I. At first glance, 1 John 2:17 may seem to teach that one gains eternal life by obeying God's command or following certain rules.

II. A closer examination of the biblical data will reveal that this is not so.

A. We know from a number of verses that eternal life is a gift and not something that is earned. (Rom. 4:4-5; Eph 2:8; Titus 3:5)

B. The righteousness of God, which is necessary for eternal life, is given to the believer by faith.

1. God said of Abraham that he "obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." (Gen. 26:5)

2. However, there were no charge, commandments, statutes, and laws in Abraham's day. This is the language of Sinai.

3. We see that Abraham had done all these things by faith. God imputed God's own righteousness to Abraham. (Gen. 15:6)

The Will of God and the Christian Life

I. Common Questions About God's Will

A. What does 'God's will' mean?

B. Does God have a plan for my life?

C. How can I discover God's will?

D. How can I know God's will for sure in a specific situation?

II. Common Answers About God's Will

A. Common Answer to the Question "What does 'God's will' mean?"

1. The conventional, if not widespread, view is that there are three meanings to the notion of 'God's will.'

2. Another way of saying this is that God has three wills.

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a. God has a sovereign will = God's secret plan that determines everything that happens in the universe. (Dan. 4:35; Prov. 21:1; Rev. 4:11; Eph. 1:11; Prov. 16:33)

b. God has a moral will = God's revealed commands in the Bible that teach how men ought to believe and live. (Ex. 20: 1-17; Rom. 2:18; 1 Thes. 4:3; 5:18)

c. God has an individual will = God's ideal, detailed life-plan uniquely designed for each person. (Prov. 3:5-6; Col. 1:9; 4:12; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:17; 6:6)

B. Common Answer to the Question "Does God have a plan for my life?"

1. God has a will for each individual because:

a. It is reasonable to believe that He does.
   
   (1) God is a God of order. (1 Cor.14:40)

   (2) God knows the future perfectly and He knows the outcome of every decision we might make. (Matt. 11:21)

b. Many dedicated believers throughout church history claim to have experienced God's individual will.

c. Scripture teaches that God has a will for each individual.
   
   (1) There are examples from the Scripture of God's individual will.

   (a) Jesus (Heb. 10:7-9; John 4:34; 6:38; Luke 22:42)

   (b) Paul (1 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Acts 13:1-2)

   (c) Philip (Acts 8:26-29)

   (d) Ananias (Acts 9:10-11)

   (e) Peter (Acts 10:20)

   (2) There is direct teaching in Scripture of God's individual. (Col. 1:9-10; Rom. 12:1-2; Prov. 3:5-6; Is. 30:21; Ps. 32:8)

C. Common Answer to the Question "How can I discover God's will?"

1. There are “road signs” that point one the discovery of God's will for himself.

a. The Bible
   
   (1) The Bible does not give the individual will of God.

The Will of God
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(2) The Bible gives the boundaries (= the moral will) within which the individual will of God will be found. (e.g., The Bible does not tell you who to specifically marry, but it does tell you to marry only a believer. (1 Cor. 7:39))

b. Circumstances

(1) open and closed doors (1 Cor. 16:8-9)

(2) unusually timed circumstances

(3) "putting out the fleece" (Judges 6:36-40)

c. The inner witness of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; Rom. 8:14, 16; Gal. 5:18)

d. Mature counsel from other believers (Prov. 24:6)

e. Personal desires (Ps. 37:4)

f. Common sense (wisdom)

g. Special supernatural guidance (Acts 8:26; 9:3-6; 10:3, 10; 13:2; Acts 16:9-10)

D. Common Answer to the Question "How can I know God's will for sure in a specific situation?"

1. We can be sometimes (even if not every time) be certain of God's individual will.

2. When we have certainty, it will come from:

   a. Agreement of the road signs
   
   b. Results of the decision: peace and blessing (Phil. 4:7)
   
   c. Prayer (James 4:2)
   
   d. Personal communion with God (Ps. 32:8)

III. Responses to the Common Answers

A. What Does the Bible Actually Teach?

1. It is my contention that the Bible teaches that indeed God has a sovereign will.

   a. The sovereign will of God is sometimes called in theology the decree of God.

   b. The decree of God is grounded in God's grace, love, and good pleasure. (Matt. 11:25-26; Luke 12:32; Eph. 1:5,9; Rom. 9:21-23)

   c. Its characteristics are:

      (1) It is eternal. (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Peter 1:20; Eph. 3:11; 1 Cor. 2:7)
(2) It is wise. (Rom. 11:33; Eph. 3:10-11; Ps. 104:24)

(3) It is free. (Is. 40:13-14; Rom. 11:36)

(4) It is unconditional. (Is. 46:10; Eph. 1:11; Acts 2:23; Eph. 2:8)

(5) It is all inclusive. (Eph. 1:11; Acts 17:26)

(6) It is immutable. (Rom. 11:29; Ps. 33:11; Is. 46:9-10)

(7) It is efficacious. (Ps. 33:11; Is. 14:27; 46:9-11)

2. Further, I believe that the Bible teaches that God has a moral will.

a. God's moral will is the expression, in behavioral terms, of God's character. (Lev 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Rom. 7:12; Eph. 5:1; 1 John 5:3)

b. God's moral will touches every aspect and moment of life.

