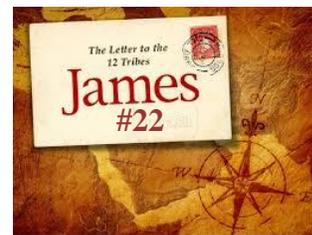




Chico Alliance Church
August 12, 2018
Pastor David Welch



“Decision Making and the Will of God”

We all face decisions every day, all through the day. Some decisions are minor, some monumental. Paper or plastic. Caffeine or decaff. Dark roast, medium roast. Non-fat, 1%, 2%, whole milk. Most items you seek have a multitude of types, brands, colors, prices.

Other times we must make more substantial decisions. Who should marry? Should I marry? Should I stay married? What career should I pursue? What ministry should I pursue?

Some days I experience decision burnout. The more stress we feel, the harder it is to make decisions? My decider gets overloaded. I don't want to make another decision the rest of the day. God created us with the capacity to make choices. The privilege to reason and choose elevates us above the rest of creation. The Bible clearly illustrates the prominent place of meaningful choice.

God allows meaningful choice and each choice or decision involves a corresponding consequence. Wise choices bring positive results. Foolish choices bring negative consequences. Right choices please God. Wrong choices grieve God. God allows us to choose actions, we are not free to choose the consequences. I am free to rob a bank. I am not free to avoid the legal consequences. Every willful action brings a corresponding reaction. I am pro-choice. I must also accept the fact that I have little control over the consequences of my choices.

Many blame God for the evil in our world. Here is how the argument generally goes. If God is all powerful, He could eliminate the evil in our world. If God is all loving, He would eliminate the evil in our world. Since evil still exists in our world either God must either not be powerful enough or good enough. Those who propose such a thesis miss the meaningful choice factor. Since all the evil in our world is a consequence of man's poor choices, the only way to eliminate evil in our world is to rescind humanity's ability to choose. God chooses to continue to allow people to freely choose good or evil.

Through Jesus, God instills new longings to freely choose good over evil. At full redemption, all God's children will passionately choose to live godly. For now, we struggle with the old fleshly passions still imbedded in our physiology from birth and the new passions installed in our soul at rebirth. Paul bemoaned the continual struggle.

Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Galatians 5:16-17

When it comes to choosing to do the right thing, Paul reminds us of the absolute necessity for the Holy Spirit's empowerment. Victory over the constant pull of the world, the flesh, and the devil involves numerous factors we have considered earlier i.e. the Holy Spirit, regular interaction with the Word, mutual encouragement.

James addressed the folly of making life choices without acknowledging God's will.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" — yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we

will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. James 4:13-17

This passage instructs us to...

Consider God’s will in every aspect of your life because life is short.

James does not condemn human planning. He condemns the arrogant attitude that fails to recognize the sovereign will of God. We are free to plan all the details like the merchants in his illustration. Time (tomorrow), place (certain city), duration (a year), means (trade) goal (make a profit)

The instruction is to consider and recognize God’s will in your planning. That raises a very important question. How do we determine God’s will? A book came out some years ago entitled “Decision Making and the Will of God.” The author challenges the tradition view of discovering God’s will. He reinforced and refined my thinking on the subject. I want to share some of that thinking with you today and some next week.

Knowing God’s will is not an option.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:15-17

Paul clearly asserts that to not understand the will of the Lord is foolishness.

Jesus passionately focused on His Father’s will.

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. John 4:34

Epaphras prayed that the Colossians would live in the will of God.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. Colossians 4:12

The key questions to address are what is God’s will and how can we know it?

WHAT IS GOD’S WILL?

The topic of God’s will is expansive and deep. I will try to simplify it and focus more on practical application. The key word translated “will” in the New Testament is primarily emotional rather than volitional. The term describes the desire of God’s heart out of which He in turn decrees a specific course of action. God’s will/desires breakdown into two categories.

GOD’S SOVERIGN (DETERMINED) WILL

God’s sovereign or determined will describes those desires concerning the universe that will assuredly come about by His decree. There are numerous aspects of these desires that are mysterious and yet unknown. Others have been revealed in Scripture. This describes the actions and events that God desires and decrees that are not and cannot be altered or averted by anyone or anything outside of himself. Scripture alludes to a number of these things.

