**The Sovereignty of God – COL.005**

Colossians 1:1-2. Our subject is the salutation number five. We have a new Church in Irving. We have an article about it from last Sunday's, Dallas Morning News. It demonstrates what we have pointed out to you that their heretical philosophical, intellectual arrogance, that is the reason that Paul is writing to the Colossian Church, the counter heresies that come from that is alive and well today. Here's an example of it. The Church service began in the traditional way with a few minutes of juggling acts, our sacrament dead pan juggler, Mike Sullivan, actually is probably safe to say that absolutely nothing is traditional about the North Texas Church of Free Thought, including the word Church. Most folks might think God ought to figure in there somewhere if you're going to have a Church. Nope, not at the Church of Free thought. It describes itself as a fellowship of unbelievers.

After the juggling invocation, Tim Gorski stepped forward to say a few words about the bombing in Oklahoma. “I won't suggest that we bow our heads for the dead in Oklahoma City. That's not what we're about,” he said. Instead, he called for the living to remain logical and rational in the face of tragedy. “Let harsh reality be our teacher,” he said. Our task here is to know and learn and do what is right. The fledgling North Texas Church of Free Thought meets on the first Sunday of each month. About 35 people attended last Sunday service in a small meeting room of the Wilson World Hotel in Irving. Appropriate name for the meeting place. In another meeting room, children participated in the Church's Sunday school. The day's lessons were on honesty and bones of the body. Mr. Sullivan, Dr. Gorski, and their families founded the Church this year.

I wanted my children to have a Church experience. Explain, Explain. Debbie Bo, Dr. Gorski's wife. I wanted them to have a community of people who believe in the same things or disbelieve as the case may be. Dr. Gorski describes the Church as being a typical, as typical in function as any other Church without the doctrine of supernatural beings and so forth. And would this free-thinking Church be open to the possibility of experiencing the divine? “There's a very interesting parallel there with people who think they have been kidnapped by aliens and taken aboard spacecraft,” Dr. Gorski said in utter seriousness. You have to think how likely is it that this is real? The centerpiece of last week's service was Mr. Sullivan's reading of an essay on religion by Oxford University's zoologist, Richard Dawkins. Dr. Dawkins theorizes that religious belief is a kind of mental virus or parasite.

His theory is that children's minds are especially susceptible to being implanted with lifelong self-delusional beliefs much as a computer can be implanted with a self-destructive virus. In following remarks, Dr. Gorski noted that even children have limits to their belief. If I say something too farfetched, my three-year-old daughter will say, “That's rubbish, Papa.” A few parts of the Church service seem familiar; offering envelopes were distributed. The man in the front of me fell asleep, but otherwise, this was much more like a meeting of a science club than a worship service. Marilyn Sullivan read a poem about Galileo. Dr. Gorski offered a few nuggets of science news and trivia. Did you know that tribology is the study of friction wear and lubrication? The Church includes remnants of a defunct atheist group in the area, but Dr. Gorski and Arlington physician said the Church of Free Thought intends to be less confrontational than traditional atheism.

“We decided to get away from bashing religions and more into exploring what is important to us,” he said. “We're more interested in thinking than leaving.” At the end of the almost two-hour service, the children came in from their Sunday school and marched to the front of the meeting room. They told a little bit of what they had learned that day about honesty and the femur. Dr. Gorski then perched his three-year-old daughter Imagine on a chair and offered a spontaneous demonstration of that rubbish detector he had mentioned earlier. “Did you know that Jesus died for your sins?” He asked. “Yes,” she said proudly. Dr. Gorski groaned. And then from the back of the room, her five-year-old sister called out the proper response. Imagine quickly corrected herself. “What rubbish!” she proclaimed. Dr. Gorski deemed and it struck me that viruses come in many forms.

That is a demonstration of the problem that was taking place in Colossi. Colossi was overrun by some people who are highly intellectual. They thought they were super minds, they were educated, they were cultured. As often happens in our society today, somebody who has an ability that has been cultivated and trained in some specialty field now considers himself an authority on spiritual matters. And in Colossi we had these philosophical mental giants explaining to the Christians in those congregations of various Churches in that city how there was a knowledge beyond the simple scriptures of the Old Testament and the teachings of the apostles, a true and deep intellectual insight, and they scoffed at the people who thought they had knowledge through faith, knowledge, through believing doctrine, knowledge through believing the authority of the word of God. So this Church here in Irving is exactly that. These are people of intellectual arrogance who presume that because they're competent in various fields, they are successful, and they have money that they are now prepared to pass judgment upon God and His word.

