

The Simplicity of Knowing God's Will For Your Life

Romans 8: 26 – 27

Romans 8: 26 - 27 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

- Last week, we focused on the perplexity of prayer, and we talked about how hard it is for us to know what we ought to pray for. As we looked at these verses, we saw that God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us pray, and even to perfect our prayers, so that our prayers always align with the will of God.
 - If you think about it rightly that is actually a great comfort for us. Even when our prayers aren't exactly right, the Spirit inside of us, groaning with us, makes them right—helping our prayers to conform to the will of God.
 - Why is that a comfort? Because through God's will, God is working for our good and His glory. What could be better for us than that for us?
- But still, it would be nice to better understand God's will for our lives, wouldn't it—not just to know how to pray but to know how we should live?

1. Knowing about God's will—a theology

Deuteronomy 29: 29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

- There are parts of God's will that are hidden or unknowable to us because God has chosen not to reveal them to us. But not all of God's will is hidden from us. God has made some of His will known to us through His revelation to us—His Word, and those things belong to us and our children forever.
- Theologians refer to this part of God's will, that we can know, as God's will of precept (or preceptive will) because it contains His commandments or precepts.
 - This part of God's will tells us how to live in a way that is pleasing to God.
 - This part of God's will has been made very clear to us through the Law of God in the Ten Commandments.

Mark 12: 30 – 31 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

- Through the prophets of God:

Micah 6: 8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

- And, even through His own Son.

John 13: 34 – 35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

- The preceptive will of God is God's rule of righteousness for our lives. These things are what God desires for our lives. But, as we well know, God's preceptive will can be and is broken every day by everybody because God made us with the freedom and the choice to love and obey Him or to not love and obey Him. We are not pre-programmed robots. Joshua's charge to the Israelites shows us we indeed have this freedom of choice.

Joshua 24: 15 choose this day whom you will serve,

- Reformed theology doesn't deny our free will or certainly our accountability because the Bible clearly proclaims these things. In fact, how could we be accountable if we didn't have a free will? But reformed theology also acknowledges that while all humans have a free will, we are unable to exercise that free will rightly, because, simply put, our choosers are broken by the warped desires of our hearts.

Genesis 6: 5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

- We know how we ought to live, but we are incapable of pulling it off, because our will is bent and broken in such a way that rather than seeking God's will we desire to seek our own.
- So, it is actually a good thing for us that while God gave us a free will, He also gave us a will that is subordinate to His will.
- Which brings us to another part of God's will that theologians call God's decretive will (or His will of decree).
 - We can break God's will of precept, but God's will of decree is unbreakable. Every human, every creature, all of creation must bend to it.
 - God's will of decree will be accomplished because God is sovereign, and all powerful, and whatever He has decreed will come to pass.
 - For example, when God commanded the light to shine, the darkness had no power to resist the command. The "lights" came on. God did not persuade the light to shine. He didn't negotiate to form the universe. He decreed it and it happened.

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

Westminster Confession of Faith 3.1

Ephesians 1: 11 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

- Notice what Paul says there. It is not just some things. It is all things— whatsoever comes to pass. Nothing happens by chance. Everything that happens is orchestrated by God to accomplish His purpose.

- Why do we have this glorious inheritance that is ours in Christ? Because before the foundation of the world God decreed both the means of salvation (Christ's death on the cross) and the objects of His salvation—those who would trust Christ as their savior.
 - What a minute, are you saying that from eternity past God decreed who would be saved and who wouldn't? No, I am not saying that, the word of God is saying that, and who am I to argue with that?

Romans 9: 15 – 18 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

- Can you see how clearly, these verses speak to God's will of decree? God chooses who He will show mercy to, and He also chooses whose heart shall remain hard.
- Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus is the prime example of this. Pharaoh's heart was hard toward God and hard toward Israel by Pharaoh's own choice. It was the natural disposition of his heart. God allowed that disposition to remain so that His might, power, and glory could be displayed to Israel, Egypt and all the peoples of the world.
- God didn't make Pharaoh do anything. God didn't violate Pharaoh's will. What Pharaoh did was Pharaoh's choice. God simply allowed that choice to stand and then used that choice to accomplish what He had decreed.
 - ♦ We know this is true, because the Bible is clear that God is not the author of evil and sin.

James 1: 13 – 14 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

- God never forces anyone to sin to accomplish His will of decree. He just allows people to do what comes naturally to them as a result of our fallen sinful nature, our broken choosers.

nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

- Where in Scripture does that thought come from? Well, the example of Pharaoh is one. But perhaps the example of Jesus' crucifixion will make this even clearer. Listen to what Peter said in his first sermon on the Day of Pentecost.