   (1) goals (the purpose of life)

      (a) the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 1:10)

      (b) ministry and edification to others (Rom. 14:19; Gal. 6:9-10)

      (c) evangelism and discipleship (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:2)

(2) attitudes⁴

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is . . .</th>
<th>God's Will for Us . . .</th>
<th>Not . . .</th>
<th>Key Verses</th>
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<td>Love</td>
<td>Lust</td>
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<td>Independence</td>
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<td>Humility</td>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>James 4:6; Philippians 2:5-8</td>
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<td>Presumption</td>
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<td>Clear</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Romans 14:22-23</td>
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<td>Irresponsibility</td>
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<td>Diligence</td>
<td>Laziness</td>
<td>Colossians 3:23</td>
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<td>Compulsion</td>
<td>1 Peter 5:2</td>
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<td>Selfishness</td>
<td>1 Timothy 6:17-19</td>
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<td>Submission</td>
<td>Self-advancement</td>
<td>1 Peter 5:5-6</td>
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<td>Courage</td>
<td>Cowardice</td>
<td>John 16:33; Matthew 10:26-28</td>
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<td>Contentment</td>
<td>Greed</td>
<td>Hebrews 13:5; Philippians 4:11</td>
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² Friesen, 156 (revised version p. 122).
(3) means (why, how, and what)

(a) it must be lawful (inside God’s moral will)

(b) it should be wise (Eph. 5:15-17)

c. God's moral will is fully revealed in the Bible. (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:3-4)

d. God's moral will is able to equip believers for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:17)

e. God's moral will is discovered by:

(1) Reading Scripture (1 Tim. 4:13)

(2) Diligence (2 Tim. 2:15)

(3) Memorization of Scripture (Ps. 119:11)

3. However, I contend that the Bible does not teach that God has an individual will in the traditional sense.

a. Instead, I contend that the Bible teaches that, outside of moral decisions (the objects of which the Bible either directly or indirectly addresses), our decisions should be based on wisdom.

b. This view is called "The Way of Wisdom" in the book *Decision Making and the Will of God* by Garry Friesen.³

B. Implications of the view that God does not have an individual will in the traditional sense.

1. If it is not true that God has an individual will for each Christian, then much energy and anguish has been and is being wasted by many Christians in seeking something that does not exist.

2. If it is not true that God has an individual will for each Christian, then the question should be asked "Exactly what does the Bible teach regarding how we are to make decision?"

IV. Contrasting the Traditional View with the Way of Wisdom

A. Principles of Decision Making

1. Traditional View

a. For each of our decisions God has a perfect plan or will.

b. The goal of the believer is to discover God's individual will and make decisions in accordance with it.

³ see note 2
c. The believer interprets the inner impressions and outward signs through which the Holy Spirit communicates His leading.

d. The confirmation that one has correctly discerned the individual will of God comes from an inner sense of peace and outward (successful) results of the decision.

2. Way of Wisdom

a. In those areas specifically addressed by the Bible, the revealed commands and principles of God (His moral will) are to be obeyed.

b. In those areas where the Bible gives no command or principle (nonmoral decisions), the believer is free and responsible to choose his own course of action. Any decision made within the moral will of God is acceptable to God.

c. In nonmoral decisions, the objective of the Christian is to make wise decisions on the basis of spiritual expediency.

d. In all decisions, the believer should humbly submit, in advance, to the outworking of God's sovereign will as it touches each decision.

B. Further Contrasts

1. Ordinary Decisions

a. Traditional View: The decision making process must be abandoned in the "minor" decisions of life like what clothes should I wear today? or what should I have for lunch?

b. Way of Wisdom: One should exercise good judgment and not waste time.

2. Equal Options

a. Traditional View: Insistence upon only one "correct" choice generates anxiety over "missing the dot" rather than gratitude for more than one fine opportunity.

b. Way of Wisdom: One should thank God for the opportunity to select from acceptable alternatives, and choose one's personal preference based on wisdom.

3. Immaturity

a. Traditional View: In some instances, the logic of the traditional view tends to promote immature approaches to decision making.

   (1) by permitting believers to justify unwise decisions on grounds that "God told me to do it"

   (2) by fostering costly delays because of uncertainty about God's individual will
(3) by influencing people to reject personal preferences when faced with apparently equal options

(4) by encouraging the practice of "putting out a fleece"—letting circumstances dictate the decision

b. Way of Wisdom: One should apply maturity by gathering and evaluating data, devoting sufficient time to the process, giving personal desires their proper place, and basing the decision on wisdom and spiritual expediency.

4. Subjectivity

a. Traditional View: Certainty that one has found God's individual will is impossible apart from an objective source of knowledge.

b. Way of Wisdom: Since God's moral will has been completely revealed and the means of acquiring wisdom has been explained, the knowledge required for decision making is fully attainable.

V. A Biblical Model of Guidance

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<th>Sphere:</th>
<th>Nature:</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Governing Principle:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral Guidance</td>
<td>In moral conduct</td>
<td>God directly guides believers</td>
<td>By revealed commands and principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom Guidance</td>
<td>In nonmoral decisions</td>
<td>God mediately guides believers</td>
<td>By acquired wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sovereign Guidance</td>
<td>In all things</td>
<td>God secretly guides believers (and unbelievers)</td>
<td>By sovereign control over all events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Guidance</td>
<td>In unique cases</td>
<td>God has supernaturally guided believers</td>
<td>By divine voice, angel, dream, or miracle</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4 Friesen, 230 (revised p. 221)