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**FOUNDATIONS FOR KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD**

**LECTURES FOR 2024**

**WWW.BIBLICALELEARNING.ORG**

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We have viewed the Bible’s testimony about knowing God’s will. We have discovered that many of our questions about life have no biblical text that address our concerns. Therefore, we need to learn another aspect of “how” the Bible guides us. When we do not have a specific appropriate text, we must discern our issues in terms of a biblical worldview and values model.

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**Of these lectures...**

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Smith: Reasoned Subjectivism

Friesen: Christian Pragmatism

**ABBREVIATIONS:** “GM” Refers to slide and note packs

“DMGW” Refers to chapters in Dr. Meadors’ book, *Decision Making God’s Way*

**\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* END OF TABLE OF CONTENTS \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \***

**ORIENTATION & INTRODUCTION** to Knowing God’s Will

* **Welcome**
* **Who I am**… Dr. Gary T. Meadors, Emeritus Professor of Greek and NT, Grand Rapids Theological Seminary / [gngmeadors@mac.com](mailto:gngmeadors@mac.com) / [www.gmeadors.com](http://www.gmeadors.com) [my resume is on my website]

I have taught Bible, especially the NT and Greek, as my primary focus for over 50 years. I am retired and do special projects as opportunity arises.

A word about teaching method: “Give a person a fish, and you find them for a day, teach a person to fish, and you feed them for life.” (Chinese Proverb?) My method is to teach you how to fish, not just give you a trite answer. Such a method requires more of you, the reader/auditor. You only grow by serious engagement with learning. BE A LEARNER. If you ever feel bored, remember, “Boredom is arrested mental development.”

* **What we will study…**
  + **A biblical theology** about knowing God’s will. Most of the literature about knowing God’s will is written at a “popular” level. My intention is to teach you a more comprehensive way to think about God’s will. This approach is not some simplistic formula to figure God out, but a comprehensive model for thinking biblically about God’s revelation to us and how that guides us in life’s decisions.
  + **CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS... How** do you think about and discuss “knowing God’s will.” The way Christians think and talk varies in Church traditions. Church stereotypes vary by locations... I know my tradition but I may not know your tradition. MUCH of what we will discuss is the Bible and we certainly have that in common. The interpretation and application of Scripture to a subject can, however, differ because of various theological commitments. Please be open to investigate new ways of thinking.
  + **My book**, *Decision Making God’s Way: A New Model for Knowing God’s Will* (Baker, 2003 is Out of Print; BUT is available in LOGOS in English and Spanish; check used book online sites like “Thrift Books.” I am writing a new edition which will follow these lectures).
    - The “table of contents” above notes which chapter in my 2003 book relates to the current lectures. You will notice that my sequence in the lectures differs from my original publication. After reviewing my model for a long time, I think I have developed a better sequence for the material. **You DO NOT need the 2003 book for the current study. It is merely collateral reading.** Please check Amazon from time to time for my revised edition.
    - My view about knowing God’s will is the same as the 2003 publication. I am just upgrading, clarifying, and re-sequencing the material. I am also providing material on biblical wisdom, the issue of providence and a critique of other models.
  + **SEQUENCE**… is difficult for a “model” because **you need to see the whole paradigm in order to fit the parts together.**  Studying the Book of Revelation illustrates this challenge, as one author stated it, “You know nothing about the book of Revelation until you know everything!” The point is that some material only unpacks when you understand the totality. I have thought about God’s will for decades and how to sequence the biblical and theological material in a way that flows well. As the claimed Chinese proverb puts it: “Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach them to fish and you feed them for a lifetime.” My goal is to teach you to fish!

Since seeing the big picture is important, we will do our first lecture as an overview of the whole model then break it out in subsequent lectures. This will give you the “big picture” before we treat the various items necessary for a view of how God’s will is understood and pursued.

* + After I have presented my model, I will do a brief review of several prominent constructs that differ from mine (Blackaby, Smith and Friesen’s individual publications). These three were conveniently presented in *How Then Should We Choose* (Kregel, 2009). Some have claimed that my view is a variation of Friesen. This is an incorrect judgment, probably based on a poor reading of my model. Some take verbal parallels and *assume* they mean the same thing. I will point out just how different my model is from all three in the flow of our study and in the Appendix to this course.
* **Suggestions for study patterns**…

Setting in front of a screen with a talking head can be difficult. In order to help you engage the material, I have provided Slides and Notes to help you engage my lectures. These files are posted on the opening page of the course where the menu of lectures is presented.

Here are some suggestions for effective viewing and study.

1. **Overview** the Table of Contents. Absorb the “big picture” of the subject matter.
2. **Retrieve** lecture slides and notes. You may do this completely or lecture by lecture.
3. **Create** a Notebook for these items. Use this notebook to log ideas and questions that come to you as you listen to the lectures.
4. THEN view a video with notes available to log ideas and questions. Videos will vary in length. You can do a whole session at one sitting or space it out as you desire.
5. **DO NOT get bogged down**…it would be better to quickly listen to the lectures first, then return for a closer study.
6. Keep track of your thinking, being careful to log it according to what part of a lecture/notes stimulated you. Questions of clarification and even disagreement are welcomed by the professor. Dr. Meadors’ email is: [gngmeadors@mac.com](mailto:gngmeadors@mac.com) [his website is [www.gmeadors.com](http://www.gmeadors.com) ].

