



Volition

His Gift - Our Responsibility

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WORD OF TRUTH PO BOX 10514 KANSAS CITY, MO 64188

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FOREWORD

Volition: His Gift-Our Responsibility is based on a series of 20 lessons Chester McCalley gave at Beth Haven Church in the early 1980s. After his death, his assistant for nearly 30 years found manuscripts for a good portion of this book on the human capacity to choose. Recognizing the value of these lessons, especially in the face of a world that either diminishes personal responsibility for our choices, or simply denies we have free will at all, I believe it to be a good choice to complete this book to benefit you, others, and myself. The content is derived from his notes. Dad was inspired by Ron Merryman's lessons on "Human Volition & Divine Sovereignty" (currently available in book form from merrymanministries.net). I encourage you to test these lessons and principles against Scripture, just as Chester would have insisted.

Dad dedicated his life to actively deepening his understanding and insight into God's revelation. He pursued this goal with great effort by studying the original text and grounding his attitude in humility, curiosity, and reverence. His approach was to never assume he *fully* knew the meaning of the text, even the most familiar of passages. He would often say God's word always provides something new we can learn, better apply to our lives, or reinforce as we pursue the never-ending process of transforming our minds and hearts to be more Christ-like. He never tired of digging into the most precious, dynamic, and truthful book we possess, God's written word.

I was in college when Dad presented these lessons on volition. Now as I approach my 60s, I reflect on the remarkable impact God's word and Dad's teaching, in particular the many lessons contained in this book, have had on my life. Reading through his notes as I prepared to finish this manuscript, I often came across comments and ideas that I not only put into practice in my life, but also use to mentor others. I'm reminded of Proverbs 22:6 which says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it." I am incredibly grateful my parents brought me up with a worldview anchored in God's truth. The biblical concepts in this book through application and prayer will prepare you to persevere during even the most challenging of times and will lay a foundation for you to develop a rich and unbreakable relationship with your Creator.

The narrative of this book is typical of the gift Dad had for communicating deep spiritual truth in a way even a middle school student could understand. The opening

chapters remind us that the troubles we experience in this world and the emptiness we feel in our hearts when we are not in fellowship with our Lord are all due to one simple fact. Our wills are not aligned with His or with each other's.

Are we making choices to follow God's will as expressed in Scripture? Are we placing our own desire above others? God made us for relationships. Christ-like love is the supreme ethic that enables healthy relationships. Proper use of our will is how we live out a faithful and loving relationship with God and each other. This book will provide you with the wisdom of how to use your volition to respond to God in the way He designed us to function.

My hope and prayer as you study this book is that you will discover opportunities to correct your human viewpoint and replace it with the most precious knowledge we have, God's divine viewpoint on how to use our capacity to choose. Additionally, the lessons you apply from this study will allow you to be a testimony to your family, friends, co-workers, and those you disciple, mentor, and influence. We are called to shine the light of Christ in this world. Our light is always more apparent when we are surrounded by darkness, which is an unfortunate reality of this world. May God's Spirit guide you through this study in a way that motivates you to make intentional choices that will prepare you to be a more useful vessel for Him so that you might build up and encourage others to do the same.

Dave McCalley
Summer 2020

Chapter 1

THE CAPACITY TO CHOOSE

A Study in the Volition of Man

God has invested man with great potential. He has given man the capacity to think, called intellect. In addition, man is given the ability to feel, called emotion. Finally, and the subject of this book, is the capacity to choose, called volition.

The purpose of this study is to determine the teaching of the Bible with respect to the will of man. In its simplest expression, volition looks at our capacity to exercise choices. The areas in which people are responsible for right choices are wide indeed. We are to reflect the will of God in both our actions and reactions to life situations. Our feelings about certain things and people are usually the result of a series of volitional responses, be they good or bad.

In such a presentation as this, perhaps the word volition waives a red flag at some who fear that volition itself is inherently in conflict with the sovereignty of God. Scripture teaches no such thing. God is sovereign in the most absolute sense, but this does not deny that this sovereign Creator gave man the ability and responsibility in the matter of making choices.

We must take seriously the fact that, as God's creatures, He has a will for us. His word addresses us with many commands that direct us to act and react in a prescribed way. We have the capacity to reaffirm the goodness of God's will or we may deny the goodness of His will.

We will discover that the proper use of the will is to exercise choice in such a manner that all the actions of life are a continual affirmation of the will of God. This is the opportunity that presented itself to Adam, and it is likewise the opportunity for every believer. It is with the aim of affirming the will of God that these pages are written.

The Importance of the Doctrine of Volition

A complete justification for the study of this doctrine could be sustained by reference to the massive confusion that exists in respect to the sovereignty of God and the will of man. Christianity could almost be divided into two camps over this issue alone. A balanced view of the sovereignty of God and the will of man is what we must seek.

The issue of the will of man and the will of God needs careful consideration in light of the biblical information we have. The repercussions of choices made contrary to the will of God, as well as the great blessing promised those who choose to conduct themselves in harmony with the will of God, fill the pages of Scripture.

Another reason for this study is the believer's great concern for knowing the will of God. This is as it should be. The essence of a valid Christian experience is the alignment and submission of our wills to the plan of our Lord.

A good deal has been written with respect to finding the will of God. The majority of it is poorly supported from Scripture and therefore leads the believer into a sort of hand-wringing experience over the will of God rather than bringing us to certainty and assurance. Concern for the will of God should not lead us into great doubts about our choices or make us indecisive individuals. The maturing believer has an increasing capacity for wise and judicious choices that in turn lead to greater maturity.

Rare is the believer who has not asked, "Should I go ahead and make a decision or wait on God for some indication of what direction to take? And if I am to wait, how will I recognize that indication when it arrives?" Or "Since God has sovereign control of His universe, shouldn't we just relax and go along for the ride and not concern ourselves with the decision-making process?" Scripture gives us abundant information to deal with these questions.

Volition: The Big Picture

Human volition cannot be understood when studied by itself. It is one of those truths that can be understood only in context with something else. It is somewhat like a college course that has prerequisites. To gain a proper perspective on human volition, three areas must be viewed together. They are the divine will, the satanic will, and the human will.

Listing the wills in this order is not arbitrary. This order reflects the chronological sequence of their appearance in the universe. Later in our study, we will trace the entry of the satanic and human wills.

This listing also reflects a power structure. God's will is supreme and superior to that of Satan or humanity, and Satan's will is superior in power to that of humanity. The will of God and the will of Satan must be considered in order to see the place of the will of humanity since either may influence it.

It is important to note, however, that Satan may not dominate a believer in such a way that he is a helpless victim. While demonic influence is a biblical reality and should never be underestimated, those so influenced came to this condition through a series of volitional responses that were contrary in every sense to the will of God. They are, therefore, responsible for the condition in which they find themselves.

Chapter 2

THE CAPACITY TO CHALLENGE

The Initial Challenge to God's Will

Our starting point is the time when the will of God stood unchallenged in the universe. From this point, we move to the entry of a second opposing will with the declaration of independence by Lucifer. From there, the scene moves to the Garden of Eden where man registers his disobedience to the will of God, and the conflict of the ages begins.

God, Satan, and man all have a will for the universe. God's will focuses on His Son, Jesus Christ. Satan's will and man's will both agree in making themselves the center of all things. Man might be said to stand somewhat in the middle in that both God and Satan desire the submission of man to themselves—God for our ultimate good and Satan for our ultimate destruction. Man's will, therefore, may be the servant of good or evil.

The Challenge in Brief

God created a being superior to all others and assigned him a place of authority over all creation. A time came when this being proclaimed a desire to establish a rule in opposition to God. Multitudes of angelic beings joined him. Conflict and rebellion thus entered the universe. The response of God was to create the place of "eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:42)."

From here, the conflict extends to earth where man is given the opportunity to daily reaffirm the will of God by obedience to God's commands. Adam, however, disobeys and provides the scenario for what we call human history.

The Challenge in Detail

In the Word of God, the entry of sin into the universe is recorded in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. Attempts to go beyond this source are philosophical, not biblical. Ezekiel 28 divides into two parts: the address to the prince of Tyre (28:1-11) and the address to the king of Tyre (28:12-19).

The Address to Satan – Ezekiel 28:12

To assert that the address to the “king of Tyre” is ultimately an address to Satan is a valid assertion. There is nothing unusual about the addressing of Satan through a human medium.

The facts of many passages go far beyond what could be said of the beings addressed. Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament is a prime example. It was the psalmist himself who said, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me....” And yet, one cannot deny that these words had their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ as He cried them on the cross.

In Hosea 11:1, it is clearly the nation of Israel that is called “my son”; and yet Matthew 2:15 applies these words to Christ directly. This does not mean Scripture has a dual meaning, but it does mean that the words of a given passage may extend and apply past the person being addressed.

If one reads Ezekiel 28:1-11, it can be observed that the statements made there can apply fully to an earthly ruler. However, when one comes to verses 12-19, statements are made that go beyond the king of Tyre and address a far greater being.

Satan is often addressed indirectly. It was to Peter that Christ said, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” And it is to the king of Tyre that we find Satan addressed in these verses.

Headlines – Ezekiel 28:12b

Satan is first described as to his general character—“you had the seal of perfection.” We start with an emphatic *you* in the Hebrew text. The Holy Spirit underscores it for us. This is to separate this being from all others. The focus is on the unique and special character of the one being addressed.

The word *perfection* means *full measure*. The being before us is one that leaves nothing to be improved upon. This, of course, must be viewed within the parameters provided in verse 15, which speaks of this being as *created*. He was all that a created being could be.

This generalization now becomes specific. He is “full of wisdom.” The word used here refers to shrewdness and intelligence and is used in the book of Exodus to designate the skillfulness of those who did the physical preparation of curtains in the tabernacle. Satan is skillfully intelligent. Further, he is described as “perfect in beauty.” The idea of *perfect* is *all or wholly*. The total appearance of this being is beautiful.

Duty of the Anointed One – Ezekiel 28:14

The words “I placed you there” (28:14) clearly indicate that he is to function under the will of God. There is to be only one will in the universe—the perfect will of God, and this being is to continually affirm this fact. Notice the simplicity—only one will, the perfect will of God. All of creation was to function under this good will, and this created being was assigned the responsibility to administer God’s will. The result was a stable, tranquil, and ideal universe. The will of God is absolutely sovereign. At the same time, it is important to note that this sovereign God allows His will to be challenged.

Two Responsibilities

The first responsibility assigned to this special created being is to act as priest. The covering described in verse 13 is found two other places in the Bible. It is descriptive of the breastplate of the high priest in Israel (Exodus 28:17-20), and it is found in the display of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21.

The priest in Israel served as a link between God and men. In the New Testament Jerusalem, we have the dwelling place of those who are totally absorbed in the execution of God’s will.

The second responsibility was to act as God’s prime minister. This conclusion may be derived from his position— “on the holy mountain of God.” Usage establishes this to be the seat of God’s authority. It may be seen in his environment— “the stones of fire,” which are always associated with the area around God’s throne. His duty may also be understood from his title, “anointed cherub.” The cherubim functioned to support and uphold the righteousness of God. They are found at the Garden of Eden in the role of protection (Genesis 3:24).

The great responsibility of this created being was to uphold, affirm, and carry out the perfect will of God. Since the will of God is the only source of good, its execution would guarantee an orderly, benevolent, and efficient universe.

Fall of Satan—Ezekiel 28:15

In Ezekiel 28:15, we are taken to the origin of sin. The anointed cherub functioned well “until unrighteousness was found in you.”

Here is the key difference between eternity and time. Eternity was the functioning of the one single will of God. With the fall of Satan, we have the introduction of the second will into the universe. Its entry will be used by the sovereign God to prove that no good can come from any will except His own.

Freedom to Challenge God's Will

Relative to the study of volition, we meet here an extremely important concept—God allows His will to be challenged. God allows His creatures to challenge His absolute authority. This in no way lessens the sovereignty of God, but rather enhances our conception of it. God is so secure in His sovereign position that He can allow His will to be challenged, and He even put into the hands of His creatures the tool by which they can challenge Him. That tool is called volition—the capacity to choose.

The Sin of Satan—Isaiah 14:12-14

In Isaiah 14:12-14, God's prime creation is called *Lucifer*, a word that is the root of our world *hallelujah* and means *bright and shining one*. This views him in the pristine estate of Ezekiel 28.

His sin becomes obvious in this passage if one observes the repeated "I will"s. Verses 13 and 14 are permeated by the idea of a second opposing will. These "I will" expressions standing in opposition to the will of God account for all the disharmony, suffering, sorrow, sin, and tragedy in the universe.

Independence from God is Satan's sin, and it is also Satan's program for humanity. For the unbeliever, Satan desires that he neglect the cross of Christ and thus perish. For the believer, Satan's plan is to separate him from the revealed will of God that is recorded in the Bible. Every time Satan separates man from God's will, it is to man's own destruction and misery.

