

Dr. Gary Meadors, Knowing God's Will, Session 0, Orientation and Introduction

© 2024 Gary Meadors and Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to my course on Biblical Theology for Knowing God's Will. Today I want to share with you the first lesson. We call this GM0, and I'll explain those numbers and letters in a moment.

But this is the first lecture, and it's Orientation and Introduction, GM0, Slides and Notes. Now, you should have downloaded and either printed or, on whatever device you use, the Table of Contents for the class. Also, there are some PowerPoint slides and notes that you should have available because you'll want to have them as I go through the lecture. Listening to a talking head on a video can be very boring, and I feel that if you have those notes, you can think along with me and consequently have a better experience in learning.

All right, now in relation to Knowing God's Will, let's see how we're going to attack this to give you the big picture of the course. For example, in the Table of Contents in your first page of your notes, you have an outline of what we're going to do. For example, Part 1 is called Discernment of God's Will is Based in Scripture.

Part 2, near the bottom, Discernment Requires a Worldview and Values Model. Part 3, on the second page, Discernment Requires Addressing Subjective Challenges. Part 4, Practicing Decision-Making by a Biblical Worldview and Model System, and then I have an appendix in which I will evaluate briefly some competing views about Knowing God's Will.

All right, now let's go back and just kind of look through the Table of Contents a little bit. Under Part 1 of Discernment of God's Will is Based in Scripture. I'm going to begin in the next lecture, well that's actually Lecture 1, this is just the introduction, and that will be called GM 1. I'll do an overview of my model.

In fact, I'm going to look at the entire model in that lecture very quickly. The reason for that is this, is I think it's much better to have a synthesis of a model than to take the pieces, piece by piece, and then eventually it fits together. So I want to help you see the whole thing and then we'll break it out into parts.

I had a colleague in a college once who did his dissertation on how the brain functions. He was an educator and a scientist, and he came to the conclusion, the main conclusion, is that learning works best from synthesis to analysis, not in the reverse, from synthesis to analysis. Have an idea of the forest before you examine all the trees.

And so that first lecture is going to give you the forest. It's going to give you the overview of what I'm going to be talking about through the entire series. It's very important if you listen to nothing else, if you're surfing through these lectures on biblical e-learning, at least listen to lecture one and get the big picture of what I'm going to do.

Lecture two, we'll call that GM2. Now the reason for this GM0, GM1, GM2 is to keep these notes and videos organized in the package because it can get kind of out of sight and be very difficult to see what the flow is going to be. So I've done it that way to make sure that you can follow easily.

Lecture two, GM2, will be learning about Bible versions. Since knowing God's will is related to the Bible, and since we all are using versions that have been translated from the Greek and the Hebrew, then we need to understand what we're using as a Bible. I'm in the USA and I would be using English Bibles, and my lecture will basically be looking at English Bibles since that's my realm.

But I know this is an international site for biblical e-learning and that you may be in another country. You may actually be listening to me through artificial intelligence, which translates my English lecture into another language. And you may have a variety of Bible versions of your own, or maybe not.

That's something that you'll have to decide. But we'll look at Bible versions so that we come to grips with the fact that the Bible that you read, the translation that you read, is written and translated in a certain paradigm of how to render it from literal, functional, to more dynamic or explanatory. And I'll explain that to you in that lecture.

We'll talk about, very briefly, how has the church discerned God's will throughout history. I'll give you a view of that. Then we'll look at the Old Testament, we'll look at the New Testament, and then we'll kind of wrap it up in terms of that particular section of discerning God's will in Scripture.

Then we'll go on to part two, Discernment Requires a Worldview and Values Model. And that will become evident to you from the lecture one, which gives you the overview, as well as my breakouts. But this is my model.

My model has to do with using a biblical worldview and values model to be able to discern the various issues that are presented to you in your Christian life where you don't have a direct teaching of the Bible. I actually have a lecture in which we'll talk about how the Bible teaches. It teaches direct, it teaches in an implicational ways, and we have what we call creative constructs that takes the whole Bible and puts it together in a way that can promote a certain understanding.

Now, that is very prominent in church history. As we well know, we don't have everybody on the same page. We have Calvinists, Arminians, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Pentecostals, the Holiness, and the Church of God.