Acts 2: 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

- Jesus was delivered up according to God's will of decree from eternity past, but it was the hands of sinful men who executed him. God's will of decree was carried out by men who willingly violated God's will of precept.
- The men who crucified Jesus certainly were not loving God with all their heart, or their neighbor as themselves. They certainly were not doing justice, seeking kindness, and walking humbly with God.
- To carry out His plan of salvation God did not force men to sin, but He used their sin to accomplish His eternal decree regarding our salvation.

Isaiah 53: 10 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

- Jesus' death on the cross accomplished the desired result of our salvation because God sovereignly decreed it to be the means of our redemption.
- Nothing can thwart this will of decree; it always come to pass.

Job 42: 1-2 Then Job answered the Lord and said: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

- There is a God who is sovereign, whose will is greater than ours. His will restricts my will. My will cannot restrict His will. When He decrees something sovereignly, it will come to pass—whether I like it or not, whether I choose it or not. He is sovereign, and all powerful. I am subordinate. He is the creator; I am the creature.
- We can look back at history and know what the Lord has foreordained because we know what has happened. If what God ordains always comes to pass, whatever has happened must have been ordained by Him. He "works all things according to the counsel of His will"
- Whether you realize it or not, this hidden will of decree engulfs your life.

Proverbs 16: 33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

- You roll the dice, you might even blow on the dice, but God determines how the roll ends. You make plans and decisions, but God determines the outcome according to the working of His hidden decretive will.

Proverbs 21: 1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

- And it is not just kings that God does this with, it is vagabonds like you and me too.
- We, especially we very reformed people, sometimes slip into a deterministic view of life that says, "Que será, sera," or "Whatever will be, will be." As if we have no choice, no free will. As if God willed everything that happened in such a way that it eliminates human choices.
- But it is clear from Scripture that while God preordains whatsoever shall come to pass, God uses men and women who are freely making choices

to accomplish what He has ordained. Under the sovereign control of God, the choices people make determine the directions history will take. Human choice is one of the ordinary ways in which God works out his unchanging decrees.

- Think of the story of Ruth that Jay beautifully unfolded for us two weeks ago.
 - God didn't force Naomi and her family to go to Moab, but God did allow the famine to come to Israel that drove them there, but they freely chose to go.
 - God didn't force Ruth to marry Naomi's son, she freely chose to marry him, which brought Ruth into Naomi's family. But then to accomplish His purpose, God took the life of both Ruth and Naomi's husbands.
 - Now there were more choices for Naomi and Ruth to freely make. Naomi chose to return to her homeland Israel. Ruth chose to be faithful to Naomi and go with her. God didn't force those choices, but God was directing the outcome to carry out his hidden counsel and eternal decree.
 - Ruth made a choice to be a faithful daughter in law and care for Naomi, so she made a choice to go and glean grain in the field of a man named Boaz, who turned out to be a close family relative to Naomi, a man who had the means to be able to redeem Naomi's family land. Which was a choice Boaz freely made.
 - Boaz freely chose to show kindness to Ruth. Boaz and Ruth freely chose to get married. Through all those choices, God was orchestrating His will of decree—His plan of salvation.
 - Through God's providence, God worked through their marriage to bring forth a son who would be the father of Obed, who would be the father of Jesse, who would be the father of the great king of Israel, David, from whose family line Jesus, the savior of God's elect and the King of kings would come.
 - Why did all that happen? Because God decreed it would happen from eternity past. How did God carry out that decree? Through His divine providence, orchestrating events, and using the choices that Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz freely made.
 - God didn't tell Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz of his plan to bring David and then Jesus from their family line. He just worked behind the scenes in their lives, using, circumstances and their choices to accomplish his eternal decree.

2. So, since God's will of decree is hidden from us, how then should we live our lives?

- This is the question that seems to be on the mind of every Christian. What is God's will for whom I should marry? What is God's will for my job, or the college I attend, and on and on.

- But think about what we have already learned. We can't know God's hidden will except in hindsight, or unless God chooses to reveal it to us as He occasionally did through the prophets in the Old Testament.
 - I had a friend in Florida, who said to me, "It was better to live in Old Testament times, because back then God just showed up and told people exactly what He wanted." That seems true, doesn't it?
 - But remember this. It might seem like God was always showing up in the Old Testament telling people what to do, but the Old Testament takes place over about 4000 years and there really aren't that many times when God told people what to do. There were years that would go by, and God would be silent, and during those times people just had to try to figure life like we do.
 - We actually have a huge advantage over the people of the Old Testament. Because of Christ, we have the internal witness of the Spirit of God to guide us through life, through the choices we are making. This is what Paul has been teaching us here in Romans 8.

