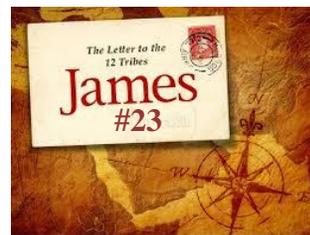




Chico Alliance Church
August 19, 2018
Pastor David Welch



“Decision Making and the Will of God” Part 2

REVIEW

Our encounter with James instruction to consider God’s will in every aspect of your life because life is short lead us into a deeper discussion of the nature and discernment of God’s will.

WHAT IS GOD’S WILL?

The topic of God’s will is expansive and deep. I tried to simplify it last week. The primary word translated “will” in the New Testament is primarily emotional rather than volitional. The term describes the desires of God’s heart out of which He in turn decrees or determines a specific course of action. God’s desires breakdown into two categories.

GOD’S SOVERIGN WILL

God’s sovereign or determined will describes His intentional involvement in our world. This involvement includes the instigation, intervention and interaction with the people and events of our world and the universe.

He sovereignly created and maintains the universe apart from man’s help.

“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

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. Heb 11:3

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Colossians 1:16-17

In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of his power. Hebrews 1:2-3

God powerfully reminded Job concerning His sovereign will. Many view Job as a book about suffering. Yes, there is plenty to learn about dealing with suffering from the book, but the core of the book has more to do with the sovereign will of God. Job spent the bulk of the book defending himself in the face of suffering and eventually demands an audience before God to explain why such a “good” man should have to face so much pain. At the close of the book, God grants Job’s request.

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Job 38:1-7

The Deist holds the view of God that recognizes His creative acts at creation but sees no ongoing personal interaction with His creation. Everything now functions according to natural processes and reason. A study of

Biblical history reveals both. Some things come about through on-going natural function. Yet one cannot escape God's personal and specific interaction with people and events from time to time. Much of God's sovereign will has occurred and will yet occur despite any awareness or action by us. God revealed other aspects of His sovereign will in the Scriptures. These events and interactions will come about even though many of them include the involvement of people. They will occur because God determined they would occur.

We touched on some of them last week.

The promises of God.

All the prophetic declarations of God.

The details of Jesus' suffering and death.

The number of specific details predicted and fulfilled are staggering even when it included human choices. i.e. Judas, soldiers, Pilate

God sovereignly determines certain events in our life.

God sovereignly establishes governments while also determining the means.

Pay attention to those sovereign acts of God recorded in the Bible. God works ALL things according to the counsel of His own will with the goal of bringing Himself glory, honor and power. I am not convinced that God sovereignly orchestrates every specific detail in the world or even our lives. There are some things that function according to natural processes without God's specific intervention. Within those natural processes however, there are times when God sovereignly intervenes for His purposes. He may sovereignly disrupt weather patterns. He may directly discipline through a myriad of means. He may apply pressure through direct means i.e. Ten plagues against the Egyptians. We 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 notwithstanding human assistance or resistance.

GOD'S MORAL WILL

Within God's sovereign will we observe a moral will. God sovereignly determined that His creatures exercise meaningful choice. God's desires that His creatures choose wisely. His desires stem from His own moral nature. 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. God grants the freedom to ignore His moral will. Failure to choose God's moral will is sin and carries consequences. He calls us to be holy as He is holy.

Peter reveals God's desire that none perish due to rejecting Jesus. People are free to accept or reject Jesus. People are free to rebel against God. They are not free to choose the consequences for violating God's moral will.

We discover God's moral will every time we interact with the Scriptures. God communicates his moral will through commands regarding human behavior. The 10 Commandments summarize God's moral will. 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 lies a whole area of freedom to choose without divine consequences or retribution. We mentioned the first supper. God clearly communicated the parameters of Adam and Eve's culinary choices.

They were free to choose to 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 if they avoided the one tree. Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil violated God's moral will and triggered devastating consequences. They could freely choose any other produce without consequence.

We offered the analogy of a vacation cruise. Many things about the cruise ship are pre-determined and unalterable by us. (Sovereign will.) Other aspects are a moral choice. We are free to choose but not without consequences. There are predetermined and mandatory rules on the cruise. Yet within the sovereign and moral will of the cruise line we enjoy considerable freedom. After some further reflection I think there is another category.

These choices come in the realm of the freedom of choice regarding non-moral choices. For lack of a better term, I will call it the desired will of God. It involves a specific desire God may have within the area of freedom. God does not always have a "perfect will" or a specific preference. We are free to choose between non-moral options. We make our choice based on the wise thing to do.

There are times when God communicates a specific direction or action. Some believe God has a specific preference more than He does. It is our job to agonize until we find that "perfect" will of God. I need to discover God's perfect place to live, career to pursue, person to marry or not even get married, school to attend, church to attend, amount of money to give, house to buy, car to buy, how many children to birth. It is my grueling task to discover that specific dot, that perfect will of God in a myriad of choices available.