We have all kinds of expressions that read the same Bible, but have come to some very different, very different sometimes and slight differences overall. And that's very confusing to a lot of people. How can we have a Bible from God and yet we come to different conclusions? And the answer is, God gave us an inspired Scripture through the natural processes that he used with prophets and apostles, but he didn't give us any inspired interpreters.

And that's a fact of life. We have the Word of God, and yet godly people, equally qualified and trained, come to different conclusions. That's part of the human arena.

That's a big philosophical issue, a theological issue we may touch on later. So, we'll talk about worldview and values in Lectures 7 and 8. Then, in Lecture 9, we'll talk about the components of this view in a biblical model. And we'll process our decisions by a process that is suggestive of how to think with the Bible in relation to the questions that your culture presents to you.

Part 3, discerning and addressing subjective challenges. These are the items that are probably most interesting to you in many ways because you're wondering what they are. That's why we call them subjective challenges.

For example, I'll give you a lecture on the role of conscience. Just what is conscience? How does it operate in a human being? And what does it have to do with knowing God, knowing God's will? The voices that you hear in your head, where in the world do those come from? Is your head just an audience room for the devil and for God and for anything else that might pop up? So, we have to look at conscience because it's a key issue in the capacity to think that God has created us with his human beings. We'll talk about the role of the Holy Spirit.

This one has a lot of variety in the history of the church, particularly in Western church. And I can't speak very well to the Eastern or to other countries very much, but in the Western church, Europe and America, we have a great deal of variety about how the Holy Spirit operates. At the end of the day, we have to answer that question from the and here again, same Bible, different answers.

I'm going to work you through that issue in a way that I hope will at least help you understand what I consider to be a major answer in Western Christianity and one that I own myself. We'll also talk about how prayer relates to knowing God's will. Then, in part four, we'll practice decision-making based on a biblical worldview and value system.

We'll take some illustrations and talk briefly through them to show you some aspects of how it works to use the Bible to answer questions. The lecture on how the Bible teaches this is extremely important because most of the challenges that you have don't have a proof text in the Bible to answer. The Bible didn't speak to transgender.

But the Bible did speak about gender. So, you have to draw implications and create constructs that are biblically faithful to have a worldview and value system and make judgments. All right, so that's an overview of the table of contents.

And I hope that you'll think through that and get yourself located so that you know how we're flowing. And you may, as you come into these kinds of lectures, sort of cherry-pick the table of contents. You might say, man, I'm interested in conscience.

So, I'm going to run over there and listen to that one. That's okay. But the fact is that this is a model.

Models cohere. That's why I'm doing lecture one on the entire model. Models cohere, and you've got to understand the whole thing to understand the parts.

There's a statement by a commentator named Robert Mounce in the opening of his book on Revelation, the book of Revelation. And he says, you know nothing about the book of Revelation until you know everything about the book of Revelation. Now, that's an interesting statement, and you all know that perhaps you've been challenged by trying to figure out the last book of the Bible.

Well, the answer to that is because that book is so subject to the lenses that we bring to our reading that we need to understand all of it and see the models that unpack it in order to be able to even understand our own. Revelation is unique in that particular way. But all models are unique in that way because a model is a coherent package of information that provides a process whereby you can answer questions and learn things.

Okay, so that's the table of contents and I hope that you've had that in front of you and you can work through that. Just listening to me is not the best way to do that. Listen and look.

All right, let's talk about the some introductory issues just very briefly here. Let's talk about myself a little bit. If you'll notice in the handout that has the introduction, you can go over there just a little bit on page two, you'll see welcome and you'll see who am I. Well, I'm Gary Meadors.

I'm an emeritus professor of Greek and New Testament from Grand Rapids Theological Seminary in Michigan in the United States. And I was ordained in 1967. That's probably before many of you were born.

I taught for over 30 years in colleges and particularly in seminaries. And so, I have quite a bit of background and I've taught Bible primarily, although I've taught some other things such as philosophy. I've taught hermeneutics, life of Christ, and an array of items.

Now, what will we study and how will we study? I've called this a biblical theology for knowing God's will. I'm not going to go into the explanations of the differences between systematic and biblical and historical theology. But the key of biblical theology is that it looks at the entire Bible and looks at it as a synthesis.