Romans 8: 14 all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

- We have the Holy Spirit to lead us, for the most part, people in the Old Testament didn't have that.
- But still, even with the Spirit of God in us, there are parts of God's will for our lives that remain hidden from us until that hidden will has unfolded.
- Let me give you some principles that will help guide you to make decisions that will align your life with the will of God.
 - First, and most importantly, is to ask yourself "Does Scripture speak in any way to what I am about to do?"
 - So, for example, if you are thinking about sleeping with someone outside of marriage, or marrying someone who is not a follower of Christ, or getting a divorce because you no longer love your spouse, or cheating on your taxes because you need the money more than the government, going to the Word of God will quickly show you that all those things are outside the preceptive will of God, because they violate God's commandments and Biblical principles.
 - Allow God's word to light your path and you'll see more clearly where God wants you to go.

Psalms 119: 105 Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

- But what if Scripture is silent? Then the next thing we do is pray, and ask others to pray with us, and seek direction from God.

James 1: 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

- As you pray, God will not speak to you from the heavens, but God will speak to you in other ways.



- Seek the wisdom of the Christian community around you. Ask wise people for advice and counsel.

Proverbs 15: 22 Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.

- Fourth, evaluate yourself, and, going along with what I just said, ask others to help you in that evaluation. Why am I doing what I am about to do? Am I a good match for what I am desiring to do?

Romans 12:3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment

- Fifth, and almost finally, ask yourself, “Is what I am about to do, really the desire of my heart?” Now the reason this comes last is because of what we know about our hearts.

Jeremiah 17: 9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

- On its own your heart is not really very reliable to go by, but the more in tune your heart is with God, which is why prayer precedes this step, the more God speaks to us through our hearts.
- And then there is one last principle, and it is this: If what you desire to do accords with Scripture, or at least is not out of accord with Scripture, if you have prayed about it, and sought wise counsel, if you have examined your heart, and everything is a green light, then move forward, go and do. But hold on loosely to your plans giving God room to work by opening and shutting doors, trusting God to lead you to where He wants you to be.

James 4: 13 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” — ¹⁴yet 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. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

- This is how we come to know God’s decreative will in our lives. We pray, we seek counsel, and we go try to open doors. None of us knows where tomorrow is going to take us, but we know who holds all of our tomorrows. The way we live in view of God’s hidden will of decree is humbly one day at a time, trusting God every step of the way.
- As Christians we are fascinated with trying to know the unknowable, trying to know God’s hidden will.
 - None of us knows what tomorrow holds, or even if we have a tomorrow, but through God’s written word, through His Son, through the working of the Holy Spirit, we know the one who holds all our tomorrows.
 - Why do we focus so much on what is unknowable and so little on what God had made known to us?

Micah 6: 8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you

- Rather than focusing on what we cannot know, shouldn't our focus be on what God has made known to us?

3. How then should we live our lives in view of God's revealed will of precept?

Proverbs 3: 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

- Do you want to know how to move confidently into the future knowing you are doing the will of God? Focus on Proverbs 3:6.
- What does it mean to acknowledge God? It means to acknowledge what He has chosen to reveal about himself to you and what he wants for you through his preceptive will.
 - What is God's will for your life? It is not about who you will marry, or what job you will have, or even if you go to seminary. It is that you would acknowledge Him.

Mark 12: 30 – 31 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

Micah 6: 8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

- Imagine if every decision you made in life, from marriage, to career, to whatever, was formed and informed by loving God, loving you neighbor, seeking to do what is kind and just, with great humility.
 - What kind of life would you be living? You would be living a life that acknowledged God in everything. A life that was doing the will of God and was pleasing to God.

1 Thessalonians 4: 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification

- Your sanctification, which is living a life that is holy and pleasing to God, is God's preceptive will for your life. But how on earth can we live a life like that when our choosers are broken—when every inclination of our hearts is evil?
 - Because before the foundation of the world God spoke His will of decree, and as a result:

Ephesians 1: 3 – 6 Blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

- Before the foundation of the world, God decreed that His Son would die for your sin, and through that death

1 Corinthians 6: 11 you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.