

Sunday Night Equipping – God's Will (part 4)

Critiquing Traditional Approach – Part 1:

Introduction:

We, as Christians, understand that God leads His people. **Romans 8:14** “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.” All true children of God are being led by the Holy Spirit. The issue that we are examining together is not IF God guides His people (He does) but HOW God guides His people! Why is this sooo crucial? There is scarcely anything that more dramatically influences our daily lives than our understanding of how to know the will of God...

Tonight, we begin a critique of the traditional approach...

I. What is God's Will?

A. Traditional System

1. Sovereign Will – God's secret plan that determines everything that happens in the universe
2. Moral Will – God's revealed commands in the Bible that teach how man ought to believe and live. God will never lead you to do something He has forbidden in His moral will.
3. Individual Will – God's ideal, detailed life plan uniquely designed for each person.
 - a. “Finding the Center of God's Will”
 - b. The traditional view holds that the Bible (God's moral will) gives most of the guidance needed to make a decision; but, additionally, knowing God's individual will is essential for complete leading to the correct choice.

B. Alternative System

1. **Sovereign Will**
2. **Moral Will**
3. **No “Individual Will”**
 - a. The Bible is fully sufficient to provide all the guidance needed for a believer to know and do God's will – this will be explored deeper in coming weeks – Sufficiency of Scripture!
 - b. **Searching for “individual will” is worse than searching for needle in haystack! The Vanishing Dot...**
 - c. Depending on one's mindset this is liberating or unsettling...
 - d. I hope to be able to communicate that it is liberating, freeing, and joyous.

II. Arguing Against the Individual Will of God...

A. Reason – Surely God has an ideal life-plan for His children

1. Flows from understanding God as the Master Designer – being all-knowing and orderly. It was propounded as reasonable to think that He could develop an individual will for each person that they are to discover...

2. But just because such a belief is not contrary to reason, does not mean it is required by reason. Just because something can be reasonable doesn't mean it is necessary.
3. Reason can account for the orderly guidance of God in other ways!
4. God establishes His order through His moral will (guidance for orderly living) and His sovereign will (superintendence of all things).
5. As our Father teaches a child the basic principles of life, explaining right and wrong, wise and unwise, so God is our Heavenly Father providing guidance like this!
6. Just as a Shepherd establishes boundaries/limits of safety for sheep, God provides us with protection and boundaries.
7. Just as a King establishes laws to promote the general welfare and punishments to encourage compliance, so the Lord guides us.
8. In all of these cases, the guidance was done in a general way, not specific. A father doesn't tell a son what to do every moment of his day, a shepherd doesn't instruct a sheep as to every tuft of grass to eat, a king does not micromanage his subjects...
9. The Biblical analogies used to describe God's care for us line up better with a belief in God's Sovereign and Moral Wills only.

B. Experience – history (like the Reformation) and own heart – sense of peace

1. All responsible bible teachers agree that experience alone is not the determiner of truth – for there can be a great many differing experiences variously interpreted.
2. Becomes a matter of interpretation – Was it pleasing to God because of a subjective feeling that person had that led them to the exact right thing? Or instead was it that they acted within the moral will? It is the later that I believe!
3. Joshua 1:7-8 “Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”
4. Focus on being who God called you to be: no matter where you go, you will honor Him!
5. What about those strong inward impressions we seem to get at times?
 - a. Problem with lack of consistency – they are not universally proven in leading to definite avenues of service... sometimes we experience a “dead end”
 - b. Problem with other explanation – Obedience needs to occur regardless of subjective feelings (heart is deceitful) – obedience to God's moral will is what is blessed. Ex) whether “impressed” or not we are to share the gospel!

C. Scriptural Examples

1. Names and References:
 - a. Jesus (**John 8:42, 7:17, 8:26, 5:36**)
 - b. Paul (**Gal 1:1, Rom 1:14, Acts 13:1-2, 16:10, 6-7**)
 - c. Phillip (**Acts 8:26-29**)
 - d. Ananias (**Acts 9:10-11**)
 - e. Peter (**Acts 10:20**)
 - f. Joseph (**Gen 50:20**)

2. Crucial Hermeneutical Principle (surrounding narrative passages)
 - a. First of all, many events recorded in the Bible are included primarily because they were unique situations – they went against the norm!
 - b. Must determine in each biblical example whether it was to be understood as normative for Christian behavior or experience
 - (1) “holy kiss” (**I Cor 16:20**), talking donkey (**Num 22:28-30**), Building Ark (**Gen 6**), burning bush (**Exodus 3**), etc.
 - (2) Supernatural guidance was the exception to the rule of how God led His people
 - c. Any example of “special guidance” is clearly supernatural revelation (throughout Acts) – there were examples of divine callings (Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jonah, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, Peter, etc)
 - (1) Even these “direct revelations” from God were not the “norm”... Oftentimes Paul’s direction was decided by weighing the value of various options
 - (2) Also notice that these “special directives” were given to specific people at specific times in God’s outworking of His redemptive plan. For example, God spoke to Moses who then spoke to Israel...
 - (3) Also, in these cases, we notice that the “special guidance” is supernatural revelation – not urgings or nudging... From these examples, the point is that God *may* give supernatural revelation, but in no way is it promised to us and in no way are we encouraged to seek it out.
 - d. Concept “putting out a fleece” is not an example to be followed (lack of faith!)