Satan's "I Will"s

Satan asserts that he will "ascend to heaven." In the Bible, *heaven* may refer to four different spheres. It may refer to the immediate atmosphere, where celestial bodies reside, the lower heavens, and the actual throne of God. It is the last one to which Satan aspires. This is not the expression of desire for shared rule but is an attempt to replace God. We see in Genesis as we move to the Garden of Eden that Satan tempted Adam and Eve by appealing to their desire to "be like God" (Genesis 3:5). Man has never lost that aspiration.

Satan wishes to be "above the stars of God." Stars may refer to the physical stars of the universe or may be used to designate angels, the messengers of God, as in Revelation 1:16, 20. Satan's desire is to have absolute sovereignty over all beings, including God, with all submitting to him. Satan varies his strategy from age to age, but his desire for absolute sovereignty lies at the root of all.

He desires a position "above the heights of the clouds." Clouds are referred to about 150 times in Scripture, and almost 100 of them refer to the presence of God.

The most significant thing about Isaiah 14 is the title Satan uses for God. He is called the "Most High." This is the Hebrew expression El Elyon. It is the key name to designate God as the Supreme Ruler of the universe. It points to Him as the one whose will is absolute, exercising rule over His creation. A key passage using this title is Genesis 14:18-19, where God is called the "possessor of heaven and earth." This term denotes ownership, the aspect of God that Satan desires for himself. In Deuteronomy 32:6-8, the expression El Elyon is used again of God as having Israel in mind before they even existed.

Chapter 3

CHALLENGE OR AFFIRMATION

Sin Moves to Eden

When God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, He gave him certain responsibilities and prohibitions. These instructions were extremely clear, and Adam understood them fully. Would Adam accept these instructions as absolute good? Would he accept the will of God as best? Would he gladly align his will with the will of God? Would his volition affirm that the plan of God is superior to all other plans?

Every morning Adam had the opportunity to send a message to all creation—the will of God is best. When Adam passed by the forbidden tree, he could refrain from eating as God had commanded him to do. In this obedience, he was affirming the will of God as best.

God, in His sovereign plan, elected to give Adam a choice in the matter. God created him so that he could obey, or he could disobey. He could affirm the will of God, or he could reject it and go on his own way. At this point, man's volition took a tragic turn. Adam disobeyed, went his own way, and misery entered the human race.

Influence on Adam

In Genesis 3, we have two wills exerting influence on the will of Adam. First, we have God's will, which is clearly expressed in His word. We also have a narrative showing how Satan introduces his will to Adam.

Adam's response is negative to God and positive to his own interests. Genesis 3:17 is painfully clear. Echoing Satan, Eve says, "Eat." Through His word, God says, "Do not eat." Adam responds with the choice to disobey God. From this point on, human will takes on a broken character. Humanity now has a sin nature; and we, not God, become the center of our mentality. Humanity is now what Romans 6:17 calls "slaves of sin."

Important to note here is that Adam sinned because he chose to sin. He exerted his will contrary to the will of God.

God Confronts Adam—Genesis 3:11

In Genesis 3:11, God asks Adam, “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” Notice God bringing Adam to the single issue—did he disobey?

Four concepts are involved here. First, there is God’s law, the expression of His will that said, “Do not eat.” Second, God attached a penalty for disobedience that said, “Eat and you will die.” Third, we have God’s courtroom that asks, “Did you disobey?” And fourth, we have the actual execution of the sentence when Adam disobeyed.

God’s law, God’s penalty, God’s courtroom, God’s sentence—an order that is the basis for human society: clear laws, definite penalties, definite responsibility, and certain sentences.

It is worth noting that we have largely abandoned the third concept, responsibility for actions. The question “Did he do it?” has been replaced with “Why did he do it?” In other words, we assign the reasons for wrong conduct to conditions outside of the offender. As long as a believer shares in any part of this mentality, he will be totally unable to relate to the concept of responsibility presented in the Word of God, which will be presented later in this study.

The answer of God’s word to “Why did he do it?” is clear and simple. Men do wrong because man is inherently evil—he has a sin nature that produces sinful acts, and man is totally responsible for everything he does and thinks that is contrary to the will of God. If we cannot accept this teaching, we will never be men and women who walk in accord with the will of God because we will be forever excusing ourselves for our wrong actions and wrong reactions.

Influences on Man’s Will

In the Bible, man’s will moves under the influence of his sin nature; and he is held by God to be fully responsible for his actions.

When Satan manipulated Adam and Eve in the garden, he did not achieve an absolute victory for himself. As a matter of fact, he set the stage for God’s “so great salvation.” Isaiah 53:6 spells out the rebellion of man relative to his will by saying “each of us has turned to his own way.” Here we have the sequence. We have moved from the single will of God to the second will of Satan; and now in the garden, we have the will of Adam that will result in billions of wills, each desiring their own way as described in Isaiah 53:6.

Putting It All Together

God desires the willing submission of His children for the enthronement of His Son Jesus Christ in our lives now and ultimately His enthronement over the earth at His second coming. The Word of God is the objective expression of God's will and is His appeal to us for obedience. We have the Holy Spirit resident within us to give us power to submit to the will of God.

On the other hand, Satan desires willing submission from humanity in order to enthrone himself in our lives now and ultimately over all creation. The highest level of success that he will achieve will be in the "man of sin" described in II Thessalonians 2.

The basis of Satan's appeal to humanity is the sin nature through which he gains entry and control in the lives of each of us.

The cross work of Jesus Christ has freed the believer from the control of his sin nature in such a way that he has a choice to say "yes" to the will of God and "no" to the commands of the sin nature. This is the teaching of Romans 6:12-13.

Chapter 4

KINGS IN THE UNIVERSE

Where Next?

Starting with the existence of the unchallenged will of God, we have viewed the origin of the will of Satan and the will of man. We now need to look at each from the standpoint of rulership and ask, “What is the sphere of authority involved with each of these wills?”

Man’s Authority

In Genesis 1:28, man is told to “rule” over God’s creation. While this was the condition of things before the fall, Genesis 9:1-7 repeats this command to Noah and his sons after the fall. Psalm 8 reiterates the concept of the rule of man over creation. The psalmist marvels over the greatness of the universe and then marvels over the position God gave to man saying, “You made him rule over the works of your hands....”

The concept of man’s sphere of authority is reflected in the designated authority structures of the Bible. There is authority in the family where the parents are over the children and the husband over the wife. The Bible recognizes governmental authority, as expressed in Romans 13 and I Peter 2:13. There is authority in the local church. Hebrews 13 gives a triple repetition of the order to obey leaders.

Limitations of Authority

All designated authority has parameters drawn by God. Human authority is never all authority. No authority is justified to require what is counter to the commands God has given. The husband does not have *absolute* authority over the wife nor do the parents over the child. Legitimate human authority is derived from God and thus limited by God.

These limitations, of course, are defined by the Word of God. Romans 13:1-7 teaches that governmental authority is to restrain evil; it is not to restrain good. A parent

may not ask a child to steal, for the Bible forbids this course of action. To make such a request would overstep God-given authority and therefore cause one to lose it. When a designated authority steps out of the God-given parameters, obligation of those under that authority ceases.

Satan's Rule

There are several words used of Satan that establish the fact of his rule. Among them, one of the clearest is the word *prince*. It is the Greek word *archon*, which means *ruler*. The Jews reveal their belief in a satanic hierarchy of rulership by accusing Christ of operating under the "rule of the demons" in Matthew 9:34, 12:24, and Mark 3:22.

Jesus applies this same designation directly to Satan in three important statements recorded in the Gospel of John. The first is John 12:31. The verse begins with the word *now*, which is obviously a time concept. The context shows that Jesus has the cross in mind. What He speaks of here is an event relative to His approaching death. Satan is then designated as "the ruler of this world." Notice the idea of rulership and authority over a sphere called *this world*. The word *world* has several uses in the Bible. Here it is used to designate all life that has not been corrected by the Word of God. The world is totally antagonistic to God's truth. The reason lies in who rules it. The verb speaks of Satan as one who "shall be cast out." The tense of the verb points to a future event, and the cross assures us that this will happen.

A vital point should be made here. This statement of Jesus recognizes that Satan has a very real power, but it is also a doomed power. It is doomed because God is absolutely sovereign in His universe and cannot be dethroned. At the same time, it is obvious that God allows that sovereign authority to be challenged. Satan's rulership is a challenge to that authority.

The second reference to Satan's rulership is John 14:30 where we are told that "the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in me." Here again, we have recognition of the reality of Satan's rule. At the same time, we are told that it is diametrically opposed to Christ. This is the kind of world we live in.

The third reference is John 16:11 where the reality of Satan's rule is realized, but the emphasis lies on the fact that it is *judged*. Satan's rule is real but doomed.

The final passage that applies the word *ruler* to Satan is Ephesians 2:2. Here, Satan's rule is linked to this world, and he is called an authority. This advances our thought to the concept that Satan's rule is real but also is limited in its sphere of operation.

Satan's authority is superior to that of humanity in power and in scope. This does not mean that Satan may possess whomever he chooses. A person may surrender to him, however, by incorrect use of their volition.

Another passage showing the rulership of Satan is II Corinthians 4:4 where he is called “the god of this world.” Here again is the recognized rule and realm of Satan.

The Rule of God

Two concepts about the rule of God are necessary for a proper understanding of His rule and how man may relate to it. First, God’s authority is absolute. There is not the remotest possibility that God will ever be dethroned. To reject the absolute sovereignty of God is to reject the God of the Bible. God knows no threats that ever place Him in any sort of jeopardy.

That God is the supreme person of the universe can be established by scriptural expressions. Hebrews 6:13 states that there is “no one greater.” This is absolute supremacy. In I Chronicles 29:11-12, He is called “head over all,” and in Psalm 82:6 He is called the “Most High.”

That God is the supreme person of the universe can also be established by logical extension of biblical passages. If one considers all of the attributes of God as revealed in the Bible, one must conclude that there is none superior to God. For this reason, some do not treat sovereignty as a separate attribute but as the logical conclusion drawn from all His other attributes.

When we say that God is the supreme person of the universe, the word *person* is very important. What are the marks of personality? The answer lies in the self-awareness of self-consciousness that is possessed by humans; whereas rocks, automobiles, and ice skates do not have self-awareness because they are not personalities. We as persons have the capacity to think (intellect), the capacity to feel (emotion), and the capacity to choose (volition). God possesses all of these.

God Is Personal

The God of Scripture is not austere and far removed; He is warm and personal and desires the volitional response of His creatures. He did not want a forced obedience from Adam; He wanted Adam to act in a volitional way toward His will.

The personal nature of God is established by passages such as Genesis 18 where Abraham asks God if He is going to destroy the righteous with the wicked and then proceeds to do some “sanctified bargaining” with God.

In Psalm 6:4-5, the author tells God that He needs to deliver him because if He does not, he will not be around to praise Him. Many passages picture God as laughing, grieving, and angry. God is personal—He is not abstract.

God May Be Challenged

Our first concept relative to the rule of God was that God's authority is absolute. The second is that God allows His will to be challenged. There are two reasons for this.

First, God allows His will to be challenged so that there may be a complete display in human history proving that no good can come to the universe apart from the perfect will of God. God could have eliminated Satan the moment he sinned, but He did not. God could have eliminated Adam and Eve the moment they sinned, but He did not.

There is reason for all this. God continues to allow Satan to rule the cosmos, and man goes on in his sin. Is God impotent to bring this to a halt? Obviously, He is not. Just because He does not, does not mean that He cannot. He chooses to allow men to reject His will. Why? So that there will be a historical demonstration that only the will of God is the ultimate good and the only source of tranquility in the universe.

Second, God allows His will to be challenged because He wants the volitional response of His creatures. He wants you and me to respond to Him because we love Him, because we accept His will as the best will in the universe. He could easily crush us all into obedience, but God does not want that. This is why the doctrine of volition is so important.

Through obedience to the Word of God, we have the daily privilege of affirming to all of creation that God's will is best. What will ultimately be displayed by God at the return of Christ can be displayed in the lives of His children now. The various facets of this will be the subjects of the rest of our study.

Chapter 5

THE PLAN OF GOD

Having seen that God is the Supreme Ruler of the universe and as such is the final and absolute authority, we now consider the plan that God has revealed to man. The very existence of the Bible shows that God has desires and plans for man and for His creation. The pages of Scripture express this plan that has been progressively revealed over many centuries starting with Adam.

Making a plan is inseparable from making choices. When we plan a vacation, the choice must be made as to where we will go—thus eliminating certain localities—and how we will get there—picking certain modes of transportation over others. Decisions must be made as to what clothing will be taken along, etc. A plan necessitates choices.

The Bible is a lengthy revelation of the choices that God has made with reference to His universe. It is our responsibility to identify them and align our will with them. This is where we relate to the whole concept of the sovereignty of God.

God is the Supreme Ruler of the universe, and as such He has a plan for the universe that reflects certain values and preferences. It is of great importance that God has not hidden this plan from us but has given us a written revelation of it in the Old and New Testaments.