We call it these days a meta-narrative of Scripture. What's the big story of the Bible? And I want to look at the Bible that way under this question of knowing God's will. Just how does the Bible as a whole present that? And that comes in the biblical theology domain.

We want to understand the Bible in its own context. There's a statement that we don't know what the Bible means until we know what the Bible means. In other words, we've got to understand as best we can in the original context what the author was conveying in relation to his teaching and what God wanted to convey through that author.

When we understand that, then we have a platform to move out and say, how does that relate to me? Many times people will read the Bible as if every verse is a proof text for their life. That's a horrible use of the Bible. In fact, it abuses the Bible a great deal.

Someone has said that the Bible was written for you but not for you. The Bible is very occasional. The books of the Bible are dealing with a certain issue and certain group of people in history and we learn from that how God operates and then we transfer it into our own world.

There's a term called contextualization in which we bring something from maybe a thousand years ago and then say, how does that relate to us today? That's a process that needs some thought. It's not natural for us to do that and we don't naturally know the answer to those things so we have to be alert so that we don't abuse scripture and have we go about it. On page three, you'll notice that we have cultural expressions.

This is extremely important with the subject of knowing God's will. Churches, denominations, countries, whether it's the U.S. or Europe or Japan or Saudi Arabia where you might have a Christian community or any other place on the globe, you have traditions. Your church has operated in certain ways and missionaries go out

and they take their American way and if they're smart, they try to learn your way so that they can then make the bridge.

But the problem is sometimes, as everyone knows, the U.S. has had a bad habit of forcing its understandings without understanding the people it's speaking to first. We don't want to do that. We want to ask the question, how have you processed God's will? Now we have one great point of continuity between us, and that's the Bible, and so we're going to try to let the Bible be the arbitrator of how we think about this subject, not our tradition.

Now our traditions are there. They're ingrained in us. They're the lenses.

We talk about lenses. When you read the Bible, you have your lenses on and you tend to read it through those lenses which inform you about its meaning. It's kind of like the book of Revelation again.

You read the Bible, you read the book of Revelation through pre-millennial lenses, all millennial lenses, post-millennial lenses, all kinds of lenses. You've got to know what glasses you have on and have actually experienced the other glasses so that you can have a forward understanding of where you are and how you understand God's communication with us. So, cultural expression can be a problem.

During my lecture, my illustrations and my jokes even are very much culturally ingrained, and they may not mean much to you because it's part of my culture. I try not to do that, understanding that biblical e-learning is a kind of universal, global presentation and will be around the world, so therefore, my illustrations won't be as good as your illustrations, but you'll have to figure out the difference between the two. I did write a book on this subject called *Decision Making God's Way, A New Model for Knowing God's Will*.

Now that's a publisher's title. Publishers give titles to sell books. I would call it a biblical theology for knowing God's will, but they put it into this kind of a framework.

It was published by Baker in 2003. It's out of print with Baker, but it is available from Lagos in English and in Spanish. Now the contents of what I'm teaching is in that book, but I've sequenced my lectures differently.

Sometimes I'll give you a note at the head video slide about where in the book you can read about what we're talking about in the lecture. You don't need the book to do these studies, but it could be something nice if you had it available. Sequence.

How do you sequence a model? Now remember where if we were looking at the book of Galatians or we were looking at the life of Christ chronologically or we were

looking at some other book, the sequence is determined for us. We start with chapter one and go to the last chapter. We look at it holistically.

We look at it individually in context. Well, a model is a little bit different because a model is a huge paradigm and we've got to get the view of that paradigm to see how the pieces work internal to it. Calvinism is a paradigm.

Arminianism is a paradigm. Premillennialism is a paradigm. All millennialism.

All the various kinds of theology are paradigms and they usually have some kind of a sequence. Frankly, it's very difficult to sequence my discussion of God's will because as soon as I start talking about something, you're going to think about something that I'm going to talk about later because you've got the idea in your head and I'm trying to sequence it and bring the pieces out. That's why I'm going to do that lecture that overviews the entire model first and then do the breakouts so that you've got the big picture and you see the sequence of how I put my model together, and then you will be able to understand the individual lectures better.

Now, let me talk about study patterns. I'm a teacher, and you're an auditor. You don't have the pressure of a grade coming at the end of the semester, but I believe that because you're here, you're a learner.