D. Scriptural Teaching – some famous passages argued for the “traditional view”

1. **Proverbs 3:5-6** “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”
 - KJV – “direct your paths” – bad translation
 - יָשָׁר *yashar* - “make your paths straight/smooth/successful”
 - See **Prov 11:5** – righteous → smooth way; wicked → falls
 - Context:
 - V1-2 Keep My commandments
 - V3-4 Keep Kindness and Truth
 - V5-6 Trust in the Lord
 - V7-8 Fear the Lord
 - V9-10 Honor the Lord
 - Purpose: Set forth a pattern which demonstrates trust in and obedience to God [follow God’s Moral Will] and you will experience success (by God’s def’n)
2. **Isaiah 30:20-21** “Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, *He*, your *Teacher* will no longer hide *Himself*, but your eyes will behold your *Teacher*. Your ears will hear a word behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right or to the left.”
 - Some have claimed this speaks of the H.S. leading – seems that way especially with the capitalized “Teacher” and inserted HE.

- Better to understand this as speaking about the ministry of prophets that God would send to call the people back to God's MORAL will
 - Because of evil present, prophets were not being listened to, some were in hiding (**I Kings 18:4, 19:18**)
 - This passage is saying that the people would actually see the prophets when they spoke (if they obey the Lord)
 - **Deut 5:31-33** going to the right or left was to deviate from God's Moral will – call people back to God's standards [impact of Godly leaders]
3. **Col 1:9, 4:12b** “For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding... always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.”
- In all these passages we must define “God’s will”
 - Not sovereign (whatever it is, it can be known but could be missed)
 - 1:10-12 “walk worthy of the Lord” – **Eph 4:1, I Thes 4:1-3** [moral will]
 - “fully assured” – **Col 1:28, 2:2**
4. **Romans 12:1-2** “Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”
- On the basis of the doctrine taught in **ch1-11**, Paul exhorts believers in view of God’s mercy to surrender their bodies to God in obedient living!
 - Instructions are given in the following verses in MORAL behavior
 - Using gifts, serving, rejoicing, and showing hospitality. It speaks of submission to governing authorities, how to act in matters regarding conscience, and self-denial.
 - This is common place for Paul’s epistles – 1st few chapters focus on belief, 2nd set focus on behavior... Eph 1-3, 4-6
 - Not about name of mate or choosing a job
 - **II Cor 3:18** the Word of God causes the transformation
 - **Eph 4:21-24** Moral Will of God plays the central, transforming role!
5. **Ephesians 2:10** “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand [from προετοιμάζω] so that we would walk in them.”
- God’s sovereignty emphasized (contextually) [refers to **Sovereign will**]
 - **Romans 9:22-23** What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,
 - **Romans 8:28-30** And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that

He would be the firstborn among many brethren;³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

- **Eph 5:15-17**
 - V8-10 “what is pleasing to the Lord”
 - V15-17 “the will of the Lord”
 - MORAL WILL
- V18 “filled with the Spirit”
- V19 “spiritual singing”
- V20 “giving thanks”
- V21 “mutual submission”
- God’s Moral Will gives info on good & evil AND wise & unwise.

If there is no “individual will” [the ideal] then it’s easy to understand why believers who are looking for it will necessarily encounter frustration! We have heard from so many that God will reveal His ideal to every sincere seeker, so we end up blaming our insecurity on sin or insincerity. Even after following all the steps involved in the traditional approach, there is the lack of 100% assurance (doubts) which leads to much anxiety.

- Belief impacts Behavior! Deficient Doctrine leads to Deficient Practice.
- What we have looked at in Scripture will be confirmed by experience!

Great Chart on p113 of Decision Making and the Will of God...

Gary Friesen summarizes a way in which the present belief in the “individual will of God” might have come about... Synergism of Biblical Example and Teaching in the following manner...

Biblical Example: God Guided Believers: Acts 16:9 “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”

Biblical Teaching: God Promises Guidance: Is 58:11 “And the Lord will continually guide you...” & Ps 48:14 “For such is God, our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death.”

So → Traditional View of Guidance: God has an ideal, detailed life-plan uniquely designed for each person, which He reveals to the heart of the believer through inward impressions and outward signs.

HOWEVER...

Biblical Example: ... (1) In every example, the means of communication is supernatural revelation & (2) Such direct guidance for specific decisions was the exception to the rule.

Biblical Teaching: ... (1) Each passage concern’s God’s moral will & (2) No passage indicates communication of God’s will via inner impressions.

So → God's guidance is better understood in view of the Moral and Sovereign wills of God alone. We are responsible for knowing God's moral will & submitting to His Sovereign Will.

Next week we'll spend a little more time discussing other problems with the Traditional Approach...