God Always Acts in Character

Any discussion of what God does must be set against the background of who God is. God never acts out of character. This leads us to the point that God's plan is in perfect harmony with His character. This means His plan will not contain anything that is unwise, unjust, unloving, or in any other way contrary to His makeup. Since we live in a world of men and women who frequently act contrary to righteousness and justice (including ourselves), we must carefully align our mentality with the truth about God and His actions.

Hebrews 6:18 says, "it is impossible for God to lie." This is certainly not a limitation on God, but it is an affirmation of His absolute faithfulness and veracity.

If we look at the justice and righteousness of God, we can immediately see why God could not save apart from the cross. For this reason, God does not have a plan that bypasses the cross in the program of salvation.

Since God is all-powerful, sovereign, and unchangeable, we may also say that God has only one plan. There is no “plan A” and another “plan B.” As human beings, we must have alternatives to our plans because we cannot control circumstances. We have all made plans that came to nothing because of circumstances that we could not control. That is not so with God.

Man’s Will and God’s Plan

God’s plan does not suppress man’s capacity to choose. The capacity to make good choices is, as a matter of fact, part of God’s plan. This does not mean that God has no concern about our choices. He may even bring certain circumstances to bear that will influence our choice in the right direction.

Occasionally one hears the statement, “God does not coerce the human will.” This is one of those statements that contain some truth and also some error. The truth is that God allows us to will. The error is that God is therefore passive toward that will. That we are both free to will and that God brings influences to bear on that will can be seen in several cases.

First, we can see it in the experience of the psalmist. Psalm 119:67 says, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word.” He then extols the goodness of God in afflicting him because it brought him to obedience. God was far from passive toward the psalmist’s wanderings and brought events to bear to influence him toward obedience.

The whole concept of discipline in the Christian life is evidence that God moves toward the believer in such a way that his choices will be the right ones. At the same time, the believer may resist God’s discipline; and who has not done so?

Second, we could look at the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, residing in every genuine believer, is continually prodding us in the direction of obedience. Whenever we read the Word of God, we find God urging us, commanding us, and encouraging us to actions that are in line with His will. God does not suppress our will, but neither is He passive to a will that is contrary to His. (John 14:16-17, 16:7-15, Galatians 5:16-18)

The Choices of God

One need not read very far into the Old Testament to find out that God has made certain choices and expressions of His purposes and intents. God chose Abraham when there were others around who might have been selected. God chose the nation of Israel as His chosen people. Jacob had twelve sons; God picked Judah. Germane to an understanding of any part of the Word of God is the truth that God makes sovereign choices. They are always made in line with His love, His righteousness, His justice, and His faithfulness.

It is our privilege to possess the Word of God that tells us of these choices, learn what they are, and submit our wills to them.

God's Choices Are Revealed in Divine Revelation

Since God desires the willing submission of His creatures to His will, He has not hidden His desires and wishes. This is the value of the Word of God. It is a clear expression of the will of God for individual believers, for the nation of Israel, and for all of human history.

Because of our sin natures, we always have a tendency to think that God's will may be something less than perfectly good. We must identify this sinful tendency and deny it continually. No good can possibly come to the universe apart from submission to the perfect will of God.

The Truth of Romans 8:28

The context of Romans 8:28 is a world of sin and suffering. In Romans 8:18, we have reference to the "sufferings of this present time." Verse 20 speaks of creation as "subjected to futility," and 8:22 speaks of the "groaning" of creation, of believers, and of the Holy Spirit.

We can, in no sense of the word, control the groans that surround us, but we can and must control our responses to these things. Romans 8:28 is the doctrine that makes this all possible.

This familiar verse starts with the words "we know." Paul used this expression over two dozen times to express a truth that was well-known among believers. It stands in an emphatic position in the sentence to indicate that the context is not one of weak uncertainty but of absolute confidence.

Translating Romans 8:28 Correctly

For KJV users, the issue centers on the words “all things work together.” Only two Greek words are involved. The word for “all things” is *panta*. Its form is a neuter plural nominative or accusative. This means it could be the subject of the verb or the object of the verb.

The verb is *sunergei*, which is a present singular and thus “he, she, or it works together.” The best translation, therefore, is to make the subject of the verb *He*, and thus a reference to God, and make *panta* the object of the verb.

Thus, our translation would read, “We know that He works all things together for our good.” The point is that God is the One who can and, as a matter of fact, does work all circumstances together for the good of His children. This teaches the personal involvement of God in the lives of His children.

Some Greek texts actually have the word *God* in them, serving as the subject of the verb. They would read, “God works all things together....”

The expression “for good” indicates the direction God makes events take. We must, however, have a proper understanding of what good is. We must define it as God defines it, not as humanity defines it.

God is the only source of absolute good. He, therefore, must be the definer of what good is. This underscores a mistake we all too often make. We select what we think is good and then expect God to agree. We forget that we are sinners, and only the objective statements in Scripture can tell us what is good and what is not. The Word of God not only communicates to us the solutions to human problems, but it tells in great detail precisely what those problems are. God’s word, as always, is our source of insight and understanding.

The Believer from Two Viewpoints

From the human side, Paul is looking at those “who love God” and from the divine side, they are those “who are called according to His purpose.”

The word *purpose* here is important for two reasons. First, it is the key to the following verses that tell us what that purpose is. Second, its meaning is very clear. It means a thought or plan before, a preselected purpose, an intelligent design. God’s intelligent design is unfolded in the following verses as well as in the rest of the Bible.

The stress of the verb in Romans 8:28 is the divine ability to take a multitude of events and blend them into something that may be called good in the fullest sense of the word.

A Cup of Flour for Lunch?

On the kitchen counter lies a garlic bud, a stick of butter, salt, pepper, some flour, etc. None of these alone would make a pleasant meal. Imagine eating a stick of butter or a tablespoon of pepper. Put these items in the hands of good cooks and they will mix, blend, cook, simmer, bake, etc., until a delectable product emerges.

This is what Romans 8:28 is teaching. God takes all the events of life and blends them into something very beautiful. If we understand this, we will view all of the events of life in a unique way. His sovereign ability to do this becomes a source of stability and assurance no matter what may come our way. This does not mean, of course, that when we sin God will cancel consequences for our actions.

The believer who does not understand and believe this truth can only behold the unpleasant, irksome, and often unhappy events of life and display all kinds of human viewpoint responses and reactions that destroy all possibility of Christlikeness.

The instructed believer, on the other hand, sees the same unpleasant events and yet beholds the master hand of God in them. They are all viewed as part of the good and gracious plan of God designed to make the believer like Himself.

The Romans 8:28 Mentality in Joseph

Three Lessons from the Life of Joseph

The first great doctrine taught by the life of Joseph as narrated in Genesis 37-50 is that the sovereignty of God does not contradict the responsibility of man. This is seen in Genesis 41:28-36. Here, God announces the inevitability of seven years of famine. This was the irreversible, sovereign declaration of God. This revelation, however, does not make Joseph shrug his shoulders and say, "Whatever will be will be." Instead, he responds with preparation, and for seven good years makes ready great provision of stored food. The sovereignty of God spurred him to action.

The second truth taught by this Genesis story shows the personal involvement of God in the lives of His children who are in the midst of a set of distasteful circumstances not of their own choosing. Joseph did not choose to be sold into Egypt. He had no control whatsoever over the actions of his brothers. Many of the sufferings of life are due to our own bad choices, but not all of them. Joseph is an excellent example of how we should react to these circumstances.

Joseph's mother died when he was barely sixteen; this was not because of any choice of his. Genesis 37:4 records the hatred of his brothers. Why did they hate him? Because Jacob chose Joseph as the son on whom he desired to bestow special favor. The choice of Jacob followed by the sinful reactions of his brothers equaled

the circumstances Joseph found himself in. Circumstances of this nature continued until he was thirty years of age.

The third truth revolves around the fact that, though Joseph did not choose the circumstances in which he found himself, he was fully responsible for his reactions to all these things. No abuse ever inflicted upon us can hurt us nearly as much as our non-Christian response to it. Many people who have been sinned against respond with bitterness and hatred and find themselves spending a lifetime with the horrible consequences of this human viewpoint reaction.

The Basis of Joseph's Reactions to Being Sinned Against

First of all, Joseph recognized that God was personally involved with him in the midst of all of these circumstances. Genesis 39 makes this very clear, "And the LORD was with Joseph... (39:2), "the LORD was with him..." (39:3), "The LORD was with Joseph..." (39:21), "the LORD was with him..." (39:23). This is all he needed—the presence of God is the protection of God.

Second, Joseph had a Romans 8:28 kind of viewpoint. Genesis 45:4-8 reveals this clearly when he informs his brothers "do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." Joseph saw past the mistreatment and was able to observe how God was working all of these circumstances together for something good. As a matter of fact, this working will be the salvation of the nation of Israel!

No matter what circumstances a believer finds himself in, he is always fully and completely responsible for reacting to them with divine viewpoint reactions. This may be a hard lesson to learn, but there can be no spiritual maturity of any sort until we learn this lesson thoroughly.

The Romans 8:28 Mentality - A New Testament Example

Paul spent four years in a Roman jail. These were years of horrible physical circumstances. He was mistreated in many ways and jailed unjustly. His repeated appeals for legal justice are recorded in the latter part of the book of Acts.

It is highly significant, however, that the three most Christological books, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, were written during this period. It was in the midst of the most discouraging circumstances that Paul came to his greatest understanding of the person of Jesus Christ.

The mental attitude that made this possible is expressed in Philippians 1:12, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel...."

Two expressions in this verse are very important. First, Paul speaks of “my circumstances.” This translates three words in the Greek—a word for *things* followed by a preposition meaning *down* and then the object *me*. Paul is referring to “the things that have come down on me.” What were these things? They were unjust imprisonment, restriction of his right to move about freely, plus all of the discomforts of a Roman jail. The result? Instead of hindering the gospel as they were intended to do, they have really furthered it as the following verses teach.

The lesson is simple. What people intended for evil and harm, God brought together for good. This is Romans 8:28 in operation. Paul’s stability is rooted in an understanding of this truth.

Chapter 6

GOD'S WILL FOR MAN

God's Will for All

The will of God for humanity can be expressed by the words *birth*, *growth*, and *full maturity*. It is the desire of God for all of humanity to be born into God's family. As soon as that birth occurs, God desires all those in the family to grow. That growth is to be steady and continuous, leading toward full maturity and glorification.

We often think of salvation in terms far narrower than those of Scripture. Salvation encompasses God's entire program for humanity, which includes entry into salvation (justification), growth in salvation (sanctification), and finally, full realization of all the blessings of salvation (glorification). Salvation is God's program that begins the moment we become believers and continues on until body, soul, and spirit are "like Him" (I John 3:1-3).

God has a specific will with reference to each aspect of the plan of salvation. We begin with those who have not entered into phase one (justification) and then move to God's will for the believer in phase two (sanctification).

God's Will for the Unbeliever

The single issue for the unbeliever is the cross work of Jesus Christ. It is presented in what the New Testament calls the gospel, which is the first critical issue in life that man must face or refuse to face.

It states in the simplest terms that Jesus Christ, by His cross death, took the sins of humanity and made full payment for them in terms of their guilt and penalty. His death was a substitution for sinners. We are to respond to this work by putting our full confidence in what He has done (I Corinthians 15:1-8).

God, who is sovereign, has chosen to bless this faith response to the work of His Son with eternal life. This same God, on the other hand, has chosen to minister His wrath on those who register a "no" response to the work of the cross.

I Timothy 2:4

The first passage that reveals God's will for the unbeliever is I Timothy 2:4, which says, "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

In the Greek text, the words *all men* are placed toward the beginning of the verse to give them emphasis. Thus, Paul is stressing the concept of the entire human race. The words *all men* are spoken with a raised voice; they are underscored. There are no exceptions to the *all*.

The verb *desires* is a present tense, pointing to continuous action—thus, God's abiding wish. It is the sincere desire of God that all humanity comes to salvation, and not only this, but to a full understanding of the will of God.

The words *to be saved* refer to entry into God's salvation. The issue here is whether we have registered a "yes" volition to the cross work of Jesus Christ. God desires for us to do this right now. The rest of God's plan is irrelevant until this step is taken. It involves knowledge of the gospel—namely, that Jesus Christ was our substitute on the cross, and He settled the sin question forever. We know this is true because He who died for our sins is now alive, and we believe and cease to rest in ourselves and put our confidence in Him.

This verse also tells the believer how to view unbelievers. As the believer looks at those who have not yet registered "yes" volition to the cross of Christ, he views them among those who need to hear the gospel because God desires their salvation. This is our responsibility to unbelievers. We must share the gospel with them. Why? We should do so because our God desires their salvation.

II Peter 3:9

The second passage that reveals God's will with respect to the unbeliever is II Peter 3:9, which says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."

The words *not wishing* translate the participle *boulomai*, which refers to a willingness that comes from reason. God does not reflect the mentality that desires people to perish. The reference of this verse again is to phase one of salvation. God does not want people to perish; God wants every person to come to a saving knowledge of His Son, Jesus Christ.