We have found in the Book of Colossians that the apostle Paul introduces himself as an Apostle of the Church age by the sovereign choice of God. As an Apostle, Paul had spiritual authority of the local Churches of the New Testament era and, therefore, when Epaphras, who perhaps was the pastor one of the Churches at Colossi or the group of association there, reported to Paul that the Colossian Christians were being infected by this intellectual and legalistic Jewish heresies. Paul wrote a letter to set them straight, and when that kind of a letter comes from an apostle, God says, “You must listen. It is not something for you to have an optional opinion about.” When the Apostles were on hand, they had absolute authority. They were in effect like papal authorities. They were the true vicars of Christ on earth, and they spoke for God.

So, Paul's gift of apostleship enabled him to receive direct revelation from God so that heresies could be clarified and corrected. Paul also confirmed his apostleship by the ability that he had to perform miracles of healing and his ability to speak in foreign languages. Paul attained his apostleship not through usurpation nomination, but by divine preparation and choice. Paul was humbled, in fact, to be appointed an Apostle by God because he considered himself to be the chief of sinners. He had persecuted the Christians and done them great injury. In persecuting the Christians, Paul was striking out against Jesus Christ Himself. Paul was a monster before he was saved because of his self-righteousness in his religion. Paul had no illusions, therefore, about himself as to deserving such a high honor as the office of an Apostle or having earned the gift in any way. God's grace transformed Paul into an official representative of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, and Paul knew that what he was, he was by the grace of God.

So, verse one, Paul an Apostle, and then he identifies the source of his apostleship, an apostle of Jesus Christ. *Jesus*, the name of the humanity of Christ, *Christ* the name for his messianic role. The word *of* indicates the relationship of the apostle Paul to Jesus Christ. He is an Apostle of Jesus Christ meaning he belongs to Jesus Christ. And, in some degree, this also implies that Jesus was the agent that made him an Apostle. And then he goes on to tell us a divine purpose. He says, “I am this by the will of God.” He is this, meaning by means of this, is how he was chosen to be an apostle of the Church that is the will of God. And in the Greek Bible, there is no *the* God as there usually is to indicate the Father. So, without the word *the* indicates deity in general. And Paul is saying, “I'm an apostle by a divine act.”

**Using your spiritual gifts in ministry**

This was not confirmed on Paul by some ecclesiastical authority. He was not self-appointed to the office. It was a sovereign act of God. And, of course, that is true of all spiritual gifts. All spiritual gifts come to us at the point of our salvation by a sovereign act of God. There are nine of them that are in operation today, and everybody has at least one of them. Some of you have more than one, but you cannot pray for any of the gifts. You cannot ask God to give you the gift. You must only discover the gift that He has sovereignly elected to give you. And Paul discovered in that way that he had one of the gifts that no longer exists, one of the temporary gifts, one of the communication gifts, the gifts to produce the New Testament. He had the gift of an Apostle. Truth of the matter is that Paul was chosen to be an Apostle long before he was saved. This was part of the decree of God from eternity past. Theologically we refer to everything that God has decided is ever going to happen. Everything is all ever going to take place, and we call it the decree or the decrees of God. Paul was chosen in eternity past as part of that decree, and you should understand that you're in exactly the same position. Whatever your spiritual gift is, it wasn't something that just happened incidentally when you were born again. This was a specific plan produced by the Godhead and Eternity Past. That's why it is so important to understand what you are able to do in spiritual service and how you are able to take these natural abilities that you may have, such as what you saw three people do here this morning in singing, there is no spiritual gift of singing, but some people have a natural ability to sing. I am of the opinion that one of the spiritual gifts, which is the gift of ministering, sanctifies our natural abilities so that under the gift of ministry, which therefore leads me to believe that every one of you, whatever else you may have, you do have the gift of ministry. You have an ability to serve God, and some of you have an ability with some artistic gift. When it's used under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is sanctified and becomes part of your gift of ministering. You're a carpenter, you're a painter, you're a mechanic, you're an accountant, you're a computer expert, whatever you are. When you do that under the guidance of the spirit of God, that's why your very employment is a service to God when it is done in the integrity of your soul, the integrity of the word of God, so your service to the Lord in that very specific narrow focus of doing Christian work is the work of ministering and your natural abilities come under that.

The apostle Paul did not choose to be an Apostle. It was decided for him from eternity past, as it is for all of us. God had given to Paul the gift of an Apostle with all of its attendant authority over the Churches, including that in Colossi. Paul's Epistle to Colossi as an apostle was inspired by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, it qualifies as scripture. Now, not all the letters that the apostle wrote were inspired. We have later in this same book at the close of the book, the people who received this letter were told to send it 12 miles up the road to Laodicea so they could read it because they were in the same tri-city area, and they were faced with the same heretical teachings that people in the Church were getting confused about. And the Church at Laodicea was told to send a letter that Paul had written them to Colossi so the congregations there could read it.

