Knowing the Will of God

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Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[0:00] And now that the microphone is in place, please join me in prayer.

Heavenly Father, our topic this morning drives us to your feet, for it makes us vividly aware that, left to ourselves, we are silly sinners, and we shall not know your will, nor therefore do your will, as we should.
In our sense of need at this point, we ask you, Lord, to send the Holy Spirit to instruct us and give us true wisdom, that henceforth we may honor you as those who truly know and do your will.
Bless us, then, in our fellowship now. For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen. Amen. Bill, who, as he said, has the gift of bullying.
Bill asked me, quite forcefully, to speak on today's subject. And, lo and behold, here I am doing it, which shows how significant it is when Bill says something.
[1:44] Actually, the phrase that I have at the head of my notes is discerning the will of God, because that is precisely the phrase in the English Bible from which I'm going to take my beginning.

Some of you, perhaps, will remember that three or four years ago I gave a series of talks from this podium about guidance in broad terms.
That material became a book, a book called Guard Us, Guide Us, and its thesis, and my thesis when I gave the talks, was that the biblical classic, the key passage on guidance, was Psalm 23, the shepherd psalm, which proclaims the reality of God leading us within the reality of his shepherding us.
Psalm 23, the shepherd, psalm, which proclaims the Lord, psalm, which proclaims the Lord. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake, and he does that as the Lord who is my shepherd, and looks after me every way as long as life lasts.
Psalm 23 majors on God's protection and provision, and I trust that just as I say that, bells ring in your own heart, and you find yourself moved to say, quietly, yes, Lord, that has been my experience of your mercy.
[3:31] Thank you, and lead me forward now. Today, however, against the background of having done all that, I'm choosing a different starting point.

I begin from Romans chapter 12 and verse 2, which I will introduce by reading Romans chapter 12 and verse 1.
This is a very familiar passage, in fact. Writes Paul, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
The phrase, by testing you may discern, translates a single Greek word which carries that complex, complex meaning, and that's my focus in all that I'm going to say to you now.
[5:07] Romans, you'll remember, is Paul's classic statement of all the things that he stood for throughout his ministry.

his purpose in writing the letter and giving us this classic statement was to tell the church at Rome where he'd never yet gone, but where he knew that people talked about him and some certainly were misunderstanding him, he's going to visit Rome and he wants to make quite sure that everybody in the church will know both what he does and what he doesn't believe.
So, everything in Romans seems to be crafted with special care. And these two verses, beginning chapter 12, where Paul leaves behind his doctrinal discussions in order to open up ethical discussions, discussions, I mean, about Christian behavior and Christian life, everything, as I say, is carefully drafted and every phrase one feels is a measured phrase which Paul thought about before

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he used it.
And so, he makes the transition by, first of all, calling on his readers as brothers, brothers in the Lord, to receive what he's saying as brother to brother.
He calls on them to remember the mercies of God which he's been elaborating, actually, from the end of chapter 3 right the way through to the end of chapter 11.
[7:01] he calls on them to focus their lives now on response to the mercies of God.

Present your bodies, he says. Now, you must understand bodies could be said in the word could be used in Greek and is actually being used here to mean yourselves, the whole person that you are, an ensouled body or an embodied soul as you could say.
Either of those phrases would fit. It's the total you that Paul says you are to present as a living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable.
This is your spiritual worship, this is the proper response and the only proper response to the mercies of God which reach so far and enrich us so wonderfully.
And then he says very specifically do not then be conformed to this world the world will squeeze you into its own shape if you let it don't let it happen rather be transformed by the renewal of your mind the renewal of your mind yes discernment discernment of the will of God which he's just about to speak of is a matter of using your mind and that is my starting point you remember he says be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and perfect and the commentators agree as the logic of the passage indicates in fact that what he means when he says the will of God is God's will for each situation rather than
[9:19] God's will for the whole of your life Paul's concern is that every day of their lives Roman Christians other Christians with them should discern hour by hour the will of God what it is that their God wants them to do and labour to do it and he says I repeat him for emphasis the phrase will of God is quite specific what it stands for is God's will for my action my behaviour my doings right now see and that's how I focus my topic that's how I shall be that's what I shall be speaking of rather as I try to clarify this matter spring has come early in Vancouver it's quite warm in here allow me then to take off my jacket

