

Sunday Night Equipping – God's Will (part 8)

The Way of Wisdom – Principle #3:

Introduction:

Overriding Principles:

1. In those areas specifically addressed in the Bible, the revealed commands of God (His moral will) are to be obeyed.
2. In those areas not specifically addressed in the Bible, the Christian is free to choose, but must remember that he/she is responsible for the decision that is made and ought to make a decision with spiritual expediency in mind.
3. In all decisions, the believer should humbly submit, in advance, to the outworking of God's **sovereign will** as it touches each decision.

The Nature of God's Sovereign Will:

1. It is Certain

- **Dan 4:35** “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”
- **Rom 9:19** “Who resists His will?” – No one! (**Rom 9:6-29**)
- **Ps 115:3** “But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.”
- Ultimate Test Case: The Crucifixion!
 - Take a look at **Ps 22 & Is 53**
 - **Acts 2:23** “this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”
 - **Acts 4:27-28** “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”
 - **Judas Iscariot** – **Matt 26:20-25, Luke 22:21-22, Mark 14:49**
 - **God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility seen side-by-side!**
 - Judas displayed treachery which was perfectly consistent with his greedy, fallen human nature. He willingly carried out his betrayal without compulsion or force, and yet his act was certain from eternity past. It was certain, but Judas was responsible!

2. It is Exhaustive

- Everything that happens is according to God's Sovereign Will!
- “It includes the germ as well as galaxies!”
- **Prov 21:1** “The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.”
- **Prov 16:33** “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”

- **Eph 1:11** “also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.”

3. It is Secret

- We only know it after it happens!
- **Deut 29:29** “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.”
- **Romans 11:33-34** Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?
- **2 Exceptions:**
 - **Prophecy** – sneak preview – God revealing certain things still-to-be-fulfilled!
 - The outcome of God’s future plan is as certain as the things that have already happened!
 - **i.e.** Jesus’ Return, Coming Tribulation, Final Judgment, etc.
 - **Ultimate Destiny of the Saved and Lost** – **Eph 1:4** – choice before foundation of the world
 - Sinners rejecting Christ will receive what they deserve – Eternal death (**Rom 6:23a**)
 - Saved given eternal life by God’s grace/mercy! – *Assurance* in **I John!** (**Rom 6:23b**)

4. It is Perfect

- It ultimately will lead to God’s greatest glory!
- **Rom 11:15** – Temporary rejection of the Savior by sinning Israel – that the Gentiles come in and then provoke them to jealousy ultimately bringing them to salvation
- God’s plan is perfect because God is perfect! God doesn’t have “plan B’s”
- A mature Christian trusts God’s sovereign plan in the midst of any circumstance.
- **Rom 11:33** “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”
- **All of our “why” questions ultimately have the same answer:** Our loving, sovereign God willed it to be so. All glory goes to Him! If this is all we know, it is enough!

How God’s Sovereign Will Impacts Decision Making

1. God’s Sovereignty does not exclude the need for planning; it does require humble submission to His will.

- **James 4:13-16** “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.”
- He does not condemn planning in itself, but self-confident, arrogant planning that does not recognize God’s sovereignty!

- Parable told by Jesus – **Luke 12:16-21** “And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. ¹⁷ "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.'" ²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?' ²¹ "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”
- It is not the act of planning that is condemned but the arrogant, self-assured attitude.
- **We should always think and conduct plans with an attitude of HUMILITY!**
 - **No plan, whether good or bad, comes to pass unless God sovereignly wills it!**
 - Since we are finite and cannot assure any plan we make, it should always be “iffy”
 - “If the Lord permits” (**I Cor 16:7**) “by God’s will” (**Rom 1:10, 15:32**)
 - We should *not* make statements that presume upon the Lord bringing something to pass, but instead express our intentions in the “future tense of resolve.”
 - This does not mean that everything we say must be prefaced with “Lord willing,” but that this attitude should be communicated, and whenever in doubt, actually spoken!