Now we have no book called Laodicea. We have no Laodicean book in the New Testament, which tells us that Paul wrote a letter dealing with theological spiritual matters, but it was not a letter free of all error. It was not a letter inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was not a perfect production of the spirit of God. So, the letter to Laodicea is gone, but that which was done under the Apostles position under his office of the Apostle, when the spirit of God was moving upon him, the letter was inspired and that became part of the New Testament. That was true when he wrote to the Colossian Christians. Paul was commissioned, therefore, as an ambassador of God with spiritual authority over the Colossian Church which they were obliged to obey. Paul considered, however, himself not some arrogant, power-crazy character. He did not lord it over the flock. Paul considered himself to be the least of the apostles. In I Corinthians 15:9, He points that out, but he says, “for I am the least of the apostles who have not fit to be called an Apostle because I persecuted the Church of God.” If anybody ever had an appreciation for the grace of God, it was Paul, He who had been so self-righteous. He who had been so intellectually arrogant. He who had been so brutal to the people of God, the Christians should suddenly become their prime source of spiritual enlightenment. All of the basic magnificent truth of Church age doctrine comes through this man. So, faint not there, Christian. Whatever our failings, whatever our shortcomings at any particular moment, whatever our limitations, whenever we get our eyes off the Lord and focused on ourselves, God always has a way back for us, and He makes it better than ever.

**Divine guidance**

So, this matter of divine guidance as was given to Paul by the will of God here, to put him into this position, and knowing what God wants you to do, is a very significant issue with Christians. This is something that all of us constantly face, and I know it would be nice to be able to get on the telephone and bounce off a satellite to the front office in heaven and say, “I'd like some information guidance on this question. Could you check what I should do on this point?” That's always very tempting. The Mormons say they have it. It's downtown in their office. It's not a computer hookup, a satellite hookup, but they have a prophet, and he's in direct touch with God, and he speaks for God to get direct information. And they're very pleased to tell you that, day by day, they can get information from God.

Unfortunately, their Prophets are lifetime jobs, and the prophet always ends up being well up in years, usually up in the nineties, where his strength is ebbing and feebleness is overcome him, and he has a trouble finding his way to the washroom without help. So, they don't really get too much information from God directly, which is significant. But they like to think that that is the basis of their authority. Well, I can't promise you that. But we do have a chapter in the Bible that gives us some significant clues as how to go about finding out what God wants you to do. You and I constantly have to make decisions about our service, and we are making that on long range basis, and we make it on a day-by-day basis, make it on an hourly moment by moment basis. What should I do?

**Peter criticized for eating with Gentiles**

Please turn to the book of Acts Chapter 11. The Apostle Peter has been brought under criticism because while he was in Caesarea, some of the Gentiles were led to Christ were saved and entered the body of Christ as Christians. He sat down, ate with them, he went into a Gentile house, and he got into trouble for that back in Jerusalem. This is the chapter that deals with that, and this is Peter's defense of how he found the will of God. It has some good clues for our own guidance. [Acts chapter 11.] Now, the apostles and brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had received the word of God, and when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him. The people that are referred to here are Gentiles who've been converted to Christianity under Peters ministry at Caesarea. The legalists that are referred to herein verse two are Christians.

These are Christ’s, these are Jews who become Christians who are still hanging on to the old Mosaic law system and their customs, all that pertain to Judaism. Now, this is something like seven years after Pentecost took place, and for the first time a non-Jew enters the body of Christ. Paul describes it as an Ephesian breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile finally begins to come about. The wall begins to break, and Christians begin to come into the Church, into the body of Christ. They trickle in, and then they become a flood tide, and they overwhelm the Jewish element. Well, whatever was in the mind of these Jewish Christians, they are hanging onto their legalistic ways and took Peter to task for his association with the Gentiles, even though they were Christians in Peter's opinion. Verse three says, “You went to uncircumcised men, and you ate with them.”

Peter actually entered their houses socially, verse four. But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence. Peter meets this criticism, saying “It is you who are out of the will of God.” You did that which was contrary to the will of God when you went in and sat down and ate with these Gentiles. You should not have associated yourself with them as such. While Peter proceeds to explain to them to meet that criticism by relating factors of God's leading of him to that decision, how the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius came into the family of God. This was not something Peter wanted to do. Peter tried to dig in and not bring Gentiles in. Now he says, “Let me tell you how this came about, and you will see that you are wrong in telling me that I was out of the will of God in bringing these people into the fold of Christ into the Church and then associating with them as fellow believers socially.” Verse five, “Here are the factors in guidance. First, I was in the city of Joppa praying and in a trance. I saw a vision, a certain object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky, and it came right down to me.” The first point in guidance to the will of God is obviously prayer. God brings the information needed in some way in response to prayer. In Peter's case, the vision, the answer came in the form of a vision.