I shall speak more freely if I'm in my shirt sleeves now what I want to talk about first is the discernment process we're in the realm of personal ethics the way that each individual must behave to glorify God and the first and controlling point that I want to make the point which is the umbrella under which everything else that I say must be set the first and fundamental and umbrella point is that the discernment process is a matter of thinking be transformed by the renewal of your mind so that you may think right and so discern by testing what the will of
God is and now I elaborate the thought that we discern the will of God through thinking by making three sub points three sub points about the thinking that we must learn to do which points which derive from the Bible as a whole rather than from this particular text points which I think I can confidently say Paul is assuming that his readers will know and will supply when they read his word discern what is the will of God by testing one this requires us to recognize God's categories and here I am thinking of the
Ten Commandments and of many similar passages of instruction in behavior categories of action types of behavior are specified do this and don't do that do you see just think of the second table of the Ten Commandments no murder no adultery no stealing no lying there are times when we are trying to work out the will of God in situations that perplex us and in which there are cross currents of opinion and possibility and we have to say to ourselves hey wait a minute to behave like that would be to fall into one of the forbidden categories
I said murder actually of course the sixth commandment says you shall not kill murder is the correct analysis of what God is saying there he isn't saying that you must take a stand against judicial execution he isn't saying you may not join the forces in time of war those are cases where killing is appropriate but in ordinary social life killing is not appropriate and when people do it we call it murder and that's what was in my mind when I said well commandment number six rules out murder I don't think I need to illustrate that further but now take adultery let me speak with brutal frankness business man away from home is confronted with the opportunity to have a little little bit on the side and if he's a Christian businessman the right way for him to react to what he said is but wait a minute that would be adultery and adultery is forbidden similarly in business there are smart maneuvers which are devised and sometimes the businessman has to stop and say to him so hey

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wait a minute this to proceed this way would really be stealing although nobody is calling it that but I'm going to call it that and I'm going to recognize that since that's what it really is
[15:30] I must not go this way and similarly with lying you see sweet talk which suppresses some facts and highlights others and slants one's account of a situation in one's own favor well at a certain point that becomes lying also you tell an untruth in order to benefit yourself by your action and in order to avoid telling the truth to people who have a right to know the truth from your lips well one has to learn the categories this is a very fundamental discipline in coming to know the will of God but now we proceed further along with recognizing

God's categories the scripture requires us constantly to embrace God's ideals you can focus misbehavior more easily by specifying the categories that is the limits you know which you mustn't transgress then you can focus the positive goals the moral goals that God calls us to set before us but embracing God's ideals is the discipline to which positive commands in scripture call us there are the two great commandments to start with you shall love God with everything you've got you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself that means loving your neighbor with everything you've got and as you go through passages like the ten commandments well the mental discipline that's required before you've learned all that they're meant to teach you is to reverse the prohibitions and see what kind of positive behavior those prohibitions are intended to further no killing no you preserve life no adultery no you preserve your marriage no stealing you preserve people's property no lying no false witness against your neighbor you preserve their position and you don't slander them and try to knock them down in other words the ideals that God has embedded in the moral teaching of scripture call on us to be a particular kind of person and it doesn't take very much reflection to realize of course this kind of person that we're called to be is the image of our
Lord Jesus our Savior who is also our example he loved his God his father and he loved his neighbor when he was on earth up to the limit and that's what we have to learn to do this is the theme that you find breaking surface several times in the New Testament the theme of the imitation of Christ Christ well that's the second thing that we have to learn and in order to learn these two very basic lessons in discernment recognizing God's categories and embracing God's ideals for godly life we need to have educated consciences and the educating of conscience should be treated as a major matter in
Christian nurture it is perfectly true that conscience is a power of the human mind that in one sense is natural to us and spontaneously all of us have had the experience of conscience condemning us for things that we've done but conscience judges the things that we've done in terms of such standards as it has and a lot of our consciences in the church I fear haven't really been educated up to the fullness of God's ideal for life the same is true of course out in the world where things that a conscience ought to condemn are taken in stride and people's consciences don't condemn them because their consciences have never been taught that this is simply wrong behaviour and that reflects the fact that for literally centuries especially in
Anglicanism we've been taking it for granted that everyone who's brought up in the world of British type culture absorbs the highest Christian ideals of behaviour by osmosis you live in the country and there's no issue involved because it all gets under your skin and into your heart without it needing to be enforced taught analysed and insisted on and now as we live in a time when our western world is drifting away from its Christian heritage people are growing up without those ideals in their mind so that they're not able to discern the will of God at many points where actually they need to think again about stealing and honesty think again about lying and deception think again about adultery and sexual misbehavior surely you see what I mean people behave this way and their ill educated consciences don't condemn them so you've got to draw the distinction conscience as a power of mind that condemns or justifies as Paul actually says both condemns or justifies according to the standards that conscience knows that's natural and an educated conscience a conscience that is which has been taught
[23:16] God's standards that's something that has to be induced by education so this raises questions about what we teach our children at home what the children learn at school what standards are accepted in our society we Christians who shall I say are trustees for God's ideal of human life we have to be active teaching it otherwise nowadays people won't know the standard and so they won't live according to the standard there was a time in the history of English Christianity when this point this was granted and I'm going to give you a quick example of what