If this is God's desire, why are not all men saved? Because God has chosen to allow our "no" volition to run its full course all the way to hell, which is eternal separation from Him. An eternity separated from a relationship with our Creator is the ultimate demonstration of how negative volition toward the cross work of Jesus Christ ends.

Why does God allow this negative volition? It is certainly not because He is not able to prevent it since He is omnipotent. Omnipotence needs to be understood correctly, however. It does not mean that God can do anything. It does mean that God can do all things that are in harmony with His holy and perfect character. Scripture itself teaches that God cannot lie, which is not a limitation of His power but simply reveals that He always acts in line with His nature.

Not only does God act in line with His nature, but He acts in line with His sovereign will. Herein is the answer to why all humanity is not saved, even though God desires everyone's salvation. God has, in His sovereign will, decreed that negative volition be allowed to proceed all the way to destruction. Thus, the concept seen in the Garden of Eden is part of God's plan for humanity. He does not suppress volition because He desires the willing response of His creatures. God is personal and, as such, desires to sustain a relationship with us that respects our volition, our freedom to choose.

It is, therefore, with utmost sincerity that we may beseech and encourage people everywhere to believe the gospel. This is done fully realizing the necessity of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit to bring people to salvation, while at the same time maintaining the fullest responsibility to respond with "yes" volition to the work of Jesus Christ. No valid excuse may ever be fabricated for not responding to the gospel in a faith manner. This is the first and foremost duty of everyone, and it is the desire of God on behalf of all. It is the first step in the direction of fulfillment as God's creatures.

God's Will for the Believer

Once we have rightly related to the will of God with respect to our entry into His salvation, we face the will of God in phase two. It is at this point that God begins to teach us as His children. He enlightens us to new values—a new sense of what is important in life and what is not. The success of this process depends on two things.

First, it is directly related to our exposure to His revealed will in the Word of God. His value system, His will, His program is found in the written Word of God. It is the book in which His curriculum is found.

Second, we must make choices with regard to our relationship to Scripture. No one is forced to pick up the Word of God and begin to learn it. Indeed, many believers never get serious about the Word of God. Every believer would do well to analyze his or her choices with respect to God's word.

The Quality of Our Choices

It is very important for a believer to engage in proper self-analysis. This does not mean that we are to become introverted; nor does it mean that we are to dwell on

our weaknesses, a sure road to depression. We are, however, to analyze ourselves very carefully by the Word of God. James 1:22-24 tells us it is our “mirror.” Since God’s will is revealed in the Bible, we need to carefully evaluate the choices we have made, make daily, and will continue to make with regard to their place in the routine of life.

The problem with the majority of us as believers is not what we are doing but rather what we allow our daily activities to replace. We should carefully ask ourselves, beginning from the time we rise in the morning until we retire at night, what was the priority of each hour? What did we do from eight until nine, from nine until ten, ten until eleven, etc., throughout the day?

What place did serious contemplation and study of the Word of God have in the whole routine? This will reflect the quality of choices that we are making.

Becoming aware of what we choose to do in place of something else is revealing. Is our quality of decision ever so poor as to dedicate an entire evening to television or the internet and nothing to the Word of God? We are where we are in life due to our choices, conscious or not, and their quality is of extreme importance.

Much more needs to be said concerning our choices and our responsibility to make the right ones. This will be handled in further chapters of this study.

Before we look at several passages that express the will of God for the believer, let’s consider specific expressions of the will of God for the believer. In preparation for doing so, we need to commit ourselves to three concepts.

First, we must identify very carefully what the will of God is in these passages.

Second, we must identify what part of our present daily routine competes for these priorities. This will be subjective, since we all live in different sets of circumstances.

Third, we must commit ourselves to begin making decisions and choices that give God’s will absolute priority.

If we do these things consistently, we have nothing to look forward to except a constant maturing process in the Christian life, whereas neglect can only drive us from the will of God.

God Desires the Believer to Have Knowledge

This truth can be examined by taking a further look at I Timothy 2:4. As just seen, the verse begins by telling us that God desires the salvation of the unbeliever. He “desires all men to be saved....” This, as was noted, refers to entry into phase one of salvation. It is very important to see, however, that God’s desire for us does not stop

at phase one. The second part of the verse reads, “and come to the knowledge of the truth.”

God’s purpose is not satisfied by evangelism alone. Indeed, evangelism that stops with the birth of the child into God’s family is not true evangelism. God desires that divine viewpoint be instilled into the mentality of His children.

The word translated knowledge is *epignosis*, a word made of up *gnosis*, which means *knowledge*, and the preposition *epi*. The addition of the preposition does two things for the word *knowledge*. First, it intensifies it, indicating a full knowledge. Second, it gives it direction that points to accurate knowledge. God desires for His children to have full and precise knowledge. This is why He gave us His word.

This relates directly to the purpose of the local church—to help believers to maturity through the teaching of the Word of God, carefully, fully, and continually. It is to be our number one priority if we are to function in obedience to the will of God (Ephesians 4:11-14, II Timothy 3:16-17, 4:2).

A second passage that pertains to God’s desire for the believer to have knowledge is found in Ephesians 5:15-17. “Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Since this is an expression of the will of God, disobedience is obviously sin.

The word *careful* means *accurately, paying close attention to something*. The believer is to practice careful self-examination by looking at oneself in the light of the Word of God. Here is that concept; we are to conduct ourselves, paying close attention to our walk. This is scriptural self-analysis.

Paul gives a positive and negative concept by using two similar-sounding words, “not as *asophos*, but as *sophos* (not as unwise men, but as wise).” An unwise person is simply anyone devoid of divine viewpoint. It refers to a person who looks at things through the eyes of people. It is a person who knows and applies little of God’s word.

God does not want His children to be this way. Notice, however, that it is possible to be in this condition. In fact, this is where every new believer starts. It is the will of God for us to move from this condition to that of a wise believer, one who is oriented toward divine viewpoint.

Notice that the will of God is not something to agonize over; it is not a hand-wringing matter. It is a matter of getting into the Word of God so we may gain an intelligent viewpoint on life and thus develop the ability to make proper choices.

The word for *understand* means *enlighten*. It is a compound word made up of a verb meaning to *put or place* and a preposition meaning *together*. Believers are to “get it

together.” Notice that we do not “get it together” on the basis of emotion but rather on the basis of an enlightened mentality.

God Desires the Believer to Be Sanctified

Our passage here is I Thessalonians 4:3, which reads, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification....” The word *sanctification* carries the idea of setting apart for a purpose. It is the desire of God that each of us becomes increasingly set apart for His honor and glory. When we think of sanctification, we should think of its three aspects.

First of all, we are sanctified in a positional sense. Every believer is placed “in Christ,” and because of this identification, we are sanctified or set apart from the world. Second, when the life of Christ begins to manifest itself in actual conduct, we have experiential sanctification. Finally, we will someday be made like Him, which we call ultimate sanctification or glorification.

I Thessalonians 4:3 is talking about the second aspect of sanctification. It is the will of God that we live lives that are functioning under His will at all times. From this general concept, Paul moves into some specific areas where our lives are to be lived in obedience to God’s will.

We are to abstain from fornication. Here is a broad term for sexual abuse. It takes in bestiality, incest, adultery, homosexuality, etc. God desires His children to abstain from sexual looseness.

Making Application

Does the environment we live in affirm these divine viewpoint values? Does it affirm sexual morality? Does it encourage us to opt for the will of God? Does our favorite TV show reaffirm I Thessalonians 4:3?

Why, then, do we not begin to make some better choices in the use of our time? Why do we not reject values that are part of this age and begin to affirm the will of God? All of this involves the use of man’s volition—the capacity to choose. This involves choices of what we listen to, what we see, what we think, how we feel. This should not be confused with legalism, which is the mental attitude that we can do something to merit the blessing of God. Making choices and rejecting human viewpoint systems is part of the obedience program of every believer and should be pursued with genuine zeal all of the time.

God Desires the Thanks of the Believer

“In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thessalonians 5:18). God’s will for us to have a thankful heart in response to His provision permeates Scripture (II Corinthians 4:15, 9:11, Philippians 4:6, Colossians

2:7, 4:2, I Timothy 4:4). This is a concept that requires massive application of various biblical doctrines. Among these is an understanding of the various reasons why God brings pressures into our lives. There is much in the Word of God concerning this, but it lies outside the scope of this study.

God Desires the Growth of the Believer Through Suffering

This is stated in an extended passage in I Peter 4:12-19. It concludes with the words, “Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” I Peter 3:14-17 includes the words, “For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.” In Hebrews 5:8 we are told that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. If Jesus learned obedience in this way, why would we think we would be any different?

Suffering is often the will of God for His children. It is God’s tool to drive us to Himself and bring us to maturity. This is why Paul, Peter, and James all refer to rejoicing in pressures. Man’s viewpoint looks at suffering only as a punishment for sin, whereas God’s word says it is to be a great source of blessing.

Making the Choice

Which viewpoint do we choose to adopt into our mentality? God’s will is clearly revealed in the Word of God. What we do with it depends on our volition—our capacity to choose.

Chapter 7

DETERMINING GOD'S WILL

The Makeup of Man

Man Before the Fall

There are at least five basic concepts relative to the makeup of humans that are extremely important given we came from the hand of God.

In the first place, man's existence was initiated in the mind of God. This is shown by Genesis 1:26 where we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in Our image...'" The plural pronoun *us* allows for the trinity. The activity of God the Son in creation cannot be debated as seen by Colossians 1:16-17, Hebrews 1:5-6, 10, and John 1:3. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit conferred together to create man. This is the basis of man's responsibility to God. We are responsible to God because God created us. Satan uses every possible tactic to get man to deny this. Among his most successful moves is the macroevolutionary theory of creation, which denies a personal creator-God and replaces it with a random, unguided process.

Second, humanity's makeup is modeled after the trinity. Man is said to be in God's *image*. The Hebrew word used in Genesis means a *shadow, a sketch, or an outline* (as opposed to a photograph). This means that to understand God's nature is to understand something about man's nature. This relationship to God speaks of the highest level of responsibility.

Third, humanity's function is to represent the will of God on earth. This is expressed in the words of Genesis 1:26, "let them rule...." This establishes a divine order in creation. God is sovereign over all and will allow challenge; man is a sovereign in submission with the capacity to challenge; and creation is to be in submission to man under God.

Fourth, humans are unique from all the other creatures in God's universe. Animals were created by a command to the earth (Genesis 1:24), whereas man was created by divine decree (Genesis 1:26) and had life breathed into him (Genesis 2:7). Among the distinctions is the fact that while animals are conscious, man is self-conscious.

No dog ever said, "I am a dog." Animals remember things but not ideas. Some animals use signals, but none use language. Language expresses concepts, but animals have no concepts. Therefore, they have nothing to say. Animals have no real capacity to be creative. They do not make tools or put wood on the fire to keep warm. Animals have no conscience, for no dog ever returned meat to the butcher from whom he took it.

Finally, humans are responsible to God because we are created by God. Our response to the creative act of God in Genesis should be, "God made me, and therefore He has a right to rule me." Our chronological distance from the creative act of God in Genesis does not diminish our responsibility in the least. We are as directly responsible to God as Adam was. This consciousness of being created by God gives us moral impulses. Satan robs us of that sense of moral responsibility by his theory that tells us that nothing plus chance plus time equals everything.

Man from Adam On

How is man's will affected by the fall? How are we different from Adam? Remembering that we are in the same position as Adam insofar as responsibility is concerned, in what way do we differ?

The first feature of man after the fall is his attempt to extricate himself from the position of responsibility for his rebellion against God. Even Adam manifested this after he sinned. Did he not say when asked if he had eaten, "The woman...gave me from the tree, and I ate"? And was it not Eve who said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate"? Adam even presumed to respond to God that it was the woman "whom Thou gave to be with me...." Man will even blame God before he will assume personal responsibility.

Features of Human Will

We must first remember that human will is not free in the same sense that Adam's was. To deny this would be to assert that the fall did not have an effect on man's total being. Adam became a sinner by choosing to sin. We are sinners, however, by birth. Romans 6:17 looks at the unbeliever and speaks of him as a slave of sin. The unbeliever's human will operates primarily under the domination of his sin nature, an option even for the believer. It is only the work of the cross that frees us to exercise choices in the right direction.

It is also true that man is completely free to will anything he pleases. God does not put limitations on what man may will. He does, however, put limitations on the success of what man wills. One could will the death of God for that matter, but one cannot will the death of God successfully. To will within the framework of God's will is the secret of mental peace, and to will outside of it is the road to frustration.

Does God Want to Break My Will?

Here is an important question, one that often confuses many believers. God does not desire to break the will of the believer. God desires rather two things relative to our wills. In the first place, He desires (and, as a matter of fact, has accomplished) an effective separation of the believer from his sin nature. This is the teaching of Romans 6:1-11. Second, this makes it possible for us to exercise our will under the will of God. The appeal of Romans 6:12 (“...do not let sin reign in your mortal body...”) is an unmistakable appeal to the believer to use his will in a certain way. Notice that this is not described as breaking our wills. It is an appeal to us to will in a proper manner based on the freedom made possible on the basis of the cross work of Christ.