Creation

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” Revelation 4:11

The sacrifice and suffering of Jesus

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Galatians 1:3-5

*Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
Isaiah 53:10*

The salvation of people

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:7-12

The Suffering of Christians

it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:17, 19

it has been granted (willed) to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, Philippians 1:29

The complete fulfillment of all prophecy

The rise and fall of government leaders

It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. Isaiah 40:22-24

Whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. Romans 13:2

The examples from Scripture are extensive. As we just read, God works ALL things according to the counsel of His own will with the goal of bringing Him glory, honor and power. The fact is, God orchestrates many things in His sovereignty that we don't know and even can't know due to our limited understanding. I am not convinced that God specifically orchestrates every tiny detail in the world or even our lives. There are some things that function according to natural processes without God specific intervention. Sun rises and sets. Plants grow. Seasons come and go.

Within those natural processes there are times when God sovereignly intervenes. He may sovereignly disrupt weather patterns. In our study of Jonah, we observed several specific actions directly caused by God. We often refer to these as super natural events. These are the times that God interrupts the natural order of things. Jesus demonstrated his deity by such interruptions in the natural order of things. Healing, changing water into wine, calming the storm, feeding multitudes.

God's sovereign will describes those things and events He directly decrees or determines and orchestrates for His purposes apart from human assistance or resistance.

GOD'S MORAL (DESIRED) WILL

Within God's sovereign will we discern a moral will. These are the things desired by God but not determined. Some would categorize this as God's desired will. God desires that his creatures made in his own image actually function according to his nature. These desires emanate from his own perfect character and attributes.

He calls us to be holy as He is holy. That expresses His desire even though we fall far short of that desire. Peter reveals God's desire that none perish due to rejection of Jesus. Yet we know from Scripture that many will perish due to their rejection of Jesus. Whereas much of God's sovereign will remains a mystery and may not be discovered until after the fact, God extensively reveals his moral will in his word. We discover God's moral will anytime we interact with the Scriptures.

God communicates his moral will through commands regarding human behavior. The 10 Commandments serve as a summary of God's desires. Half of the 10 Commandments express what God desires concerning our response to him. The other half expresses what God desires concerning our response to each other. Jesus summarized God's desire even further when he called us to love God with our whole being and our neighbor as ourselves. Any commands in Scripture how we should relate to God express his desired will. Any commands in Scripture concerning our behavior express his desired will.

Within God's moral will or desire lies a whole area of freedom.

Take the first supper. God's desire for Adam and Eve was that they eat of any of the food in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve didn't need to go to God and pray for some specific divine direction for what to eat for dinner that first night. God provided a large variety of foods to eat. Only one food was prohibited or contrary to God's desired will.

Hopefully this analogy helps combine the two concepts. Think about a cruise ship. Many things about the cruise ship are pre-determined. The destination, the journey, the timing, the accommodations, certain scheduled events, certain acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors, size and speed. There are predetermined mandatory rules on the cruise. There are required identification papers i.e. passport. Certain analogies as to how we get on the boat apply subject to one's theology. There are other things outside of our control like fellow passengers and weather. Yet within all those parameters we enjoy considerable freedom. This analogy illustrates the harmony of the determined will of God, the desired will of God and the meaningful choice of people.

The well-known verse from Romans melds the two aspects.

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. Rom 8:28

God sovereignly orchestrates all events of life and decisions of men together for our God and His purpose.

Tradition considers a third aspect of God's will that sees a specific will of God for the details of an individual's life. This view advocates some perfect individual will left up to us to discover. God determines a "perfect" place to live, a career to pursue, a person to marry or not even get married, a specific school to attend, an ideal church to attend, an divinely ordered amount of money to give, a perfect house to buy, a car to buy, how many children to birth and it is my grueling task to discover that specific dot, that perfect will of God among a myriad of choices available.

How do I discover the dot? How do I know if I have actually chosen the perfect "dot"? Many books have been written on how to discover the "dot". The author of "Decision Making" poses an interesting question. What if there is no dot? What if we are agonizing over something that doesn't really exist? What if God leaves anything

within His desired will up to me to choose and anything within those parameters is fine with Him. What if He expects me to make wise choices based on Biblical wisdom?

Both school A and B or even C could provide acceptable preparation for ministry. What if person A, B, or C are acceptable spouses? What if there is no “perfect” soulmate to agonize over? The bottom line for finding God’s “perfect will” boils down to an impression or inner feeling or direct leading. The pressure to find God’s perfect will runs high.

YET everyone who espouses the perfect will of God cautions us regarding the subjectivity of making decisions based on feelings or any of the other methods of discovering the hidden “dot”. They would insist that those methods harmonize with the principles found in the word of God. Wouldn’t following the wisdom and principles found in the word of God be enough to make decisions in the first place? If there is no perfect “dot” to be discovered, how do we make acceptable decisions in the journey of life?