2. Circumstances define the context of the decision and must be weighed by wisdom... not “read” as road signs to God’s individual will.

- Apart from revelation from God, circumstances can be taken to mean almost anything, so we must not look to them as indicators regarding what God wants us to do!
- We are never instructed to “read providence” to make a decision!
- Ill) Lightning striking the church – relocate, stop building project, sin is holding church back, get rid of the pastor, stop the changes that are happening... etc.
- Problems:
 - *Wrongful Conclusions:* **Acts 28:1-6** “When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. ² The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. ³ But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they *began* saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and *began* to say that he was a god.”
 - *See also Job 2:13* – best thing Job’s friends do... once they open their mouths, horrible interpretations! Chapter after chapter of wrongful interpretation!
 - *Misdirected attention:* **Lk 13:1-5** Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater* sinners than all *other* Galileans because they suffered this *fate*? ³ "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ "Or do you suppose that those

eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? ⁵ "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

- *Just because we lack knowledge does not mean we cannot apply wisdom: Eccl 11:5* Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones *are formed* in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things. ⁶ Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.
- *Without divine commentary, we do not know the "divine interpretation."* **Unless God has provided supernatural revelation, it is best to avoid our spiritual interpretations of these sorts of events, and reiterate that God is in control of all events and is using them for His ultimate glory!**

3. Open doors are God-given opportunities for service... not specific guidance from God requiring one to enter.

- An "open door" is an opportunity to do something! *Being spiritually opportunistic we can take advantage of these opportunities, but we are not under moral compulsion... As with any opportunity we must weigh the pros and cons and utilize wisdom!*
- **Acts 14:27** "When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they *began* to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."
- **1 Cor 16:9** "for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries"
- **Col 4:3** "praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;" – *Pray w/ others for opportunities – Teachers should pray for opportunities to teach; servants should pray for opportunities to serve!*
- **2 Cor 2:12-13** "Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, ¹³ I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia." – *Paul concerned about "severe letter" he sent to Corinth. He left Troas (open door and all) and went looking for Titus to hear the report of how the Corinthians responded! This ended happily with the rendezvous in Macedonia with Titus and the report that the Corinthians had responded to his letter with sorrow and repentance (2 Cor 7:6-12).*
 - If open door constitutes a "sign" then a believer must read it and obey, and Paul's action is inexplicable. But if an open door is an opportunity to be considered and weighed by the decision-maker, then Paul's action makes sense.
 - Paul passed up the potential of new work because something more important demanded his attention... *Rather than build a new house, he ran to put out flames in an old one!*
- **Evaluating Doors**
 - "Door" means opportunity – usually related to the effective ministry of the Word
 - Opportunities come through God's sovereignty
 - Most of the time "open doors" should be utilized as part of wise, resourceful living for the Lord (**Eph 5:15-16**)

- If a greater opportunity or more pressing work is at hand, it is acceptable and proper to pass by the open door.
 - An “open door” is not a direct providential sign from God telling the believer to go in a certain direction.
4. “Putting out a fleece” is an invalid practice that sometimes works when it is really wisdom in disguise.
- Gideon in **Judges 6** – we have already seen that this is a horrible place to find a pattern for decision-making. This is really an expression of doubt by Gideon! The answer to Gideon’s request was manifest in a miraculous display of supernatural power by a very patient and forbearing God! Also understand that the fleece was not for guidance, but to confirm guidance already supernaturally given! The NT never provides a model for decision making that even hints at this being the appropriate means of ascertaining guidance.
 - Why does it sometimes work though?
 - Possible that the fleece chosen is really wisdom in disguise!
 - Ex) Selling car for \$2,000 – difference between sign & wisdom though is that if someone offers \$1999 you can accept as “close enough” whereas if you are to be consistent with the sign interpretation you don’t accept!

The Difference that the Sovereign Will Makes on the Believer is ATTITUDE!

God’s sovereign will has no direct bearing on the activity of decision making, its reality should govern the believer’s attitude in decision making. Humble planning is the proper response to the sovereign will of God.