By way of application, it is not the duty of the parent to “break” the will of the child. It is the duty of the parent to encourage and discipline toward the end of the submission of the child’s will to the will of God. Parents, like God, should desire and strive for willing responses to the right things. The thought of “breaking” a will implies that it does not function anymore. This makes no more sense than trying to “break” a child’s emotions so he no longer feels.

Human will must be viewed in terms of its response. It may respond to the will of Satan (Ephesians 4:27), it may respond to the will of God (I Thessalonians 4:3), or it may respond to his own sin nature (Romans 6:12-13).

The Proper Exercise of the Will Relative to the Will of God

The Foundation

We must begin with the fact that the Bible contains the revealed will of God for humanity. That will, of course, takes on different manifestations at different times. It was the will of God for Israelites in Old Testament times to observe the liturgical code involving attendance at the yearly feasts in Jerusalem, the making of animal sacrifices, etc. This is not part of the will of God for the believer today. There is always, however, a divinely given code for living. It consists of both admonitions and prohibitions, things we are to do and things we are not to do, things forbidden, and things commanded. These start with Adam and continue forever.

It is our responsibility to carefully search the Scriptures for those prohibitions and commands relevant to us today. When these positives and negatives are set in front of us, we may then conclude that it is our duty to choose the path of obedience with respect to all of them. It is never the will of God for us to do what He has forbidden. On the other hand, it is always the will of God for us to do what He has told us to do. God’s will should never be questioned on these matters. The issue here is black and white with no gray at all.

What About the Areas Where God Has Not Specifically Revealed His Mind?

This can involve some very important decisions in life. What will my life's work be? Where should I attend school? Whom should I marry? How am I going to reach my goals?

Here is where a great deal of mysticism has entered the picture, along with much hand-wringing and agonizing moments trying to get some kind of indication from God as to what His will is. Here is where we need a large dose of New Testament truth and maturity. We must realize that God has left many of the decisions of life up to us. God will not, through some mystical process, tell us what house to buy or where to go to school. He asks us rather to make use of the mind He has given us to relate to His word, gather data, and make decisions based on mature Christian thought!

A Formula for Arriving at Assurance Concerning the Will of God

In the first place, we need to become fully occupied with the concept of obeying God's positive and negative commands that are applicable in the church age. This is in itself enough to occupy our thoughts for the rest of our lives on earth. The revealed will of God is to be our point of concentration.

For those areas where nothing is specifically commanded or forbidden, we should do the following. Thoroughly investigate the pros and cons of the issue, remembering that our minds, with the God-given capacity to collect information and make value judgments, are meant to be used in the decision-making process. God uses our minds; He does not bypass our minds. Here we should ask mature Christian questions such as, which option in this instance gives me the best opportunity to glorify God? Which option will best help me to maintain the highest Christian priorities?

In all this, we must remember that a bad choice, but with no moral implications, is not necessarily a sinful choice and may only serve to remind us that we are fallible people who fail to perceive all the facts required to make a good choice. Paul made many attempts to visit the church at Rome, and up until the time of the writing of the book of Romans, they had all fallen through. This was not sinful planning in any way. It merely showed that Paul was human and did not have perfect insight into the situation. The Holy Spirit does not bypass our humanness to share special revelation of God's will. God allows us to make bad decisions as part of His instruction and growth process for us.

The Religious Mind

The above concepts are absolutely counter to what the religious mind desires. By the religious mind, we refer to all those who want a relationship to the will of God apart from long hard study and application of the Scriptures. It is the mind that

wants a religious guru to take it by the hand and say, “Do this” and “Don’t do that.” The religious mind is one that refuses to accept responsibility of choices—one that will make some foolish and thoughtless move and then have the audacity to lay the blame on God and say, “The Lord led me that way.” This is not the path of Christian maturity. As we learn the clear features of the will of God from His word, we develop the ability to make good judgments in unrevealed areas.

Chapter 8

GOD'S WILL AND OURS

God Working in Us

Beginning with a Command

Philippians 2:12-13 presents some helpful material concerning the relationship that God bears to the volition of the believer. The believers here are ordered to “work out your salvation.” The Greek word for *work out* is one that means *to perform, to accomplish, and to achieve*. When one achieves, it is because he knows where he is going; it strongly implies a goal. Thus, Paul is saying, “Carry your salvation through to its end.”

Philippians 2:13 follows as an encouragement to do this. We are to act in such a manner because of the activity of God. When we read that “it is God who is at work in you,” we have a grammatical construction that means “God—the one working in you.” The word *working* means *to energize*. God is in us, activating us. God does not work to have passive, indecisive, vacillating children.

The Dual Purpose of God's Working

God is working in us “to will and to work....” Both of these infinitives are in the present tense and thus express the continuing purpose of God. The first points to His involvement with our volition, the second to His involvement with our conduct. The text does not say He is working in us to replace our will. He is working in us so that our will may come into line with His will. God wants His children to make quality choices. Notice that the willing precedes the doing. We must make right choices before we can have right action. In fact, without good choices, there is simply no growth at all. God is in us, urging us to use our volition for Him.

Perfect and Complete in All the Will of God

Getting to Know God's Will – Agony or Ecstasy?

To many, coming to a degree of certainty of the will of God is a hand-wringing experience. For some, the very idea of decisiveness and certainty is foreign to the concept of the will of God. Here is where we should beware of the idea that “I don’t make any decisions; God makes them all.” That the believer should be committed to the will of God is undebatable. That the believer should therefore not be increasingly decisive is a violation of the teaching of the Word concerning volition.

Colossians 4:12 is a passage that links the idea of certainty to the will of God. Paul informs the Colossian believers of the fervent desire of Epaphras for them. He is said to be “laboring earnestly for you in his prayers.” The term involved here is the Greek word from which our word *agony* comes. It means *to enter a contest* and thus *to struggle and endeavor*. The struggle takes the form of prayer in two things.

The Double Desire of Epaphras

First of all, he desires that these believers will “stand perfect.” Here is a common New Testament word that means *to reach a goal* and thus be mature. The words “in the will of God” connect to the words *mature* and *complete*. The word for *will* should be taken as an active noun. Thus, we would translate, “in every willed thing of God.” Second, the expression *stand complete* is a perfect tense of a word meaning *to be fully assured* and is in the passive voice, *to be convinced*. Thus, we have the desire of Epaphras that “you may be mature and fully convinced in every willed thing of God.” Here is the relationship we should bear to the will of God. God works in all of His children, and the mature believer is keenly aware of this. Maturity does not agonize over the will of God because it is convinced that God is personally involved in the course of life of all His children.

God's Commands and God's Prohibitions

An obvious argument for the believer’s responsibility to make choices, determine actions, and respond in prescribed ways is found in the abundant imperative mood verbs of the Scriptures. The imperative mood is an appeal to our will. It recognizes that our choices need to be mandated by God.

These commands also recognize the fundamental concept studied earlier. The God of the Scriptures allows Himself to be challenged—a challenge always to the detriment of the one who issues it but nonetheless permitted by God.

Chapter 9

SELF-CONTROL

Is Self-Control a Biblical Concept?

Egkrateia is the compound word used in the New Testament to express the idea of self-control. It is made up of the word *kratos*, which means *power*, and the word *en*, which means *in*. It conveys the idea of control coming from within a person. Is this a contradiction to the nature of Christianity? How does this relate to the control of the Holy Spirit? Isn't our strength to come from God, not ourselves?

We have questions here because we have allowed the word *self-control* to be defined by men apart from God. There is a human viewpoint definition for every teaching in the Bible, even a human viewpoint description of who God is. A safe rule: Approach all Bible study with the conscious realization that our mentality has been conditioned by Satan's cosmos to misunderstand the words of Scripture. For example, God and Satan both have a definition of love. God and Satan both have a definition of salvation. And God and Satan both have a definition of self-control.

Biblical Self-Control

In the Word of God, self-control is not contrary to but evidence of the control of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 is the truth we need to see. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...." The word *self-control* is the one mentioned above, *egkrateia*. This passage clearly establishes that the control of the Spirit does not stand in contradiction to self-control. Self-control, as a matter of fact, is evidence of the control of the Spirit. It is among the fruits that He produces.

Confusion exists in many minds concerning the control of the Holy Spirit in one's life. It is treated as though it is something from the outside acting upon us. Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit's control comes from within. In other words, it is not the Holy Spirit operating in place of us, but rather the Holy Spirit operating through us. The Holy Spirit guides and controls from within by giving us the right perspective

through the Word of God. This makes it possible to exercise our volition in making decisions involving self-control.

Only in fellowship with God are we truly in control of our lives. He gets hold of us so we can get hold of ourselves. To many, the concept of the control of the Holy Spirit in one's life means that we are essentially passive with Him doing the living. This makes the active voice imperative of the word *egkrateia* meaningless since we are waiting for Him to do the acting. This kind of believer really is functioning as a non-person, feeling guilty or unspiritual if he makes a move to take active control of the direction of his life.

A proper view of the control of the Holy Spirit makes a person very active, continually making choices and pursuing obedience. When Scripture commands something, this Christian immediately assumes the responsibility to pursue that course of action. He is functioning as a person who is responsible to act and choose. His course of action is dictated by the Word and motivated by the Holy Spirit.

In Titus 1:8, Paul lists self-control as a distinguishing characteristic of church leaders. Why is this the case? There is the obvious answer that leaders are role models who are to provide godly influence through their actions and decisions. Another subtle but vitally important reason is to exhibit the self-control that maintains a priority on teaching the Word. Rarely is there pressure to place more of an emphasis on teaching the Word. More often, leadership must protect this priority against other well-meaning activities that can take time away from Bible study in the local assembly.

Who Controls Our Lives?

This is not a question that can be answered absolutely. It must be answered issue-by-issue, minute-by-minute, and decision-by-decision. Granted, we all understand what the answer should be. Some Christians have a fault of not distinguishing between what should be and what really is. This is dangerous, of course, because it is self-delusion. Perhaps we can clear up the issue a bit by analyzing the options for control of our lives.

Options for Control

First of all, it is possible for circumstances to be the controlling factor in our responses and reactions. The car breaks down (a circumstance), and we go through a whole series of reactions. The issue here is simple. "Do I determine my reactions, or do the circumstances determine my reactions?" The answer tells who or what is in control of your life; is it you or circumstances?

It is also possible for another person or persons to be in control of our responses and reactions. The husband is in a bad mood, and his wife reacts by joining him. Or

who hasn't said, "You ruined my day!"? What we should say is, "I *allowed* you to ruin my day." This places the responsibility where it belongs and shows that we are not victims. Being controlled by others is the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit called self-control.

This is not to say that we are to be rude and inconsiderate of the wishes of others under the cloak of self-control. It does mean, however, that when others influence us, it is by our own free choice. The believer is responsible to God, and God has told us what His will is. In return, He has given us the capacity to choose; and with it comes the responsibility to react as His will dictates.

A Special Remark About Marriage

A wife is to submit to her husband. The idea is for her to respond to his leadership. Submission is not responding to a set of orders, rather it's recognizing his function in life and being supportive of him. The idea expressed in Genesis 2:18 is for her to be a helper. His role is to lead through godly choices in a loving way that welcomes her input and choices.

The danger for her is to place all of the responsibility for a decision on him and avoid acceptance of responsibility. His danger is to confuse leadership with insisting on his own way, which will eventually crush her volition. When volition is destroyed, love is destroyed. Which would you rather have, a loving response by choice, or a coerced response because she is forced to submit? When a husband destroys her right to choose, he will destroy her as a person and as a Christian, too. This is a sobering thought. While there is a sacred uniqueness to the marriage relationship, this principle for leaders to lovingly respect another's volition is key for any healthy relationship, including parent-child and manager-employee relationships.

Healthy Christian Responses

It is important to distinguish between an action and a reaction. An action can be planned to get the response we want. Manipulative action is the practical means of implementing self-centeredness. Reactions, on the other hand, cannot be planned and reflect our thinking, our true self. At the root of right response is right knowledge. We can respond with what we know we should do, which is based in knowledge; or we can respond with what we feel, which is based in our emotions. Christian responses are determined by objective truth found in the Word of God, and thus how a Christian thinks. A human response is determined by the sin nature, and thus what we feel. We can't respond correctly until we think correctly.

God's positive and negative commands are an expression of His will. Understanding His will requires study of Scripture and how it applies in the age we live. For

example, the Old Testament sacrificial system is not applicable in the Church Age, but stealing is a negative command for all ages.

God gives us commands because He knows we have the capacity to make choices in our actions and reactions. We affirm biblical commands when our actions and reactions align with these commands. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul tells us to “speak the truth in love.” This command provides a framework for Christian responses. We are to do the right thing in the right way. By speaking the truth, we do the right thing. By doing it with love, we do it in the right way. Being honest in communication may be the right thing, but when done in a brutal, insensitive way, we can cause hurt or even cause truth to be rejected because of how truth was delivered.

