the Lord's will and honestly seeking it, then you must be prepared for the Lord to guide you into new ways. The Lord rarely lead us in old ways. God is creative; He's creative in His plans for His children.

If you are honestly seeking God's will for your life, if you're determined to do it even before you know what it is, if you are looking to Him while responding to His voice in the Bible, then God will reveal His way and direct you in ever widening and ever more interesting paths. He will be close to you, and He will lead you in the way that you should go. 😊