

Sunday Night Equipping – God’s Will (part 5)

Critiquing Traditional Approach – Part 2:

Introduction:

Tonight, we continue a critique of the traditional approach to Knowing and Doing God’s Will... Last week we noted the lack of biblical rationale for the existence of “the individual will of God.” We saw how the texts that are normally cited as proof for such a concept are better understood to explain or describe God’s Moral Will or His Sovereign Will. So there are “2” wills in God, not “3.” Most of the confusion regarding decision making today can be traced back to a wrongful conglomeration of details regarding the sovereign and moral wills of God. While God’s Sovereign Will includes everything that happens, God never promises to reveal it to us and we are in no way called upon to seek it. While God’s Moral Will is given to us and we are told to know it and obey it, in many cases things come to pass contrary to that Moral will that *seem* to be less than ideal. The belief in an Individual Will of God attempts to blend these other two wills of God together – saying we are to seek God’s ideal plan for our lives. It takes elements from God’s Sovereign will (perfect knowledge of all events past, present, future) and God’s Moral will (that we must seek it) and blurs them together into an amalgamation which fails to provide correct biblical guidance. Deut 29:29 is so instructive in this regard, and serves as a tremendous rebuke to this sort of approach to decision making, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.” The things that are secret/hidden (God’s Sovereign Will) belong to God (not for us), but the things God has revealed (God’s Moral Will) are for us and our sons forever that we might observe/obey the Lord (please Him).

But beyond the lack of biblical justification for “an individual will of God” there are some other practical considerations that manifest the weaknesses of the “traditional approach.” Problems in belief show up in problems in behavior. As Friesen explains, “Deficient doctrine normally betrays itself by deficient practice.” There are several practical difficulties that arise whenever someone attempts to live in accordance with the principles of the traditional approach, and it is to these I want to focus our attention tonight.

1. How do you “draw the line” between ordinary & important decisions?

- It is claimed that “God’s will for your life extends to EVERY decision of life.” This is a necessary consequence of understanding “decision-making” – domino effect!
- Eventually though, even the most strict adherents of the Traditional View must abandon it... It sets up a rigor for decision making that is untenable.
- Test: During the past week, what percentage of decisions did you make in which you were 100% certain of God’s individual will (ideal plan for your life)?
- Normal Practice brings everyone to decide on “small non-moral” issues on the basis of what seems best at the time – A line is drawn between “ordinary and important”
 - Important: Marriage, Big Purchases, Vocation, Education, etc...
 - Ordinary: Clothing & Food Choices, Travel Routes, Small Purchases, etc...
 - But such a line is not “allowed” by the traditional view, nor does Scripture provide commands regarding which decision should be placed where.

- The Traditional Approach is abandoned in the “minor” decisions in life... In these situations, everyone makes decisions based upon what seemed best at the time.
- Because the traditional view fails to provide a “livable” approach to making routine decisions on a day-in day-out basis it is inadequate as a total system.

2. What happens when you are provided with equal alternatives?

- What do you do when there are equal opportunities – even after pros and cons list?
- The Traditional View would explain that equality is only apparent... one, and only one, of the choices is the correct one, and it must be discerned to truly please God.
- The situation presents the “decision maker” with much anxiety and worry...
- But there really are some decisions that arise from “equal options” and one should just be chosen... i.e. order of shoe tying (left-right or right-left) ☺ OR two schools which equally provide wonderful opportunities
- Instead of being worried and anxious, we can approach these situations with joy and gladness that we have been offered more than one choice! Be thankful!

3. How does immature decision making fare in this system?

- Permits believers to justify unwise decisions on grounds that “God told me to do it”
 - How do you dialogue/converse w/ someone who claims this?
 - If God has truly given His verdict, there is no “higher court of appeal”
 - How do you provide critique/scrutiny if “God has already spoken?”
 - It is a Serious/Dangerous thing to say “God told me” ... you better be sure!
- In order to proceed a person must be sure of God’s Individual Will...
 - But certainty is arrived at through time... oftentimes, because this approach to decision making is so subjective, decisions lack 100% certainty...
 - The solution, most often, is a person “waiting” until they feel more confident.
 - This only serves to cause delays which can have other implications:
 - (1) Valuable time can be lost – time wasted in making the decision is now not available to carry out the decision.
 - (2) Circumstances play a larger and larger role as time eliminates the ability to choose some options and/or additional adjustments have to be made to fulfill the remaining options.
- Rejection of personal preferences for fear of being selfish
 - Some respond to the “hesitancy” they feel in making a decision by doing the “less-liked thing.”
 - Even after this is done, there still isn’t any certainty, but a person can console themselves that they didn’t act “selfishly” because they didn’t select what they would really enjoy doing... Can’t be accused of being ‘selfish.’
- Encouraging “putting out a fleece” – letting circumstances dictate the decision
 - Gideon is NOT an example to follow... Learn what NOT to do from him...

4. Subjectivity

Quote from p127-128

While engaged in a ministry to high school students in eastern Oklahoma, I once began a youth meeting with the following declaration: ‘This afternoon, I have a message from the Water Tower

Monster.’ I had immediate attention as curiosity peaked. ‘The Water Tower Monster is an awesome specter who lives beneath the water tower just outside of town beside Highway 59. His message is this: He wants everyone in town to believe in him. He says that if there are any unbelieving residents remaining at the end of one year, he will destroy the whole town. When you believe in him, you will experience an unmistakable shiver in your liver. The stronger your faith becomes, the more he will reinforce your faith through communication with your inner being. Are there any questions?’ After a few moments of restless silence, one student decided to humor me. ‘I live pretty close to that tower. Why haven’t I ever seen this monster?’ ‘The Water Tower Monster is only visible to believers,” I replied. Another spoke up, “Then you have personally *seen* the monster with your own eyes?” “Oh yes,” I replied. “Not, however, with my physical eyes. I see him with the eyes of my heart.” “The eyes of your heart?” “Right. As I grow closer to the Water Tower Monster, the liver shivers become stronger and his presence is more clearly confirmed within.” One boy looked especially perplexed. “Wait a minute. Are you talking about the eyes of your heart, or the eyes of your liver?” “That’s right.” I said. A girl probed further. “Has anyone else ever felt these liver shivers?” “Of course. All true believers have them.” “But how do you know the difference between a genuine ‘liver shiver’ and liver disease?” she continued. “When you experience the real thing,” I explained, “there is no doubt about it. The inner message is as distinct as if the Water Tower Monster were speaking audibly.” Finally, one of the kids could stand it no more. “This is ridiculous!” he exploded, to the obvious approval of all present.