Another example of a command to action is found in I Peter 5:2. Elders are called to shepherd their congregation, *do the right thing*, with a willing, eager attitude not for personal gain, *done in the right way*.

The command in I Peter 3:9 assumes we are also able to control our reactions. We are to react to a wrong done to us by not returning evil for evil but by giving a blessing instead. This does not prohibit us from protecting or seeking justice. This command also implies we should expect to receive non-Christian treatment in this world.

When we respond negatively to God’s commands, we fall into His disciplinary plan. His discipline is always for our good, whether that is to remove us from worldly condemnation (I Corinthians 11:31-32) or to produce the fruit of peaceful righteousness (Hebrews 12:11). When we respond positively to God’s commands, we show our love for Him (John 14:21, 23, I John 5:3).

Self-control is far-reaching. Where we are in life is the result of our actions and reactions. We are responsible for our actions, reactions, thought life, and emotions. Immersing ourselves in God’s word allows the Spirit to work through us to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

Whenever we react, we reveal what dominates our mentality at that moment. That could be the sin nature and emotion or that we are walking by the Spirit. When we have positive volition towards God’s word, we obey with actions that follow with His commanded reactions. This is a sign of Christian maturity.

Assets for Control

Self-control is a product of God’s knowledge program. II Peter 1 shows how self-control flows from knowledge and the importance of using our volition to access the divine assets God has provided for us. The concept of divine assets is described in II Peter 1:1-4, followed by our responsibility to utilize these assets in 1:5-14.

God's desire is for us to have a full, precise, and personal knowledge of Jesus Christ so that we will have all that is required for life and godliness. We see this by the use of the word *epignosis* in II Peter 1:3. The idea of this word is to be thoroughly acquainted with the object we seek to know, which in this case is Christ.

God has provided us with divine assets or promises. To gain knowledge about them, we must choose to search His word so that we can identify, understand, and use them. These divine assets are the sum total of benefits available to the believer listed in Scripture, based on the cross and taken by faith. The emphasis in this study is not on what the assets are, rather on their character and our choice to appropriate them.

The source of our assets is God's divine power, an infinite, unchanging, incomprehensible power. The nature of our assets is a once-for-all gift of grace, an open-handed generosity. The word *given* is in the perfect tense, which indicates a past, completed action with results that abide into the future. Thus, our assets have *already been given*. We must engage in Bible study to find, understand, and use these assets. The scope of our assets is all things. Thus, no *need* exists for the believer, only the use of our volition to understand and apply assets available to us. We should be satisfied with God's provision, rather than tortured by our wants. The value of our assets pertains to an expanded life and godliness that enables right worship. The means of using our assets is through the knowledge of Christ. The tangible expression of these assets is described as precious and very great promises that flow from God's benevolent character. A promise is only as reliable as the person giving it. God's ability to deliver on His promises gives us great hope and assurance in their surety and effectiveness. These features sum up why they are great and precious promises.

There are reasons God has given these promises. The first is that we might come into an intimate knowledge of Him. Second, these promises tell us how to identify with our Creator. Third, these promises separate Christianity from mystic religions to an objective reality. In summary, we are connected by the power of God and to the very nature of God. All of this will flow to us through the Word of God.

Responsibility of Assets

Scripture never separates divine provisions from our responsibility. Our responsibility is never separated from our volition. God's order is provision, responsibility, and choice. This pattern is seen in Romans 6 where Paul teaches us that those who are "in Christ" have the provision of being freed from sin. Our responsibility is to not let sin reign in our mortal bodies. We are commanded to use our volition to say no to sin because we have been enabled by His power.

Psalms 119:9 is another example when David asks, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" He answers in 119:10 that the way is a complete commitment to seek and follow God's commandments. In contrast, Luke 22:54-62 recounts Peter's less

than wholehearted commitment on the eve of Jesus' crucifixion. Peter loved the Lord too much to abandon Him, but not enough to boldly walk beside Him.

Coming back to II Peter 1:5, the words *for this reason* connect our assets for a successful Christian life to responsibility. We are to diligently pursue the qualities listed in verses 5-7. These qualities are connected by the Greek preposition *en*, indicating each quality flows from the previous. Peter is teaching us the road to the highest Christian character. He begins with faith, which is our positive volition toward truth, and ends with love, which is doing the best for others in the light of eternity despite the personal cost.

Here then is the order of developing Christian character. Out of faith flows virtue. Out of virtue flows knowledge. Out of knowledge flows self-control. Out of self-control flows patience. Out of patience flows godliness. Out of godliness flows brotherly kindness. Out of brotherly kindness flows love.

We are to diligently pursue these qualities. The Greek word for diligence demands effort, work, and choice. We are not to be passive, rather intentional about maturing our Christian character.

I Peter 2:2 makes this analogy: what food is to the body, God's word is to the inner person. As the body is nourished by food, so God's word nourishes the mind. Both require repetition. You cannot eat once and be permanently filled, neither can you take in God's word once and be mature. We need both daily.

Finally, notice the link between self-control and knowledge. Knowledge refers to objective truth found in the Word of God. This is why there is always an attack on activities and people who pursue or teach divine knowledge. Without knowledge, we have no framework for Christian responses, rather we respond from a purely emotional framework. Consider this statement from II Peter 3:9 as a perfect example of how patience flows from self-control. "God is not slow to fulfill the promise of His coming; rather He is patient giving every single one of us ample opportunity to turn to Him in faith."

Chapter 10

CHRISTIAN REACTIONS

We have established that self-control is evidence of the control of the Holy Spirit in our life. The Holy Spirit works through us, not in place of us. He gets hold of us so we might get hold of ourselves. God's provision of divine assets that brings us to maturity comes with personal responsibility to make right choices based on knowledge of His will. This knowledge comes through study of His Word. We will now examine in more detail right Christian reactions.

Our Expectations

Human responses span both actions and reactions. We are the initiators of our actions. Our reactions are responses to an external stimulus such as another person's action or our circumstances. In either case, a stimulus is required to trigger our reaction.

Our responses reveal what is dominant in our mentality at that moment. Options for what may dominate us at any point in time include either the sin nature flowing from an emotional framework or the Holy Spirit grounded in a doctrinal framework.

Most of us prefer honest responses from others rather than hypocrisy. However, an honest response is not always a holy response. An open honest reaction may reveal that we are not using divine viewpoint at that moment. It's important to recognize what is driving our mindset at any point in time, the Holy Spirit or our sin nature. We should ask ourselves if our honest reactions come from a right or sinful place. Genuine, humble reflection rooted in truth will enable our maturity. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul encourages us to speak the truth, but to do so in a loving way.

Realities About Reactions

Problems with our reactions tend not to be in response to good things done for us, rather we struggle when a stimulus is negative or sinful toward us. Satan wants us to have the wrong reaction and feel good about it because we feel justified in our reaction. This attitude is seen in complaining, which is a powerful refuge from responsibility. Complaining is nothing more than a quarrel with circumstances. The

circumstances may be horrible, but they are never an excuse for a reaction driven by our sin nature.

The simple solution for complaining is to never do it. In Philippians 2:14, we are told to do all things without grumbling or complaining. Since we are never to seek the will of God on commands that are clearly stated, we simply should never complain. The Greek word for *complain* is *gongusmos*. This is an onomatopoeic word, meaning the word sounds like what it describes. Pop and sizzle are examples of onomatopoeic words. Say to yourself *gongusmos* over and over to get the idea of what a constant grumbling or murmuring might sound like to others, a repetitive and senseless droning on about a person or situation.

Why the command to not complain? First, God wants us to take responsibility for our reactions. Second, God wants to remove excuses for our sinful reactions. Third, if we create cover-ups for responsibility, our ability to relate to God's word will be stifled.

Our internal attitude, not external things, should determine our reactions. The root cause of wrong reactions is inside of us. Not taking responsibility for our reactions will limit our maturity. Overcoming a problem begins with acknowledging and accepting responsibility for it. Rather than grumble that, "Bob hurt my feelings," take ownership and admit, "I *allowed* Bob to hurt my feelings."

We should discern how we respond in personal relationships. Every relationship has a "one day," a day when wills collide or frustration erupts. We might react by saying, "I'm not going to put up with that." Our reaction could come from human viewpoint or divine viewpoint. We could have a human reaction and lash out at others for their behavior. Or we could react with a divine viewpoint as found in Colossians 3:13 where we are told to bear with and forgive one another.

External things might trigger our reactions, but they should not control our reactions. We have the choice to respond in a way that is consistent with the knowledge of Scripture or in a way that brings out our sin nature. Developing a routine to regularly take in God's word so that it will transform our thinking to align with God's thinking will result in more Christ-like reactions.

This development of self-control, which flows out of knowledge, allows us to take control of our emotional world. Transforming our thinking to align with biblical teaching will be reflected in our maturity and emotional stability. Emotion is a response mechanism, and we need to give it a framework of truth to drive its responses.

In a non-Christian world, we should expect to be treated in a non-Christian way. In John 15:18-19, Jesus told His disciples they would be hated by the world in the same way He was because neither He nor His followers were of this world. We are to live

in this world and be lights to the world, but we should not expect the world to treat us in a godly way.

Passages on Thinking and Volition

Jesus' teaching in Mark 7:14-23 demonstrates how Christianity is in opposition with modern sociological thought, which looks to environmental factors as the sole reason for our thinking. Jesus teaches that the external is not our issue, rather our internal thinking is. Here, Jesus teaches that external things cannot defile, and in Matthew 23:25-26, external things cannot cleanse us.

The sins of men come from the nature of men or our minds. Modern thought, on the other hand, shifts responsibility from individuals to the environment. This is the basic idea of socialism. The evils of humanity come from the environment. Therefore, the solution is an improved environment enabled by the government. Christ, on the other hand, teaches that we first need to get our personal thoughts right so that our right actions and reactions will follow.

The next passage we will consider is II Corinthians 10. The context of II Corinthians is Paul being continually under attack for his actions, attitudes, motivations, teaching, character, and ministry. II Corinthians is a key book on how a Christian is to react to non-Christian treatment. The line of thinking is this. When Paul is absent, he is strong and demanding. When Paul is present, he is weak and vacillating. This led to him being accused of hypocrisy. Instead of retaliation, Paul reacts by giving an explanation and defense of his ministry.

Paul's ministry involved two activities, tearing down and building up. This is the picture of II Corinthians 10:4-5. Our mentality is like an old city lot with junk buildings that need to be torn down. God's word tears down and burns up our wrong attitudes. Only then can it begin the work of building up new attitudes that are grounded in divine viewpoint.

The tearing down phase of God's work includes three truths. First, we are engaged in a battle. Second, we have weapons to fight the battle. Third, God supplies the weapons assuring victory if we choose to use them.

Our battle is against strongholds. These are all the things in our lives that are contrary to the Word of God. The first step is to destroy what we think so God can then take hold of what we think. We fight strongholds by identifying and casting down things that exalt themselves. We must continually engage in an internal battle to tear down and dethrone the schemes and thought processes that take us captive. Once we move forward, something else will rise up to get in our way of knowing God. The process to rid our thoughts of strongholds is a never-ending effort.

The final step is to bring every thought into captivity. Thoughts refer to any product of the mind. Human viewpoint never stops bombarding our minds. We gain a new mentality when we bring our minds and thoughts to God for control. When our thoughts are under control, all else is under control because our thoughts determine our feelings. We are responsible for our actions, reactions, thoughts, and feelings. Believers never mature until we get sick and tired of human viewpoint and reject it wherever we see it.

Controlling our Emotions by our Thoughts

Paul used divine viewpoint to control his emotional world. In II Corinthians 10:5, he tells us to control our thoughts by bringing them into alignment with God's word. God does not want any of His children to be defeated by anything and has provided for our victory. Romans 8:37 says we are to be super conquerors of all things through Christ. The Greek word used here is the compound word *hyper-nikao*. *Huper* means super and *nikao* means to win or conquer. Victory over "all things" does not exclude feelings. In contrast, Satan attempts to bring about our defeat by convincing us we can't help how we feel. He encourages us to be victims and retreat.

Are feelings spontaneous, or are they triggered by a cause? Both are possible. Feelings are the result of our thought habits. Feelings can be learned, and we may be able to trace out how we came to feel the way we do. Begin by asking why you feel like you do. You might fear losing your job. This could be based in fact, or it may have no basis in reality. We can learn a spontaneous response through repetitive reactions that create a path in our minds, which eventually lead to spontaneous feelings that control us.

We should practice self-examination guided by the Word of God so our mentality will develop control over our emotional world. All of our thoughts are to be brought into the captivity of Christ. Therefore, we are to use God's word to change our mental attitude.

An example is the fear of death. This could be based on the reality of one's age, health, or family's medical history. Thinking about these things might create a feeling of fear. Our thought-life can affect our feelings. We can deal with this fear by denial or taking our feelings into captivity through God's promises.

We can counter this fear with divine viewpoint. This includes reminding ourselves that we possess eternal life. II Corinthians 5:6-8 tells us to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Paul reminds us in Philippians 1:20-21 that to live is Christ, to die is to gain. When we embrace biblical truth, fear can come under the control of our minds, and we begin to take captivity of our feelings.

