

If you recall our last study, in considering Deut.29:29, we distinguished between God's decretive will and His preceptive will—His decretive will is secret and belongs to the Lord—it is all-inclusive and certain—His preceptive will is revealed and belongs to us and to our children...

Thus we learned several things with reference to the revealed will of God—[1] it is synonymous with the law or word of God, “those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law...”—that is, God's revealed will concerns words that are to be done, [2] it is not always obeyed, Matt.7:21—“not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven...”—there are those who do the will of God and there are those who do not, [3] Christ died that we might obey it, 1Pet.4:2—“that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God...” and [4] it is delighted in by all true Christians, Ps.40:8—“I delight to do your will, O my God, and your law is within my heart...”

If you recall within our first study in this series, I suggested to you that God's ultimate purpose or will for His people was the promotion of His own glory—and if you recall I began that sermon by quoting the first question of the Shorter Catechism—“*Q.* What is the chief end of man? *A.* Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever...”

Tonight I want to come to the second question—“*Q.* What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glory and enjoy him? *A.* The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him...”

Thomas Boston—“We are poor blind creatures, that know not our way, neither how we should glorify God, nor how we may come to the enjoyment of him. Therefore God hath given us the revelation of his mind in that great point. The connection betwixt this and the preceding question is abundantly obvious; the one points out the end for which we were made, the other the rule to direct us how to attain to that end...”

Now I have a twofold purpose tonight—[1] I want to suggest several faulty views commonly held by well meaning Christians, and [2] I want to suggest three general helps in using the Scriptures as the sole means to know God's will...

- I. Some Common Views Refuted
- II. Some Practical Helps Suggested

- I. Some common views refuted

- A. The fleece view

1. Here I refer to a view of decision making, that might resemble that practice of Gideon in Judges chapter 6...
2. Jud.6:36—“so Gideon said to God, If you will save Israel by my hand as you have said—look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said...”
3. Now while I don't know of any Christian who has actually laid a fleece as did Gideon, I have know Christians who virtually do the same thing...
4. For example, a person might say to God—Oh God, if you want us to sell our house bring a buyer by Friday, and if one comes then I know it is your will to sell, and if no one comes then I know it's not your will...
5. Or else, a person in deciding what church to join, might leave messages at five different churches, with the understanding that the one to return his call first is the one God wanted him to attend...
6. But concerning this faulty view consider these several thoughts—[1] this is the single time within the entirety of Scripture where we find such a practice...

7. Notice [2] Gideon had already had direct revelation from God, v12—“and the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor...”
8. Gideon was not asking for a providential phone call or knock on the door, but he wanted nothing less than a miraculous act...
9. Thus we must not overlook the obvious, that Gideon was not asking of God mere direction but was in fact seeking a divine miracle...
10. On the first night the fleece alone was to be covered in dew, with all else around it dry, and then on the second night it was to be dry with all else covered in dew...
11. Thus I guess it would be appropriate for us use this method, providing the Angel of the LORD has previously appeared to us giving us divine and special revelation...
12. But then this would contradict Heb.1:1—“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...”
13. Or as the Father made public at our Savior’s transfiguration in Mk.9:7—“This is My beloved Son, hear Him...”
14. In other words we are to govern our lives by the revealed will and word of Christ—His words are a lamp to our feet and a light to our path...
15. Thus I suggest to you that the fleece view is not an appropriate means to discern the will of God for our lives...

B. The open door view

1. By this I refer to the common practice of many Christians, who govern their decision making based upon providential opportunities...
2. If an opportunity comes their way they understand it is as God’s will, and if the door closes on that opportunity then it was not God’s will...
3. 1Cor.16:9—“for a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries...”—here the apostle is giving his reason why he will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost...
4. A door of opportunity had opened to preach the gospel and so the apostle was going to go through it—thus I can here some one say—See, here is how we know God’s will, we wait until a door opens and then we enter it...
5. But notice another example, where a similar door was opened to Paul, 2Cor.2:12-13—“furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord...”
6. Here we find similar door opening in Troas to preach the gospel—he may have been given opportunity to preach in the synagogue or else to a large crowd...
7. But notice his response—“I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia...”
8. For whatever reason Paul was unable to find Titus, and thus he refused to enter the open door, and left for Macedonia...
9. In other words—Paul did not make his decisions based solely upon open doors or opportunities—in the first example he entered the open door in the second he did not...
10. Thus my point here is simply this—open doors [or providential opportunities] are not in themselves sufficient to make our decisions...
11. For example, several years ago when I first moved to Ohio, I called the Akron Rescue Mission, to see whether or not I could minister the gospel to its residents...
12. Well, the chaplain after he heard the name of our church, he rightly discerned that we were Calvinists and thus he, being a staunch Arminian, closed the door...
13. Now I could have interpreted this as God’s will—I made an attempt to preach at the mission and the door was closed...
14. But instead I called his supervisor, and explained to him the situation, who then spoke to the chaplain, who then called me back with an open door...
15. You see, in this case, what the door needed was a little push—a little persistence or determination—at times a door may even need to be kicked in...