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certain theologians did in order to try and meet the need at this point the theologians who drew up the

Westminster Confession in the 1640s were nearly all of them Anglicans and with the Confession they drew up a couple of catechisms there was a children's catechism the shorter catechism and there was the larger catechism for adults and in the larger catechism the ten commandments were expounded from scripture very fully and exactly and well I'm going to read you an example from the larger catechism of the exposition so that you'll see just how thorough it was teaching the ideals let's take the sixth commandment thou shalt not kill question what are the duties required in the sixth commandment answer the duties required in the sixth commandment are all careful studies and lawful endeavors to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes subduing all passions and avoiding all occasions temptations and practices which tend to the unjust taking away of the life of any by just defense thereof against violence patient bearing of the hand of God quietness of mind cheerfulness of spirit a sober use of meat drink physic sleep labor and recreations by charitable thoughts love compassion meekness gentleness kindness peaceable mild and courteous speeches and behavior forbearance readiness to be reconciled patient bearing and forgiving of injuries and requiting good for evil this is the way to go you see and the exposition is spelling it out by comforting and succoring the distressed and protecting and defending the innocent all of that is required for the fulfilling of the positive thrust of the sixth commandment and then the next question what are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment and wow listen to this the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment you shall not kill are all taking away of the life of ourselves or of others except in case of public justice lawful war or necessary defense things the neglecting or withdrawing of the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life starving folk for instance sinful anger hatred envy desire of revenge all excessive passions distracting cares immoderate use of meat drink labor and recreation immoderate you see because it threatens life and health provoking words oppression quarreling striking wounding and whatever else tends to the destruction of the life of any well again this is the kind of analytical teaching which was given in the 17th century and indeed in later centuries but which hasn't been given in anything like this way in the
Christian nurture of either young people or adults in the church for a long long time people pick up some of these things by accident but we simply don't do the systematic instruction which sets consciences standards as high as they should be set and I want to highlight this contrast and this neglect and say I think that we are suffering very badly because we don't educate people on moral matters in this thorough way and then there's a third activity of thought which we have to learn to practice in order through testing to discern the will of
God and to that I give the heading pursuing God's best recognizing God's categories we have to do that embracing God's ideals we have to do that and pursuing God's best we have to do that Christians says Paul in particular in the New Testament Christians are set free from the ceremonial and purity laws of the Old Testament Christians are set free from anything like the Pharisaic code of obedience which I expect you know had over 500 specific enactments in it it would have made a very large book of rules if it had been put in print we are not subject to legalistic legislation for living at all but we are made responsible for always seeking the best always seeking the best from God's standpoint in our choices in the goals that we set ourselves the question always has to be is this the best you could do for the glory of God and the good of other people again I'm going to subdivide the New Testament account well indeed the biblical account of this responsibility sets before us first the calling to please God and leaves us to make the effort of discerning learning from scripture what are the behavior patterns that please God and then making the effort to fulfill those behavior patterns and here I may say something which I say over and over again and which you probably heard from me already those of you who know me because this is a dictum that keeps coming up in Packer's conversation never let the good be the enemy of the best ever heard me say that well this is where that principle fits in if you're going to please
[32:17] God in your life you must always be aiming at the best the question of whether this that or the other form of behavior would be good enough is not the question to ask the proper question is what is the best I can do to please the God who has loved and saved me and then along with the purpose of pleasing good must go a purpose of practicing wisdom it's our responsibility to do that also and you say what is wisdom I reply well first of all I ask you to note that the Bible says a great deal in the way of answering that question the whole book of Proverbs and a great deal more in the