Thank you for choosing to study with me about knowing God’s will. I believe at the end of our journey you will find yourself better informed about **“how”** to discern God’s desires for creation and your life. My goal is to help you build a “mindset” that can discern issues not directly addressed in the Bible, by reflecting from a biblical worldview and value system. My hope is that you gain confidence in your quest to know and please God.

***Very selective bibliography*** for God’s will and biblical worldview and ethics. Some items seem older, but they are still the better reading on this subject. Additional items will be noted in the lectures.

Cosgrove, Charles H. *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God.* Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987.

Furnish, Victor Paul. *Theology & Ethics in Paul*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, Fifth Printing, 1982.

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics.* New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

Healy, Mary and Parry, Robin, editors. *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God.* Paternoster, 2007.

Helm, Paul. *The Providence of God.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

Hollinger, Dennis P. *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Huffman, Douglas S., editor. *How Then Should We Choose: Three Views on God’s Will and Decision Making.* Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009. [represents Blackaby, Friesen, Smith]

Meadors, Gary T. *Decision Making God’s Way: A New Model for Knowing God’s Will.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003.

Meadors, Gary T., general editor. *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. (participants include Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Daniel M. Doriani, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, William J. Webb present views. Mark L. Strauss, Al Wolters, Christopher J. H. Wright provide additional critique.)

Malphurs, Aubrey. *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.

Milco, Michael R. *Ethical Dilemmas in Church Leadship: Case Studies in Biblical Decision Making.* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997.

Murray, John. *Principles of Conduct.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957.

Rae, Scott B. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics.* Second Edition. Zondervan, 2000.

Ramm, Bernard. *The Witness of the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959.

Smith, Gordon T. *Listening to God in Times of Choice: The Art of Discerning God’s Will.* Inter-Varsity, 1997.

Spieger, James S. *The Benefits of Providence: A New Look at Divine Sovereignty*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007.

Waltke, Bruce. *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* Vision House Publishing, 1993. [Reissued by Harvest House Pub, 1998]

**One final item of introduction** is a note about the author’s presuppositions. The issues about knowing God’s will bring to the surface an array of opinions among scholars about “how” God has communicated and currently communicates to his people. Any construct about knowing God’s will is affected by one’s view of the Bible and an array of theological issues. Here are some of mine.

**MEADORS’ DECISION-MAKING METHOD**

**PRESUPPOSITIONS in regard to God’s guidance in the current era:**

A reader/auditor should have some idea of a teacher’s theological context. Here is a taste of mine....

Presuppositions are core beliefs that guide our intellectual life and the pursuit of the meaning of life. Presuppositions are actually the crown of one’s rational judgments; they represent the product of out thinking to any given point in life. Interpretive presuppositions are always influenced by our cultural and theological location. A “fair” interpreter is one who is honest with their interpretive bias.

* In the present era, God’s normal means regarding knowing his will relates to adjudicating questions and issues via biblical and worldview-values analysis. Direct revelatory activity is not currently God’s means of directing His world. God sovereignly acts as He pleases...but we have no authority to define God in such matters. It just is. We may speak analogically about God acting in light of his self-disclosure to us recorded in Scripture. Beyond that, we have no authoritative opinion.
* God’s sovereign will is worked out in our lives under the rubric of “providence.”
* God’s explicit moral will sets the boundaries of life, including attitudes and actions.
* Christian teaching operates at three levels: direct biblical context, implied biblical context and creative constructs that one uses to provide paradigms for dealing with life’s issues and the Bible.
* Our being created in the image of God is a crucial paradigm for understanding God’s management of humanity. We are thinking, feeling, choosing, and self-determining beings. God allows “freedom” within boundaries so that we can reflect how His image in us deals with life. Our pursuit of the decision-making process in itself glorifies God.
* Biblical meaning must be determined within the progress of revelation and redemptive history. Biblical texts convey to us information within an historical context. We must know what that context “meant” before we can assert what it now “means.” That is, “means now” depends on explaining “meant then.”
* The role of the Spirit or our conscience is one of conviction, not the imparting of new content. The so-called “content” of convictions must be adjudicated by an appeal to biblical teaching. All subjective claims must be validated by an appeal to Scripture. The use of Scripture in this regard will identify which level of teaching is claimed, direct, implied or creative constructs.
* The presence of internal thoughts or “urges” is merely our self-conscious thought capacity processing issues. These “voices” (and this includes Spirit and conscience) are not the voice of God or the Devil but are ourselves talking to ourselves.
* The concept of “wisdom” must be understood biblically. “Wisdom” in the Bible is multifaceted. It is usually synonymous with “knowledge,” “understanding,” and terms for discernment. Wisdom is a knowledge category in and of itself. To use an analogy with English grammar, wisdom is more of a noun than a verb. To act “wisely” (adverb) is to act according to knowledge. To seek wisdom is to seek understanding not revelatory information. Wisdom is a product of worldview. Wisdom is “skillful living” based on biblical worldview and values

**PLEASE NOTE**....

**My model will be valuable for you EVEN if you do not align with my presuppositions. A model is a framework. You can use a framework but guide it by your own presuppositions. Besides, reading those who are different than yourself is an avenue for growth.**