16. For example, think of a man who lost his job and is in need of another one—is he merely to sit back passively and wait for an open door...
17. He may have to knock on several doors and perhaps even knock several times on the same door, before one opens...
18. Now let me clarify—if a door is welded closed, then it may indeed be a clear indication that it wasn't God's will...
19. For example, think of Peter has been praying for a wife, and has his eyes upon Susan, but all of a sudden Susan marries Frank...
20. Then obviously that door is shut tight and Peter can safely conclude that Susan was not the girl for him [unless of course Frank suddenly dies]...

C. The inner peace view

1. By this I refer to that practice of those who look within their own hearts for an inner confirmation or verification that a decision is in keeping with God's will...
2. Instead of looking outside themselves to the revealed word and will of God, such people have a tendency to look within for guidance and direction...
3. Phil.4:6-7—"be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus..."
4. Notice several things—[1] this passage has absolutely nothing to do with decision making but bringing our needs before God in prayer...
5. V6—"be anxious for nothing, but...let your requests be made known to God..."—that is, requests for physical and spiritual needs...
6. Notice [2] a sense of our adoption will protect us—"and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus..."
7. In other words—having prayed for the Lord's provision, He gives His children an inward sense of their acceptance...
8. This inward peace brings with it a sense of fortitude in that we are reminded that if we are His children He will care for us...
9. We find similar reasoning in those words of our Savior in Matt.6:25—"therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink (v32)...for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things..."
10. That is—as you ponder the great truth that you have been accepted with God through Christ—let your requests be made know with a gospel or evangelical boldness...
11. Thus the guarding referred to in Phil.4:7, is a guarding against an excessive or sinful anxiety—it will guard or keep our hearts from worry...
12. Phil.4:7—"and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus..."
13. Thus I suggest to you that to look within for guidance or direction is not only unbiblical but extremely dangerous...
14. For example, how many times have I witnessed professing Christians make decisions that violate the clear commands of God because they "just feel" an inward peace...
15. Such a practice becomes convenient in that people can justify any decision they want—"I know what the Bible says, but I just feel an inner peace..."
16. But let me ask you—don't you and I possess the capability of deceiving ourselves—isn't it possible to generate a kind of peace in order to justify our decisions...
17. Do you know how frightening it is to me, when I watch people make major decisions not based upon a text or principle of Scripture but solely upon their own feelings...
18. Could you imagine being left within a dense and dark forest with a broken compass that works only on occasion...
19. So it is, that good, well-meaning Christians leave themselves within the wilderness of this world with little more than their own feelings to direct them...

20. How contrary this is to the practice of David, Ps.119:105—“your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path...”
21. David did not look for a lamp or light from within, but he understood that God’s objective word is the sole source of direction and guidance...
22. John Gill—“The whole Scripture is a light shining in a dark place; a lamp or torch to be carried in the hand of a believer, while he passes through this dark world; and is in the present state of imperfection, in which he sees things but darkly. This is the standard of faith and practice; by the light of this lamp the difference between true and false doctrine may be discerned; error and sin may be reprov’d, and made manifest; the way of truth and godliness, in which a man should walk, is pointed out; and by means of it he may see and shun the stumbling blocks in his way, and escape falling into pits and ditches; it is a good light to walk and work by...”

II. Some practical helps suggested

A. Specific precepts

1. By this I refer to the clearly revealed commandments of God’s word—more often than not the will of God mustn’t be found but obeyed...
2. Thus this must be the place to begin—do the Scriptures provide any command or prohibition that directly applies to this situation...
3. For example—Sarah has begun to feel restless being a stay-at-home mom—she begins to wrestle with the will of God for her...
4. Thus she checks into affordable day care costs—and she begins to send out her résumé to various businesses of employment...
5. She thinks to herself—I will send out but 5 or 6, and those to some of the less likely places, and if perchance I happen to hear back then I will know for certain it is God’s will...
6. Or else perhaps she doesn’t possess the fleece view, but the open door view, because out of nowhere a job offer that she always wanted come open to her...
7. Thus she begins to ask herself—could this be God trying to tell me something—could this be the will of God for my life...
8. Or else perhaps, she prefers the inner peace view, and so she concludes—Surely the Lord wouldn’t have me do something that I lack peace about...
9. I just cant find any inner peace about staying home and wasting my life taking care of my kids, not while all my girl friends are out enjoying their lives and climbing corporate ladders...
10. Thus regardless which of these means Sarah employs, she begins to ask her friends and church to pray that she might know the will of God for her life...
11. Well may I suggest that she need not look to open doors or inner feelings, but she needs to look at Tit.2:5 —“encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, [and] workers at home...”
12. Or else she should look to Prov.31:27—“she watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness...”
13. You see Sarah is not in need of finding God’s will, but instead she has an obligation to submit to the will of God already revealed...
14. Let me give another illustration—think of Mark who has grown cold toward his wife, and has become stagnant in his marriage...
15. Thus he begins to struggle with what God would have him to do—should he get a divorce and find someone new—would God want him miserable...
16. Thus Mark begins to pray and seek the will of God for his life—but where should he begin to look, where should he turn...
17. May I suggest Matt.19:9—“whoever divorces his wife, except for immortality, and marries another woman commits adultery...”
18. Let me provide a final illustration—Alex is looking for a job, and finally one comes his way, but it will force him to work on the Lord’s Day...