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other books of scripture devoted to showing us telling us what it means to practice wisdom wisdom appears as a matter of knowing the way knowing the way through life knowing the way to get to the full glory that

God has set before us as our goal practice wisdom what does that involve well here just one or two sketchy points that begin to fill in the picture I'm not telling the whole story but just beginning and you as thoughtful people will be able to fill in the gaps I'm sure practice of wisdom requires first moderation as distinct from excess in every good thing food is good but overeating is bad and so on and so on and then secondly the practice of wisdom involves realism calculating what you can and can't do living up to the limit of what's possible for you and accepting limits arising from your circumstances that rule out various things that you would like to be able to do and perhaps dream of doing but no as a realist you have to accept the result of your calculation that is more than
I can manage that is more than I can do the other side of realism of course is that you labour to do as much as you can do that's wisdom Moses when called remember at the burning bush Exodus chapter 3 chapter 4 when called to go down to Egypt where there was a price on his head and bring Israel out out of Egypt Moses is reduced almost to jelly actually at that point because he sees this as a task that's beyond him I can't speak he says I haven't got the gift of eloquence 17 and that in fact to do make motivating speeches give them motivating instruction and get them all fired up to come with me out of
Egypt I haven't got what it takes to do that well actually Moses had a great deal more of what it takes to do that than he realised The story goes on to show it, but God's immediate response to him is to say, well, all right, I take your point.
Your brother Aaron can speak. He is eloquent. He shall be your spokesman. Go back to Egypt now and link up with him. He's there and he will be very happy to link up with you in this enterprise.
[36:37] Anyways, well, this is the practice of wisdom. Be a realist about what you can and can't do. And don't try to shield yourself from things that you know you ought to do and could do.

Just as you mustn't try to overreach yourself in attempting things which any thoughtful friend would tell you are beyond you.
So, practice moderation, practice realism, practice enterprise. We don't often talk about this. I think we should.
Enterprise is an expression of what we call creativity. Creativity is built into us as God's rational creatures made in his image.
He is a creator. He made the world and he made us. We, at our own level, were made creative also. And actually, human life, which hasn't got any creativity as part of it, is pretty poor quality human life.
[37:58] We are called, just as we are to be obedient up to the limit, we are called to be creative up to the limit of what we can do. Remember Jesus' parable of the employer, or the rich man, rather, who gave his servants talents to work with while he was away.

Two of the three servants invested the talents and made him some money. He commended them. That was enterprise. That was creativity in the situation in which he placed them.
That was right and good. The third servant didn't dare do anything with the money except hide it away so that he could give the talent back intact to the boss, the master, when the master returned home.
And the master was very cross with the servant because he had exercised no creativity. He had shown no enterprise.
The lesson is very clear, isn't it? That disciples of Jesus Christ are called to let their creativity go into action and practice enterprise in everything that they take on.
[39:26] Do as much as they can along these lines. This, I think, is where sports and hobbies come in. Sports are very good for one's general health.