On the other hand, a series of negative responses to God's word can lead to neurosis or even psychosis. Denial of God's truth has consequences. The life of Saul recorded

in I Samuel is a prime example of that. Let's look deeper into Saul's life to see this idea.

We begin with Saul's establishment as king in I Samuel 8-10. In 9:2, we see that Saul began as a choice young man with great potential. In 9:26-10:16, Saul is presented with God's word, its confirmation, and his anointment as king. The lesson at this point is that when we are exposed to the Word of God, we either affirm it or not. When we don't affirm it, we set ourselves up for choices that over a period of time can lead to a bad outcome. That is what we see in Saul's life.

From Saul's establishment as king, we move to the national recognition of Saul in I Samuel 11-12. In Samuel's farewell speech, he reminds the nation and Saul that obedience to the Lord will bring blessing, and disobedience will cause the hand of the Lord to be against them (12:14-15). I Samuel 13:8-10 marks Saul's negative volition toward God's word when he neglects the command to keep the roles of priest and king separate. Saul chooses to present a peace offering to God, but it was the priest who was designated to do this, not King Saul.

In 13:11-13, Saul rationalizes his actions three ways. He blamed the people for scattering, Samuel for not coming, and the Philistines who were organizing for battle. As a result of these things, Saul says he "forced" himself to offer the burnt offering. Saul never faces the issue of disobedience and its consequences, rather he defends his action in a pious way.

His second example of disobedience is recorded in I Samuel 15. The Lord told Saul to totally destroy the Amalekites for their treatment of Israel when they came out of Egypt. Instead, Saul went about the battle in his own way and spared its king and the best animals. Saul again rationalizes his decision when he says they, the people, saved the best animals for sacrifice, but we destroyed the rest. When you rationalize responsibility, you ultimately rationalize away duty and moral obligations. These and other repeated choices to deviate from God's commands lead to Saul's mental problems.

David, on the other hand, sinned in what we would see as more substantial ways, but he took full responsibility for his actions. We see this in II Samuel 12:13 when he told Nathan he sinned against the Lord, and Psalm 32:5 when David writes, "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity."

The emotional collapse of Saul begins in I Samuel 16:14 and is rooted in his negative volition toward God's word. Saul begins with jealousy in response to women singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, David his ten thousands" as recorded in 18:6-11. Next, 18:12 shows that fear entered Saul because the Lord was with David. From that point on, all of Saul's reactions are colored by jealousy and fear. In 18:20-21, Saul even looks to his daughter as a way to affect vengeance on David. His emotional sins deepen in 18:29 when we are told Saul becomes even "*more* afraid." Then he struggles to sustain any type of purpose, whether good or bad. This is seen in his

vacillation to kill or save David as recorded in 19:1, 6, 9-10. He then becomes a victim of obsession, going from place-to-place chasing David. This follows with Saul becoming so out of control that he is not able to be kind in a lasting way. This is seen in his effort to kill David even though David spared Saul's life on multiple occasions. Saul then loses all contact with truth when he trades God's word for a medium (28:7). Truth rejected is truth lost. Finally, Saul commits suicide 31:4.

This choice young man was exposed to the Word of God. In response, he disobeyed it and refused to accept responsibility for his actions and reactions. This resulted in his emotional demise leading to his suicide. We are responsible to make a positive response to God. Here we see the tragic example of Saul failing to do so.

Chapter 11

SPECIFIC CHRISTIAN RESPONSES

We have shown how our reactions and emotions can come under control when we take responsibility for our thoughts. Our thoughts, in turn, can be transformed from human to divine viewpoint through regular intake of God's word (Romans 12:2). Now let's look at a set of passages where God's word provides positive and negative commands for us to choose our responses.

First, we should never combat an act or attitude of sin with sin. We are told in I Peter 3:9 to not pay back evil with evil. The Greek word *apodidomi*, which means to pay back what is due, is in the present tense, indicating an ongoing activity. Thus, Peter is warning against a continued reaction pattern that is always determined to get even.

Next, we are told to not exchange verbal abuse with in-kind verbal abuse. Instead, our aim for every reaction should be to communicate blessing. We are told *what* to do, bless, but not *how* to do it. How we bless is left to our judgment.

What are several ways we might react to sin? It may be wise to refuse a verbal response and instead respond to a wrong with mental submission toward God based on knowledge of Scripture. I Peter 2:23 gives an example when Christ suffered without utterance but entrusted Himself to God the Father. Similarly, in Matthew 5:44, Christ commands us to pray for those who sin against us.

Reactions should always align with our responsibility. If we have a protector responsibility, we should react in line with that duty. For example, a husband is to protect his wife physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Other responsible protector roles include parents, church leaders, military, police, or other authorities.

We should react to crime by giving our encouragement and support to the enforcement of civil law. A key passage on the role of civil government is Romans 13. Here, Paul teaches that leaders are to protect by instilling fear for bad conduct that is backed by punishment. The word *sword* in 13:4 is used primarily as a weapon of war but can also include judicial judgment. Notice the biblical function of civil government is to protect its citizens, never produce or provide.

When choosing how to react to a wrong, the reason for the wrong must be considered. Contrast the reason for Stephen's stoning (Acts 7:54-60), which was suffering *for* Christ at the hands of sinful men, with someone throwing rocks at the window of your house, which entails suffering *because of* a person's sin. While both are responsible to God for their sin, we are accountable to God for our reactions, which should take into consideration the specifics of a situation.

Next, let's consider a civil injustice. If it is correctable, then take action to correct it. Paul expected and pursued civil justice as seen in Acts 22:24-29 when he told the authorities that he was a Roman citizen and in 25:10-11 where he argues his innocence based on Roman law. If it is not correctable, we should commit our cause to God as Stephen did in Acts 7:54-60.

How do we respond when our reputation is slandered? First, we can respond in a positive way by clarifying the false statement. The entire book of II Corinthians is Paul's effort to clarify the slander against him. Notice the detailed, instructive response that is grounded in humility, and backed by a firm, unwavering correction of false accusations. Second, we should not interfere with God's role of vengeance as seen in Romans 12:19. We are to leave room for God's wrath and not take our own vengeance. That is God's job, not ours.

Third, it is always right to react to error with truth. This is the purpose of the entire Bible, to correct human thinking with divine perspective. This could involve emotion as seen in Jesus' anger when He purged the temple, or Paul when he reacted with anger when religious leaders misrepresented the gospel as recorded in the first chapter of Galatians. Jesus and Paul were bold with those who demonstrated religious arrogance but patient with those who had not hardened their hearts. These examples of Jesus and Paul should be considered in the context of Ephesians 4:11-16 where speaking the truth in love is the method we are to use to build up each other in the body of Christ.

Fourth, how should we respond to a morally neutral stimulus that demands a reaction on our part? Situations like this are not specifically commanded and require the application of mature Christian wisdom. This takes time to develop. To mature we must make choices. Our ability to make choices will improve as we expose ourselves to regular intake of God's word. On the other hand, we must be mature to make right choices. When we make a choice in the right direction, we gain maturity. When we gain maturity, we have more ability to make a right choice the next time. This interaction of right choices and maturity are the building blocks leading to Christian wisdom.

As parents, it is our responsibility to develop our children's ability to make good choices. We should not protect our children so much that they never have to make a choice. We must find the right balance between protecting them from choices they are not prepared to make versus exposure to situations that develop their ability to

make good choices. Children who are sheltered too much by their parents will not have the experience or tools required to make good choices as an adult.

Finally, a Job 23:12 mentality that places God's word as the most important priority in our life is the defining decision-making principle for the believer. First, we should not allow the primary place of God's word in our lives to be challenged. Second, it is not the will of God to lead us into a ministry or other occupation that will cause us to neglect the biblical responsibility to our families. Third, serving in one area of our life does not excuse sinning in another. Fourth, Ephesians 4 outlines God's program for edifying His children through the regular teaching of His word. It is questionable, then, that God would lead believers into a situation where the ability to prioritize our Christian maturity does not or cannot exist.

Questions regarding a job, a transfer, or move should be examined under the principle of I Corinthians 7:35, which prioritizes lifestyle choices that secure our undivided devotion to the Lord. Note that Paul provides direction and encouragement, not specific commands. In situations like these, we should apply the principles of Bible doctrine to weigh the pros and cons of a decision.

The following questions can be helpful when evaluating the quality of our decisions and responses. Does my reaction to a given situation harmonize with the character of God? Does it reflect love, justice, and righteousness? Our responses are an outward sign of Christian maturity.

What if someone sins against you?

How do you handle a situation where someone sins against you and then says you are responsible to respond in a Christian manner? First, that type of action and comment is a grotesque distortion of Scripture. Both parties have a responsibility. Aggressors are responsible for their actions and should not sin against another person. The person sinned against is responsible to react in a Christian way.

For example, in a child-parent relationship, a father is to not provoke a child. Thus, we are not to sin against another person. As an aggressor, we are never to act in a way that puts another believer in a situation where they must respond to sin in a Christian way. As a recipient, we are not required to remain in a situation where we passively endure a sin committed against us. We should take action to either remove ourselves from a situation or use lawful means to protect ourselves from sinful acts against us. It is not wrong to expect and pursue civil justice.

Romans 6

The idea here is *will freedom*, not *will power*. The power of the cross has freed us from the power of sin. Romans 6:1-10 emphasizes the accomplishment of the cross. We have been baptized and united with Him. Our old self was crucified so that we are no longer enslaved to sin. He died to sin and lives to God. So can we.

Romans 6:1-10 gives the facts. Romans 6:11 tells us how to rightly think in response to those facts, and 6:12-13 tells us what right choices to make. Note how Paul begins with *knowledge* of what Christ has done. He then moves to how we should *think* based on these facts and closes with how to use our *will* based on this knowledge. Christianity always provides a reason for keeping God's commands.

The flow of thought then is this. First, we are to understand what His perfect cross work accomplished for us. Second, we are to change our thinking by considering ourselves dead to sin. Third, we are to make choices that say no to sin because we are freed from sin. We are no longer slaves to sin.

God's program is simple and understandable regardless of age or intellect. He has created us for relationship with Him and each other anchored in the supreme ethic of love. He has given us the capacity to think, feel, and choose. He has provided a means of redemption and reconciliation to Him through the work of Jesus Christ. He has communicated truth in His word. When we choose to prioritize our relationship with Him through Bible study, obedience, and prayer, we begin the journey back to His original plan for us to be in fellowship with Him through moment-by-moment decisions that reaffirm His perfect will.

Epilogue

Divine truth that is revealed in Scripture does not change. However, the culture to which its truths are presented does. Think about the challenge of writing a book that presents a rational and unified message over a 2,000-year period from as many as 40 different authors. The message must be meaningful to all people regardless of intellect, social status, personality, or culture throughout all of history. The Bible accomplishes this. Many see this as evidence of the Bible's supernatural inspiration.

With God and His word standing as the only enduring source of truth, different times and cultures will stand in contrast to that truth in different ways. When this study was originally presented, most Americans believed in objective truth that did not change regardless of circumstances. In the later part of the 20th century, the idea that truth was relative and was the result of how human society evolved took hold first in academic circles then in popular culture. The term for this denial of objective reality is called postmodernism. It stands in stark contrast to the truth claims of the Bible, which are presented as objective and unchanging regardless of culture, time, or circumstance. Let's explore how to identify these ideas and how they contrast with biblical teaching.

Free Will and Truth

In the time since Chester pulled out of Scripture what it taught about human volition, a more distorted view of free will and objective truth has become prominent in society. Regarding free will, there is a belief held by some philosophers that free will is an illusion. Most who take this view also believe that only the natural or material world exists. They are called naturalists or materialists. Not all naturalists, however, deny free will.

The denial of free will is also a view held by some theologians. They tip the scales so strongly towards God's sovereignty that they leave no room for people to freely make choices. The point is to recognize that denial of free will is something you, your family, and friends will encounter. This idea stands in contrast to what the Bible teaches. Be alert, as it can come from those who do not believe in God as well as those who do.

Let's take a moment to review the key ideas of this thinking so that we can identify examples of this philosophy as it takes hold in our world. The naturalist restricts the explanation of the universe to material things. Any explanation of the world that recognizes the non-physical or spiritual realm is seen as invalid. For example, the soul or consciousness according to this view emerges from matter. It is not distinct from matter. Thus, spiritual and supernatural things are illusions that emerge from the physical world. This belief conflicts with Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 15 about the resurrection body and II Corinthians 5:6-10 where we are told that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

The contemporary line of naturalist thinking called scientism goes like this. Science is the ultimate authority to define truth. Science can only examine the natural world. Nothing exists that cannot be experimentally observed. The mind, consciousness, or soul must have a physical basis because only the natural exists. The brain and consciousness are the result of evolution and its response to its environment. Some naturalists go on to conclude that our ability to choose is deterministic, not a free choice. This means that previous events and decisions determine our choices. Everything is predetermined, even though it feels like we are actually making choices. This line of reasoning concludes that if you run the clock backwards for all choices, you can trace everything back to a first event from which all of history evolves. There is no free will.