Do you know what a learner is? A learner is a person who's curious to know. May your curiosity drive you crazy because being curious means that you're going to pursue the question until you have some kind of satisfactory answer. Don't take simple answers.

Most of the books written about God's will are here's five things, line them up and you'll be okay. Well, I'm sorry, life just isn't quite like that, is it? Neither is the Bible like that at all. So, study patterns.

Okay, first of all, I have given you a great deal of notes. My notes for this particular course have PowerPoint slides. They may come to you PDF, I'm not sure how, but you'll have them so that on your device you have them, print them out, that kind of thing.

So, you have those and then you have written notes. Each lecture will be a combination, sometimes one or the other, but it's always going to be there. So, you want to have those first.

Don't ever listen to the video unless you have the paper, so to speak, or the notes that you're going to be that I'm using in front of you. That makes it more interesting rather than just the talking head. That's talking head would be preaching.

I'm trying to teach. So, study patterns are extremely important. You can read these things that I've given you on page four.

Overview the table of contents like we just did. Retrieve the lecture slides and notes first. Look at them.

I would say create a notebook so that you have something to log your learning because if you're not logging the learning, you'll walk away and wonder what in the world it is you even listen to. View the videos. Don't get bogged down.

It's better to work through this course quickly one time and go back and do it again than to go like a turtle and never really get anywhere. So, synthesis then analysis. Synthesis then analysis.

Keep track of your thinking because the ideas you get are very important and they're something that you may want to track. You can even communicate with me. There's information in the notes about how to touch base with me.

So, I thank you for choosing this lecture and coming into it. I hope this has helped you to get an idea about how to proceed and to be the best learner that you could be. And in a moment, we're going to go to lecture one which will be that overview that I've talked about.

On pages four and five, I've given you some bibliography. Very, very, very selective. Behind me, I'm in retirement and most of my library is in Texas and I'm in Florida, southwest Florida.

I have shelves and shelves and shelves of literature that relates to what we're talking about today. But you can't put that in here. But here's some very key things that could be useful for you that you can look up if available to you and maybe they are available sometimes in translation if you speak another language.

One final item in introduction and I'm not going to labor this because I'm going to let you read it. But I want you to know who I am. Remember, we're talking about a model and there are different models because there are different lenses.

Here is a statement about my presuppositions and my lenses. How I view the Bible as authoritative and I view it as God's normal means and that's extremely important. I will lecture on the subjective issues.

I don't run life by my subjective feelings and the thoughts that bang in my head and I'll explain all that to you as time goes on. But I run life by an analysis of scripture, how it relates to life, and what I can show as lines of reason between the Bible and me in order to make a decision about a certain issue in life because that is the core of

what it means to be a Christian. We base our life and our faith and practice on the scriptures themselves.

So let me say one more thing as I close. It's the last thing I say on page six in these notes. You may say, you may read who I am and some of my presuppositions and you may say, well, we don't agree.

Hey, that's okay. Because I want you to know something. We're talking about a paradigm here.

We're talking about a model. You could take my model, my model of analysis and thinking and biblical interpretation, and some of the philosophical issues and theological issues that you relate to answering a question. You can take that model and plug in your own presuppositions, and it still functions.

In other words, you don't throw the baby out with the bathwater as a little bit of a proverb in American life. Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. My paradigm covers any presuppositions.

Even an atheist could use my paradigm. They wouldn't have my content, but they would have my paradigm and you can have it too. Even if you're in a strongly charismatic situation or you're in a strongly Presbyterian or reform situation, the paradigm could still work because the paradigm is a common paradigm.

It's how you evaluate the content in relation to the scriptures and its application. That is the key, and many times, your own theological traditions will have something to say about that. So, I think in a sense that anyone of any background can come to these lectures and benefit by seeing the paradigm of how to think about God's will in the Bible.

So, I trust that you'll stick with us and you'll go along with these lectures. That's the end of my introduction and I'll be seeing you at GM1, which will be the first lecture in our series. Thank you.

Oh, let me say one more thing. In classes, it's customary to pray at the beginning and to pray at the end. In these lectures, I'm going to ask you to do that yourself as I do it myself to pray at the beginning and end of the thing, but I'm not going to put it on to the camera.

So, have a good day, and we'll see you at the next lecture.