Hobbies, similarly, are very good for one's general health. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. You've heard that. That's English proverbial with British proverbial wisdom.
And it's true. Okay. Well, that's an aspect, then, of living with wisdom. Just as it's living with wisdom, when one watches against pride of heart.
Why pride particularly? Well, because pride is the taproot of sin in all its many, many forms. Pride was the original sin.

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And our original sin, as a quality now of our being, expresses itself in all kinds of proud, self-asserting, and, in that way, foolish activity.
[40:40] Pride leads us away from wisdom. Pride leads us into misbehavior before God.

And we have to be on the watch against that. So, living in wisdom means seeking consciously, every day of our lives, to live in humility before God.
Humility in the realm of wisdom. Lord, I can't see the wisest thing to do, and please help me, show me what it is.
Just as humility must mark our actual behavior in the family, in the business, in the world. You don't push yourself beyond what's proper.
You do humble yourself in situations where that is the proper God-honoring thing to do. So, you do, in fact, serve God in wisdom by making the most of yourself as a servant of God and a follower of Christ, but making little of yourself as a self-focused, self-oriented individual, letting original sin shape your life, shape your life in all forms of pride.
[42:11] Yes, well, this is what it means to live in wisdom. And the final quality of the wise life is that you praise God constantly.

You live your life to please God. You live your life practicing wisdom. And you live your life praising God. Praising God for all the good that he's done for you, both in the order of creation and in the order of redemption.
Not for nothing do the New Testament letters, Paul particularly, labor the thought of thanksgiving. You keep running up against it in Paul's letters.
And be thankful. Make your requests known to God with thanksgiving. Constant thanksgiving. Constant praise.
Constant conscious adoration. Is part of true godly living. To which we're called.
[43:23] Now, you see what I'm saying here, surely. It is our responsibility to seek to live in such a way that all these qualities become realities in our life.

Pleasing God, praising God, and practicing wisdom. As I said, we don't. We are called to live by a pharisaic set of rules.
We are called to live with these, how can I say it, these responsibilities as our guiding star.
And this is the life quality to which the discerning of the will of God each hour, each day of our lives will lead us.
As earlier I said that in order to understand God's standards, our consciences need to be educated.
[44:27] Now I say that in order to understand our responsibility as living before God in freedom to be and do the best that we can be for him, our imagination needs to be educated.

So that we see the possibilities of life. Imagination does focus the possibilities of life.
Whereas unimaginative living simply doesn't tune in at this level at all. Unimaginative living takes a pattern of behaviour from somebody else and you just trudge away on the treadmill.
Unimaginative living day after day doing what they said you should be doing. But creativity and enterprise for the glory of God will make much more than that out of the lives that we live.
Well now, what I've suggested so far is that when Paul tells his Roman readers to be transformed by the renewal of their mind, that by testing they may discern what is the will of God, he is calling them, as I said, to focus God's standards, God's categories, to embrace God's ideals, and to live by wisdom, always seeking God's best, never letting the good be the enemy of the best, never settling for the second best.
[46:17] And now I'm going to try and illustrate that briefly from some passages of Scripture, three in particular.

I offer them to you as examples of the kind of discernment of which I'm speaking. Do you know the book of Nehemiah?
Do you know the first two chapters of the book of Nehemiah? Nehemiah. What you have there is Nehemiah's personal account of what we would call his vocational guidance, that is, his guidance from God into the life task for which God had been preparing him.
The story can be broken down into five features or five elements like this.
Right at the beginning of chapter one of Nehemiah, there comes a communication of need. Jerusalem is in a bad way.
[47:32] The walls are broken down. Morale is at rock bottom. Out of this comes concern on Nehemiah's poet for God's glory in Jerusalem.

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Relief, you see, of the need of which Nehemiah, a royal cupbearer in the Persian palace, has now been made aware.
So, the communication of need produces concern for God's glory in this situation. Nehemiah. Nehemiah. Nehemiah. Nehemiah. Consultation with the wise is the third feature of this story. Nehemiah tells us that out of his concern, he fasted and he prayed and he gives us the substance of the prayer that he made.
And with modesty or humility, he finishes his account of the prayer by recording this.
[48:41] That he said, verse 11 of chapter one. Oh Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name.