Let me ask question: Is your faith in God substantially different than such faith in the Water Tower Monster?

It is appeal to an objective standard that is needed! – like 2 witnesses of accident (one backs up his statement by sight, the other by a speedometer) – the appeal to a standard is CRUCIAL!

III) Science Fair Projects – objective measurement is necessary!

The problem w/ the Traditional View is that Decision Making is made the servant of “subjective feelings” – “the still small voice, inner voice, inward pressure, urgings, impulses, impressions, etc.” The problem with basing decisions in these is that impressions can arise from any number of sources – God, Satan, angel, demon, human emotions, hormonal imbalance, insomnia, medication, sickness, etc.

Particular Examples of Subjectivity in the Traditional Approach...

A. Circumstances – Closed/Open Door (how do you interpret them?) God is sovereign over all circumstances, but is He trying to tell us something specifically through them which we are to utilize for our decision-making? What guidelines are there for “reading providence???” (there are none given!)

B. Counselors – Fallible. Conflicting Advice?

- How about Church decisions (conflicting direction?)
- Godly people sometimes disagree – does this mean some are “missing” God’s will?
- Interesting example: **2 Samuel 17:14** Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." For the

- LORD had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring calamity on Absalom.
- See this problem in “church decisions” when people “disagree” – can result in people believing that the church “missed God’s individual will for that congregation...” ugh!
- C. Common Sense – Not always the answer... The traditional view would point out that God’s individual will for people’s lives was sometimes greatly against “common sense” – see Noah particularly. ☺ This is part of the problem w/ the traditional view, all the “signs” are tempered by other ones, such that a decision can become very difficult – there are no “cut-and-dry” answers...
- D. Impressions – called still small voice, inner voice, inward pressure
- How can I tell whether the impressions are from God or some other source?
 - Impressions are real, we experience them, but they are not authoritative
 - Ill) Hermeneutic – “Reader-Response” – UGH!
 - **Questions:**
 1. Do I sense inward urgings?
 2. What is the source of the urgings?
 3. What is the meaning/message of impressions?
 4. Are there other signs to confirm?
 5. What are the other signs saying?
 6. Is the message I’m getting authoritative? – This is the Heart of Issue!
 - God’s Word does not invest subjective sources of knowledge w/ divine authority
- E. Uncertainty over agreement of signs – conflicting signs?
- Sense of PEACE: (faulty interpretations)
 - **Col 3:15** – absence of hostility between persons – we are to manifest Christlike attitudes towards other believers and thereby experience unity/harmony with them!
 - **Phil 4:7** – absence of anxiety within person [restlessness/anxiety]
 - Guilt – Spirit-sensitized conscience (guilt over sin) [alarm system] – this is real!
 - Feelings can come from other things: sick, chemical imbalance, poor theology, immaturity, etc.
 - God’s peace is important in the life of a believer, but it was not designed to provide assurance of God’s leadings in *amoral* decisions (it is not a sign of this sort).

Conclusion:

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...

Also note that the “leading of the Spirit of God” is manifest in His children obeying God the Father! Those who are sons of God are those who are being led into the “moral will” of God – obeying the Lord, doing what pleases Him! Gal 5:18 “but if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law,” ends up saying a similar thing. The key to overcoming the lust of the flesh and fulfilling the desire of the Spirit is walking by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit. The Spirit leads the way in

fulfilling the Law to love one's neighbor as oneself. In John 16 where Jesus speaks of the "spirit of truth guiding you into all truth" – again the promise is similar. Jesus is promising spiritual insight/illumination into what Jesus had spoken. The Spirit enabled the apostles to grasp the necessity and significance of Jesus' ministry, death, burial, and resurrection.

*2 Objective Sources for certain knowledge of God's will:

(1) God's Word

(2) Direct Revelation from God – not to be sought or expected, though

- Scripture does not teach us to look for other signs as guidance in decision-making
- The traditional view does not claim this "direct revelation"
- Warning: Claim of special revelation has been a source of false religions/cults

One last point:

Sometimes a position can be shown to be faulty by the sheer fact that it fails to uphold itself – it falls under its own test.

Ex) In order for something to be true it must be able to be verified by the scientific method. **Q:** Can that statement be verified by the scientific method?

In this case, we can ask the question, "On what basis can we decide how to approach decision making?" The traditional view would require many "signs" to come together to lead us to this conclusion. We would need to receive an impression regarding believing impressions. We would need a circumstance proving the validity of trusting circumstances. We would need counsel verifying the usefulness of counsel. But what is the basis for trusting these previous impressions, circumstances or counsels... it would have to be a prior impression, circumstance or counsel **and ad infinitum**.

On the contrary, all the alternative has to do is establish the one basis (God's Word) for decision making. God has spoken clearly in His Word that He has ordered all things. He also has provided us with His Word to know about Him and the world He has created. Proof for decision making that rests upon the Bible is found within the Bible which claims to have the authority to guide our lives.