I believe the normal process is to make choices among equal options through wisdom. In the absence of specific communication from God we make choices based on wisdom, personal thoughts and desires trusting that God will provide specific direction where He might have a preference.

Paul made plans expecting that if God wanted something different He would let him know.

But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus. Acts 18:21

Here is an example of God's direction and prevention.

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:6-10

God communicated clear direction through a vision, but it is unclear how the Holy Spirit communicated prevention. Examples of specific direction flow through the Scriptures so it is logical to assume that there are times God can and does grant specific direction.

Elijah received clear direction i.e. "and the word of the Lord came to Elijah."

God directed Peter to take the word to Cornelius.

God directed the church to set aside Paul and Barnabas.

On the other hand, they chose deacons based on Biblical criteria.

Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. Acts 6:3

This verse finds agreement and desire from both God and men.

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: Acts 15:28

Among the manifestations of the Holy Spirit is a word of knowledge and a word of wisdom. Obviously, the Holy Spirit communicates beyond the simple reading of the text. The Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God. Rom 8 On what basis then do we make choices and determine God's will.

HOW DO WE KNOW GOD'S WILL AND MAKE GOOD DECISIONS?

The only sure place we can discover God's will is God's word.

God clearly communicates the moral options in His word.

I don't need to ask whether I should remain faithful to my spouse.

I don't need to consult God about stealing the neighbor's computer.

Other actions may not be immoral but unwise. The book of proverbs counsels us on wise life choices. Look for God's boundaries. There are numerous guidelines in the Bible to help us make good decisions. God establishes certain boundaries and anything within those boundaries is OK.

Here are some of the criteria used to determine God's direction.

Circumstances

Positive circumstances are not always an indication of a specific direction. Sometimes God uses negative circumstance to produce positive results. Interpreting "signs" can be a highly subjective thing. Also, Satan can manipulate circumstances. Paul talked about Satan hindering his plans to visit the Thessalonians 1Thess 2 Sometimes we realize the value of circumstances AFTER the fact. We see God's hand in a sequence of events. Circumstances may not be a clear sign of God's will but could be considered in the process of making a wise choice.

Counsel

It is wise to seek the counsel of other people when making decisions.

Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety. Proverbs 11:14
Seeking counsel from others is the wise thing to do in making decisions. It is not a sure indication of God's direction.

Conscience

You have probably heard the phrase "Let your conscience be your guide."

Paul mentions his conscience.

*I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—
Romans 9:1*

When our conscience has been cleansed by God and is informed by the Scriptures, it can be a valuable tool. The conscience can be misinformed, weak and even dulled.

Common Sense

Common sense is learned from experience in the real world. It refers to the behaviors that are held by most thinking people. This may aid us in making wise choices but needs further consideration.

One – what is common in a culture may not be wise or right in God's eyes.

Society in the period of the Judges collapsed because "every man did that which was right IN THEIR OWN EYES." The common-sense thing was not God's thing.

Two – God does not always function according to our common sense. Marching around a wall in silence completely vulnerable to the enemy is not a sensible military tactic. Dipping yourself seven times in a dirty river doesn't seem a practical remedy for leprosy.

Contentment

This is also known as peace. "Well I felt peace about it." This requires deciding on a feeling basis. Feelings are not a reliable guide. Sometime Satan can generate a false peace about something. "I feel God wants me to be happy, so I feel at peace about divorcing my spouse". The right thing to do is not always comfortable or peaceful at the time. On the other hand, we are not to be anxious but pray. God is not the author of confusion.

Compulsion

This is also known as impression or prompting. Again, it is an emotion. "God is leading me to..." "God told me to..." I believe that God does inspire passion. In the absence of a clear direction freely pursue what you feel passionate about. One of the qualification of elders is not away a specific call but a personal aspiration.

Here are some questions to ask.

Is it Biblical? (In line with God's moral will)

Is it practical? (common-sense)

What do others think? (Counsel)

Does it violate my conscience? (conscience)

Is there a passion for it? (Compulsion).

Paul provided some guidelines to the Corinthians for making life choices.

"Will it actually benefit me or others?" 6:12a

"Will it control me or become additive?" 6:12b

"Will it violate God's moral decrees?" 6:13-20

"Will it distract me from full devotion to God?" 7

"Will it adversely or positively affect those around me?" 8

"Will it be a stumbling block to the gospel?" 9:1-23

"Will it be a stepping stone to the gospel?"

"Will it jeopardize my heavenly reward?" 9:24-27

"Will it displease God?" 10:1-13

"Will it entangle me with demonic influences? 10:14-22

Ultimate questions.

Will it develop or diminish my love for God?

Will it develop or diminish my love for others?

Our ultimate guideline is that whatever we do weather we eat or drink or whatever, do ALL to the glory of God.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31