And give success to your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. Nehemiah. Well, that's a very guarded form of expression, but what Nehemiah is actually praying is that somehow the king will let him go to Jerusalem to set the city on its feet again.
And it isn't just that Nehemiah has found in himself the desire to attempt this. Nehemiah has consulted the wise.
He's consulted friends and colleagues. And they have told him that they think he's up to the job. And that they will pray with him that the king, somehow, will let him go so that he can do the job. And all of that is contained in this phrase, Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant. That's Nehemiah himself. And to the prayer of your servants, plural, who delight to fear your name.
[50:08] That is the godly folk that I've consulted and who are with me in the prayer that I'm making. And give success to your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man, the king.

Fourth element in the story. Continuance in prayer. Continuance in prayer. Yes. Nehemiah prayed, give success to your servant today.
Well, Nehemiah gives us the dates. He had to wait, by our reckoning, between three and four months before anything happened by way of answer to the prayer.
And each day he prayed, Lord, give success to your servant today. And for the first hundred days and more, it just didn't happen. Well, continuance in prayer, once one is clear that it's the right prayer to be making, is a discipline that all of us are called to in relation, well, you know the continuing needs that we ought to be constantly bringing before God.
Perseverance, keeping on, keeping on in petition, is a Christian discipline. Men ought always to pray and not to faint, as the Lord Jesus put it.
[51:39] When we don't get the immediate answer, we shouldn't give up the prayer. We should go on praying until the answer comes. So did Nehemiah.

And in due course, the answer came. And this is the fifth element in the story. Confirmation by circumstances of the conviction that God has already engendered in his servant's heart.
That conviction is confirmed by circumstances. And I expect you know the story. The king discerned one day that Nehemiah was down in the mouth, as we would say, and he asked what the trouble was.
And when Nehemiah told him what the trouble was, he invited Nehemiah to make a request. Obviously, he liked and trusted Nehemiah.
And Nehemiah, we're told, sent off one of those arrow prayers, which take only a second to say, but which means so much, in fact, in the handling of circumstances.
[52:51] I prayed to the God of heaven and I said, please send me to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. And the king did. And that's how Nehemiah's vocational guidance came to him.

Now, can you see, there's a lot of discernment involved in this story. First of all, discernment of the need. Second, discernment of the fact that Nehemiah himself, as his friends assure him, has got what it takes to meet the need, if only he's allowed to go to Jerusalem and move into action there. Nehemiah discerns that this is the right prayer to be making. And so, he continues persevering faithfully in prayer. He discerns that that's what he ought to do.
And in due course, the prayer is answered. And when he discerns that the king is actually on the edge of, giving him the opportunity, he discerns the need for the arrow prayer.
I prayed to the God in heaven and I said. Well, that's one biblical example of discerning the will of God.
[54:15] Our topic today. Now, to another. To Paul. Two events side by side in Paul's life.

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First of all, Paul moving to Europe to preach the gospel there. He crosses from Troas to Greece. What lies behind his doing that?
Well, he has been traveling along the south coast of Asia Minor, going from east to west.
Twice he had planned to turn right off that southerly road and go up, first of all, into the province of Asia and then to the province of Mysia.
Had he done either of those things, his missionary journey, this is his second missionary journey, would have appeared as a loop through Asia Minor and he would have got back to Antioch, from which he started and he would have extended the kingdom by evangelizing Mysia and Asia.
[55:37] And Luke teamed up, you know, with Paul in Troas. From Troas onwards, Luke tells the story in terms of we traveled, Paul and I with him.

I'm in the party now. And Luke shows great interest in the way that Paul determined where he ought to be going. Well, as I say, God somehow, actually I said God, I should say the Holy Spirit, because that's what Luke says.
He was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia and the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to turn right into Mysia. So they go on, following the coast road west, until they get to the port of Troas, which is the port for Greece, you see.
And then, you know the story, I'm sure, Paul has a vision in the night of a man of Macedonia saying, come over and help us. And, says Luke, choosing his words very significantly, when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, that's the part of Greece opposite Troas, to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them, the Greeks.
But, to understand this properly, one must recognise that Paul discerned by testing that this was the will of God.
[57:21] We don't know how it was that the Spirit twice forbade him to turn north into inland Asia Minor, the way that he wanted, that he'd originally planned to do.