The problem with this naturalistic view is that it requires one to accept either a never-ending journey to find a first cause of the universe, a natural one that was uncaused, or the universe is eternal. If one believes in a natural uncaused cause, the universe must have created itself from nothing as Stephen Hawking declared in his book *The Grand Design*. To avoid a never-ending "peeling back of the onion" to a first cause, our rational mind recognizes something must be eternal, the universe or a creator. Notice the Bible got each part of this problem of origins right before there was modern science. First, the Bible assumes God exists and is beyond the natural world. Second, it declares God to be the eternal being, the only uncaused cause. Third, it says God created the universe out of nothing.

With the rapid growth of STEM careers (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine) and their educational grounding in a naturalistic view of the world, this belief will only become more commonplace in our society. The scientific method is a powerful tool to explain the natural world. Scientists like Bacon, Galileo, and Newton, who believed science was worth doing because they believed in God, refined the scientific method. We should not reject it. The point is to recognize what questions science can answer and those it cannot answer. Science is not able to answer questions of faith, morality, purpose, spirituality, destiny, or agency (who did it). Science is limited to physical laws and mechanisms that explain *how* the world works, not whether there is a mind (who) or purpose (why) behind a mechanism or law.

When one claims that we have no free will, there are sobering implications. First, we have no basis to hold anyone accountable for their choices. All personal choices are pre-determined by past and current environments. Second, the study of free will, which is said to be an illusion, has no value. Third, if there is no free will then faith in God or love between two people loses its emotional benefit, meaning, and authenticity. What good is it to receive trust or love from a person if they give it because they were predetermined to do so rather than out of their free will?

A powerful capacity that comes from being created in God's image is our ability to think rationally. Our rationality creates at least two significant challenges for those who reject free will and the non-physical world. First, this view provides no rational basis to make a universal truth claim. If we are totally determined and prewired to think the way we do, we would not be *free* to make a truth statement. Any truth claim would require us to rise above the subjectivity of this world, which would violate naturalism. This creates a self-contradiction for the determinist who makes a truth claim. Second, this view has no basis for us to trust the rationality of our thoughts. If we are the result of random time and chance that seeks survival as its end, then there is no reason to believe an unguided evolutionary process created a rational mind for the purpose of discerning truth. Notice these claims of naturalists are philosophical, not scientific. They cannot be tested, as the scientific method requires.

Finally, let's pivot from the denial of free will to the redefinition of truth. Not only has denial of free will gained traction in our society, but society has also evolved the standard for what qualifies as truth. The belief that there is no objective truth leaves a void in the human heart that desperately seeks truth in a subjective world.

To fill this void, a post-truth culture that promotes everyone's personal truth as valid has emerged. This idea claims that our personal experiences permit us to create truth for ourselves. This allows us in one sense to function in God's image by embracing the need God has put in our hearts for a moral compass (Romans 1:18-23), but it causes great discord in society as one person's personal truth will inevitably conflict with another person's truth.

The rational thinking that God has endowed us with does not allow for two opposing truths to both be true. For example, it is not possible to be a married bachelor. This is a logical contradiction. A post-truth culture creates fertile soil for conflicting truth and creates tension in our society and between people. If on the other hand, we recognize that the Creator of the universe provided us with objective, unchanging truth, we have an anchor and a compass to guide our moral thinking that supersedes anyone's personal truth.

Another result of this concept of truth is that it views any challenge to another person's personal truth as arrogant and intolerant. This reasoning is logical if there is no objective truth. However, if God has provided us with unchanging, knowable truth, then to claim a personal truth that is in conflict with our Creator's truth is the

essence of rebellion. Some find this hard to accept, but this is the result of people going their own way. Isaiah 55:8 sums it up well, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord."

As a naturalistic worldview further saturates our educational systems, future generations will find it increasingly difficult to accept that God endowed each of us with the capacity to choose and the responsibility that comes with our choices. That, however, will not change how God created us to feel, think, and act. God has created each of us in His image and as such put into each of us a sense of objective morality and need for spiritual fulfillment satisfied only through a personal relationship with Him. The truths of Scripture described in this study are the key to Christian maturity. They are the foundation to building trusting relationships with each other. Most importantly, understanding and living these truths will create a healthy, living relationship with our Creator made possible only through Jesus Christ's redemptive work (John 14:6, I Corinthians 15:3-8).

APPENDIX A

An Explosion of Wills

One Will Unchallenged

As far as the Bible is concerned, you can't go back any further on the origin of sin than Ezekiel 28:12-19. Anything beyond this is philosophy, not revelation. God created one being, Lucifer, more intelligent and more beautiful than all the rest of the created beings to rule on behalf of Him. God wanted Lucifer to volitionally respond in a positive way.

God could have arranged His universe differently, but He chose otherwise. God desires a positive volitional response to His will. This opens the risk of a challenge. It also makes our willing affirmation of God's will more meaningful than if we had no other choice. This use of volition, positive or negative, towards another person is a powerful dynamic in all relationships.

God responds to Satan's challenge in two ways. First, in Matthew 25:41 where we are told God created the lake of fire for Satan and his angels. Second, before they are sent to their eternal destiny, they are allowed to go out and do their work on the Earth. The testing ground for their rebellion played out in the Garden of Eden and continues to play out on Earth.

Second Will as a Challenge

The nature of the sin is recorded in Isaiah 14:12-14 where there is a series of "I will"s that are in contradiction to God's will. Here Lucifer registers the first "I will" in the universe that is contrary to God's will.

Conflict of Two Wills Moves to Earth

The testing ground moves to the Garden of Eden where man is created and given duty under God's will. Man is then approached by Satan who challenges Adam and Eve to disobey God's will. (Genesis 3)

This Conflict Extends to Today

God set up the universe with the ability for humanity to challenge His will. This emphasizes God's desire to have a personal relationship with each one of us. When God gives us commands, it is an expression of His desire for our personal, positive response to Him. God wants us to reaffirm His will.

Think about what this says about God. He could lord His sovereignty, power, and infinite superiority over us. Instead, He wants us to freely use our volition to affirm that His will is best for us. When we obey Him, we acknowledge His goodness. He gives us the opportunity to acknowledge that His perfect love, care, and provision are the ultimate good for each one of us. God is not distant. He is intimate and personally involved with each one of us.

Consider I Peter 5:6-7, "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all of your cares on Him, because He cares for you." Or Philippians 4:6, which says, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

God's desire for us to respond positively toward Him makes us the perfect target for Satan. His attack is on our positive volition towards God. When Satan targets our volition, he influences us to reject God's will and break our relationship with Him. Thus, Satan achieves his desire to be worshipped over God.

APPENDIX B

The Uniqueness of Humanity

There are two worldviews that shape how a person explores and determines the origin and place of humanity in the universe. These are the naturalistic worldview and the supernatural worldview. While there are nuances within each view, we will focus only on the general tenants of naturalism and the Christian view of supernaturalism.

Understanding and identifying these worldviews has become increasingly important in the 21st century. Education and jobs in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine, also known as STEM, are becoming more prevalent in our society. Some estimates made in the late 2010s place one-third of all families as having at least one member working in a STEM job. While not all who are in these fields embrace naturalism, it is the predominant lens most educators in these fields use to interpret the world around them. As a result, beliefs that emerge from naturalism are becoming commonplace and more difficult to identify. This brief overview will introduce the reader to the fundamental differences between these worldviews.

Naturalism

The naturalistic worldview holds that only material things exist. There is no non-physical substance in our universe. Everything we experience must be explained by natural causes. Any non-physical cause like a god or the spiritual realm is not considered as a possible explanation for the universe.

This view explains our origin and existence as the result of an unguided process driven by randomness, time, and chance. Matter, in this view, is either eternal or emerges from nothing. Those who propose the universe created itself from nothing define *nothing* as a quantum vacuum. While this view can explain *how* matter can

arise from a quantum vacuum, it fails to explain *who* or *what* caused the laws of physics that govern a quantum vacuum and our universe. This view pushes back the explanation of origins one step but fails to fully answer the origin of the laws that governed the emergence of something from nothing, which is not really nothing in commonsensical terms.

The naturalistic worldview then denies the possibility of any non-physical agent or mind behind the physical world. Naturalists explain *how* something in nature happens and consider their work complete. An important point of distinction is that natural laws *describe* what happens but do not of themselves create anything. A description cannot *create* an objective reality; neither do natural laws.

Here is an example of the limitation of this view using the analogy of a teapot of boiling water. I can explain *how* a teapot on the stove boils water in terms of physical laws and properties. I cannot explain *why* the teapot is boiling in the first place. If I introduce an agent or a mind, I can answer the *why* question. The teapot is boiling because Amber wants a cup of tea. Explaining the mechanism of *how* something works does not exclude the agency or *why* something happens.

A naturalist then excludes the possibility of a mind or agent behind the universe or any non-physical substance like consciousness. The naturalist may see design in nature but will not entertain an explanation that includes an agent or a mind. The Bible teaches us something entirely different. Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:20 teach that creation shows us the handiwork of God and holds us all accountable for realizing there is an agent, a Creator behind the design we observe in nature.

Finally, this view of origins requires either denial of a first cause or that the first cause is categorically different than anything else in the natural world. To this, the naturalist will reply either that, given more time, we will uncover an explanation of a first cause or that the universe is eternal and needs no first cause. Something being eternal mirrors the Christian view by recognizing something must be eternal. The naturalist assigns eternity to unconscious matter. The Bible proclaims God to be the only eternal uncaused cause. On the other hand, the idea that determining a purely material first cause is just a matter of time will only lead to a never-ending journey of infinite regress. It is as if God has logically trapped us into either believing in our own wisdom or recognizing that God is indeed categorically different and more awesome than everything we experience in the natural realm.

Supernaturalism

Supernaturalism is a worldview that is counter to naturalism. It considers both natural and supernatural causes to explain our universe. It is open to the non-physical realm. Just like there are many variations of naturalism, there are different views of supernaturalism. The focus here is on the Christian worldview.

In the Christian worldview, our origin was initiated in the mind of our intelligent, loving, sovereign God. Genesis 1:26 opens with “And God said,” which indicates intentional action from the mind of God. The passage goes on to say, “Let Us create man in our image,” which gives us infinite value and a unique place relative to all other created things. It also indicates our responsibility to our Creator.

Man’s function is to represent God’s will on earth and to be His image-bearers. This idea is derived from God’s purpose for humanity to have dominion over the earth as seen in Genesis 1:26-29. The order then begins with God who is sovereign over all. God then creates man in His image to be sovereign over the earth and in submission to Him.

We have the same condition as Adam. We want to seek our own way rather than God’s way. God allows us to challenge His will by seeking our own way. While we can challenge God’s will, we do not have the required capabilities to *successfully* challenge God’s will in anything.

Humans are unique from all other creatures. We are from the direct hand of God. He breathed life into us. We are His image-bearers. The Bible does not provide an explicit list of the attributes that define what it means to be created in the image of God. Most theologians agree these attributes include the human expression of creativity, aesthetic preferences, worship, spirituality, relationship, rationality, morality, self-consciousness, conceptual thinking, ideas, and of course volition. Ravi Zacharias, the well-known Christian apologist of the late 20th and early 21st century, notes that, unlike animals, all people seek answers to four fundamental questions. What is my origin? What is my purpose? What is my morality? What is my destiny? God has put these questions into our hearts so that we might seek Him (Ecclesiastes 3:11, Romans 1:19-21).

The implication of being created in the image of God is that we are to be in control of ourselves by having a right relationship to God that uses our volition to submit to His will. When this order is not followed, we are not functioning within God’s purpose, and we are not functioning rightly. The desire and choice are simple. However, the daily living of repeated choices that affirm God’s will is the ongoing challenge each of us faces.

God always provides for us. In the sphere of following His will, He provides a written record of His will and plan for us in the Bible. He provides those who place their faith in Him the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for guidance, and He encourages us to build each other up in community as the author of Hebrews notes in 10:24-25.

In summary, naturalism views all that exists as material. Our origin, purpose, morality, and destiny can only be explained by what science discovers. The Christian worldview sees the natural world as pointing to a creator, who is described in the Bible as a personal God who has provided a plan of redemption so that we might have a personal relationship with Him. God is our Creator. Our purpose is to seek,

glorify, and have a relationship with Him. He provides us with moral standards based on His holiness. Our destiny is to spend eternity with Him doing His work. All of this is possible because He entered into our broken world to suffer like no other person has suffered, yet without sin so that He might take our place and bear our penalty for sin and make peace between God and us. He only asks that we believe that Jesus Christ's death completely removed the barrier of sin between God and us. His resurrection is proof His work was totally sufficient. Those of us who believe in Him are placed "in Christ" so that God sees Jesus' perfection, not our sin. Recognizing what He has accomplished for us, why would we not, out of thankfulness for what He has done for us, use our volition to study His word and make daily decisions that affirm His will as best.