19. He begins to reason within himself—this job will pay twice as much as any other I have been offered, and it will require the least amount of physical labor...
20. Thus as Alex begins to seek the mind of God upon the issue, I suggest he begins with Ex.20:8 —“remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...in it you shall do no work...”

B. General principles

1. Here I am referring to those times when the Scriptures provide no direct command or prohibition concerning a particular situation...
2. For example—let’s say the Waters family is wondering whether or not they should sell their house and move out from the city into the suburbs...
3. Now it has to be acknowledged that nowhere within Scripture do we find a command or prohibition about living in the city or suburb...
4. Thus in such cases as this we have to divert to general principles that are applicable to broad or generic situations...
5. Notice [1] study relevant passages—by this I mean we must comb through the Scripture finding the most related passages of Scripture...
6. For example, the Waters family might consult such texts as Prov.22:7—“the rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender...”
7. In others words—would selling my house and buying another one, put me and my family in a great or huge debt...
8. Normally when a person sells his house he makes a profit in order to put a large down payment on another house—but our present situation may not be so...
9. Another text that may have relevance for the Waters family may be Ex.20:17—“you shall not covet your neighbor’s house...”
10. In other words—what are the underlining motives for wanting another house—are they birthed out of wholesome and God-honoring desires...
11. Or what about Ex.20:13—“you shall not murder...”—a commandment which implies we take necessary steps to ensure the safety of our families...
12. Perhaps the particular neighborhood that we presently live in has become so corrupt that break-ins and robberies have multiplied...
13. Notice [2] consult godly counsel, Prov.15:22—“plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed...” Prov.12:15—“the way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice...”
- 14.
15. Notice [3] utilize personal desires—by this I mean, having prayerfully studied the relevant texts, and consulted godly counsel, it’s not wrong to utilize personal desires...
16. For example, let’s say the Waters family has decided to sell their house and they have narrowed down their next house to two...
17. How do they know which one they should buy—well again they have prayerfully studied relevant texts and sought out godly counsel...
18. Both houses are within their financial budget, both houses would serve their purposes in reference to size and construction...
19. Both houses are located equally well—they each have a nice back yard, they are both stable, and both are offered at the same price...
20. Which one should we choose—well I suggest to you that it would not be wrong at this point to utilize our own personal preference or fondness...
21. The bottom line is this—having given prayerful and diligent study to the relevant texts—sought godly counsel—it’s not wrong to factor in our own desires...
22. Ps.37:4—“delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart...”—if we are in a right state [if we are delighting in God], then our desires will be wholesome desires...
23. This point is especially helpful for a young person who was wrestling with the vocation or career they should pursue...

24. If they are delighting themselves in the Lord, then it's not wrong [within its proper place] to utilize their personal desires...
25. At times we might have the wrong impression that God opposes us having or doing something that we like...
26. But brethren nothing could be further from the truth—such things as natural abilities or preferences are very appropriate factors to be considered...
27. For example, after I first became a Christian I was uncertain what I should do—but from the beginning there was a desire to be a pastor...
28. The Lord never puts a man into the office of elder who doesn't desire it, 1Tim.3:1—"if a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work..."

C. Examples or patterns

1. By this I mean, within the Biblical characters we find a well of information, as we consider or examine their lives...
2. Within the Old and New Testaments we have literally dozens of practical examples concerning almost every activity or decision we might face...
3. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, David, Elijah, Daniel, the disciples, and the apostle Paul—all of which should be studied with regards to the will of God...
4. Now I have to here make what I trust will be an obvious clarification—not everything these people did is to be imitated...
5. For example—Abraham, in seeking a bride for his son Isaac, sent his servant to his home country not wanting a bride taken from the Canaanites...
6. If you remember his servant asked God that the woman who responded to his question with the statement—"Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink..." was to be the one...
7. But even here there are various principles that ought to be gleaned—[a] a father ought to be proactive in seeking a spouse for his children, [b] a bride ought never to be sought from the Canaanites, and [c] we should pray to God for His assistance and blessing...