But, with that experience, whatever form it took behind him, Paul now sets himself to discern whether the vision is God's call or not, and his process of thought and reflection on this double prohibition against further evangelism in Asia Minor, this was the fact that guided him, he discerned by testing that surely this was the will of God and this was why God had forbidden him to turn north into inland Asia Minor, as I said.
So, Luke chooses his words, he says, as I read a moment ago, we sought to go on into Macedonia concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.
Paul discerns that this is the call of God, it isn't wishful thinking, it isn't one of those wild dreams that all of us from time to time get, this is a vision, a dream from God to indicate how the kingdom is next to be extended through Paul's ministry.
Now, move to Acts chapter 21, where Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and he is being told over and over that in Jerusalem he'll have trouble.
[59:26] Chapter 21, verse 4, that through the Spirit the disciples, that's in in Patara, the disciples told him that told him not to go on to Jerusalem.

Why not? Well, because trouble awaited. He does go on in the Jerusalem direction and in verse 10 of the chapter we find him at Caesarea and the prophet Agabus comes down and took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, thus says the Holy Spirit, this is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.
When we heard this, Luke continues, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.
All Paul's friends are telling him not to go.
But then Paul answered, what are you doing weeping and breaking my heart? I'm ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.
I'm going on to Jerusalem come hell or high water and since he would not be persuaded writes Luke, we ceased and said rather significantly let the will of the Lord be done.
[61:12] Luke and the others presumably recognized that it was after all the will of the Lord that Paul should go on to Jerusalem put his head into the lion's mouth.

Well we ask what had been going on to make Paul so resolute and firm in face of these predictions that he's heading for trouble.
Answer Paul knows that he is taking to Jerusalem money that is the fruit of a collection that he's made in the Gentile churches to relieve the needs of the Jerusalem saints.

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In other words it's a gesture of fellowship it's a gesture of unity between the Greek believers and the Jewish believers and Paul is very anxious to cement unity between the two constituencies by this means of the collection and if he turned aside now what would he have done with the money whatever he'd done with the money it would have been a breach of fidelity towards the churches that had given the money because they'd given it precisely for ministry in Jerusalem so Paul weighing these facts concludes this is discerning you see by testing that going ahead to Jerusalem is the right thing never mind what's going to happen when he gets there and so he does well he had discerned the will of God that he did it but without the thinking without the reflecting he might well not have discerned the will of God as in fact he did okay and then
I was going to talk for a moment about Rahab the harlot who concealed the Jewish spies because she knew that God was going to give this whole area it's the kingdom of Jericho actually God is going to give this whole area into the hands of Joshua and his people and when the king of Jericho sends his soldiers to chase the Israelite spies Rahab in fact deceives the soldiers she says oh they've gone on when in fact she has hidden them you remember up on the roof of her own house well what's going on there we ask the answer is Rahab has discerned that her on the one hand her calling is to be on the Lord's side and on the other hand that you don't owe the truth to people who given it will use it in order to kill in war and situations like war you have to lie sometimes to save life that's what you've got here no wonder then
[64:47] Rahab is celebrated both by James chapter 2 and by Joshua in sorry by Hebrews I should say in Hebrews 11 she's celebrated as one of the heroines of faith yes she discerned by testing by assessing the situation and the likely outcomes of different courses of action well two different courses of action one was telling the truth about the spies and the other was concealing it she deserved what the will of the Lord was and did it and there was wisdom there she was living according to wisdom now I'm overrunning and I must stop these examples I hope confirm to your minds what I've been trying to say about the thinking that has to be done in order to discern the will of

God in ordinary daily life I hope that these thoughts help and I leave it to you now to react to them in the few minutes for discussion that remain so end of Packer's monologue beginning of dialogue in which you take the lead come on please react to what I said Bill transfer the concept of the individual conscience to a corporate conscience is not so easy is it no it isn't and sometimes the individual conscience correctly will guide people to act in a way that the corporate body the section of the church of which they're part cannot approve will actively disapprove so that there's going to be trouble as there has been in
New Westminster Diocese and we who seek to discern and do the will of God have to be willing to face the consequences of what we're doing again I say like I said of Paul come hell or high water which in fact we've been doing and are continuing to do in this very congregation there are many such situations however that arise they're all of them tests actually for the Lord's people and you know in every test God is active seeking to confirm faithfulness and Satan is active seeking to trip us up temptation situations have always got that double aspect Jesus temptation had that double aspect and our temptations have it as well as a human spirit as a human soul that our mind is meant to be a servant of the spirit goal order of the relig Harper to do it's with the discernment or spirit that we discern it right and wrong but it's the mind that's capable of justifying any kind of evil and to be just to rely on it only is to set the fox in charge of the chickens well may I say my view actually from the data of scripture is that the spirit is the mind illuminated by the Holy Spirit well no sorry
I'm foreshortening the spirit all the way through scripture is the mind given to us given to us by God and returning to God in due course for the Christian the spirit is illuminated by the Holy Spirit who indwells but the mind and the spirit are the same reality and the spirit is I don't think to be thought of as distinct from the mind I think the way to see it rather is that Satan ensures that thoughts get into our mind which are not godly and not wise and not good and then he tries to persuade us that the reasons for treating those thoughts as the guidance to action that we need are good reasons the soul is another way this is a scripture usage of the word it's another way of looking at the personal self which includes the personal mind the spirit as I said is the self viewed as having come from God and returning to God one day and the soul is the same self viewed in terms of individual distinctness the fact that

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I am I you are you we are persons distinct from each other and that's the way that God made us so both spirit and soul can be fairly translated when you are expanding scripture as the personal self but the personal self viewed from different angles now that's one distinction the personal self viewed from these two complementary angles and the distinction between the thoughts in our minds that come from Satan and the thoughts in our minds that come from God that's a distinct distinction if I may say that and we shall be chronically muddled I believe if we don't draw the two distinctions that way so that's how I respond to your question sir and how I would urge that we think of spirit soul and
[71:46] Holy Spirit in relation to each other yeah right to the back there would you not describe Paul as an enterprising fellow I guess I would not as the spirit is bashing him around and sending him together and yon you don't get the sense that he's doing the enterprise well no but he is wouldn't you agree exerting effort once he sees what it is that God wants him to do indeed that's the understatement of the year was there ever a disciple who exerted as much effort in following the will of God as the apostle

Paul there's a real ball of fire wouldn't you think so I would I guess I just have a hard time imagining him doing sports and hobbies well yes all right yes I will let that stand frankly I have a hard time imagining him with sports and hobbies too but of course as a missionary he was living a very varied and demanding life already I thought I ought to put in a bit about sports and hobbies because if I didn't I knew that somebody would ask me about it and in the very grooved patterns of life that we all of us live in in our urbanized collectivized society we do
I think need these expressions of individual creativity individual enterprise in a way that perhaps our ancestors 200 years ago didn't it's part of what's involved in achieving the sort of balanced life in which our creativity is free to move and our hearts are free really to seek and follow the best for God that's that's the the key thought of what I'm trying to what I tried to say about enterprise a lot of people just don't get round I think I fear to facing the serious seriously facing the question what now is the very best that I can do and be for God the very best we are how can I say the grooves of our community life tend to anchor us in what we think is good enough and what we think is good enough often isn't good enough that's one of the things that
I wanted to say and if you don't agree with me well you don't agree but think about it think about it I am all for enterprising living for the glory of God probably one more question this isn't a question I was just to make a trivial comment to what you said perhaps his hobby was tent making and his sport was hiking now there's a word of wisdom if there was one yes I'll let that stand are we through Bill we are thank you that's it any final words before we separate well thank you for your patience listening to all of this thing is absolutely thank you thank you thank you thank you for your hemen

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