**If the Bible has already spoken about a matter, do not seek the guidance of God**

If you do not, you should not. Let me put it this way: do not seek the guidance of God concerning something in prayer when the Bible has already spoken about the matter. For example, don't go and pray to ask God whether you should marry an unbeliever as a Christian because second Corinthians 6:14 tells you, you should not marry an unbeliever. Do not marry an unbeliever. And I think we can extrapolate that to the point that you should not marry somebody who does not have your level of spiritual maturity. If you marry somebody who is not up to your spiritual level of insights and understanding, that's not going to be a happy relationship. That's going to be a drag, especially if one keeps moving up as a Christian in closeness to the Lord, and in the walk with God the other person just stays down or goes down lower, there will be no intimacy on the first level of intimacy required in marriage. The first level of intimacy is not physical. The first level is spiritual. The second level is to get to know the soul. That is intimacy of the mind and the will and the emotions. There's a great deal of information there. People who are planning on getting married kind of skip over that second stage of intimacy of the soul. They don't take it seriously and honestly, objectively say, this person has some strange ways of thinking. This person has some hair trigger emotions. This person makes some very strange choices with his will, with her will. You don't take that into account. If you excuse it and rationalize it, you'll live to regret it. That intimacy must come to compatibility. And then after the official public recognition of marriage comes the physical intimacy which will follow with ease when the first two are in place.

So don't seek guidance for the will of God through prayer. If the Bible has already told you what to do and it has given us much guidance in various situations, don't pray for guidance in meeting. Rather I should say do pray for certain things. For example, on the same subject of marriage, you should pray for guidance in meeting and recognizing your right man or your right woman. Heb 4:16 tells us to do that. That's something you need to pray about, and you will make that judgment in part on the depth of your knowledge of doctrine. Verse six, point number one, I want to find the will of God prayer. And in one way or another the information comes verse six. “And when I had fixed my gaze upon it and was observing it, I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air.”

Here we have guidance through the mind, which was observing. In the Greek it means *I was thinking it over*. I was meditating on this subject. I was thinking about something, seeking the divine significance. I was meditating on doctrine. Now this requires a mind which is free of spiritual calluses so that Jews and Christians can think objectively that that's the problem. It doesn't help to think about something if your mind is all hardened toward the spirit of God and toward the word of God so that you cannot think objectively. When you cannot think objectively, you'll switch gears to the emotion, and you cannot think with your emotions. People who get married on the basis of high intensity emotional level as the basis of their being brought together and of their physical contacts are in for a lot of trouble. You will look back and say, “Why didn't I realize that that was a bad signal?”

“Why didn't I realize that that was putting me together with somebody that down the line was going to become a grief to me?” Your mind has to be free of callouses, which means you have to be in temporal fellowship. You're not going to be able to think objectively, coolly, and look at this person before you get emotionally involved. If you let yourself get emotionally involved before you have analyzed this person objectively, you're going very hard to get this entangled after that has happened. Emotional thinking, you see, is subjective, and it distracts the mind from the thinking of God. It doesn't give you guidance in the heat of emotion. God leads by guiding our thoughts to His thoughts. So, when you sit and you look to God and say, “Father, I'm thinking this through, here's what I may do, here's what I may not do, here's what I'm considering and here's what I seem to find from the word of God.” And you just objectively apply the word to that, to the situation of Him. And I've been pleased many times when people in our congregation have come to me and said, “I have to make a decision on this. And from the word of God, I observed this, this which seems to indicate to me that this is direction I should go.” Now they're not coming to me to ask me for direction, but they are coming to me to say, “Am I on track in applying these doctrines to this situation?” And I'll say “Yes,” or I'll say, “No, you've missed it at this point,” but I can confirm to some degree that they're on the right track relative to what the word of God gives in guiding to lead them. So, this business of finding the will of God is prayer, and it's thinking in a status of temporal fellowship where the mind is receptive to the leading of God.

Now notice Act 10:7-10, “And I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Arise Peter, kill and eat.’” Now on this sheet were all kinds of unclean animals, the kinds of stuff that Jews were not allowed to eat: reptiles, lobsters, crabs, oysters, shrimp, all that good stuff was crawling all over these sheets. But I said, “By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.” Peter is still a good Jew, but a voice from heaven answered a second time, “What God has cleansed is no longer consider unholy.” And this happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.

**Peter’s divine revelation from God**

Peter received a divine revelation from God. He heard words of doctrine to guide him. He was reminded that what Christ had done had now removed the need for ceremonial clean cleanliness. Nothing had to be ceremonially cleansed anymore by the rituals of the Old Testament so that suddenly these things which had once ceremonially been unclean are not basically unclean spiritually as such. They might not be good to eat for physical reasons, but it was not a spiritual matter anymore as Peter was implying. The revelation of God today is received only as Peter received it, as revelation from God. Now in his case it was direct revelation. He was an apostle in our case. It is through the Bible, and the more you learn about the Bible, the more revelation from God you have. I am constantly amazed how now we are currently in our faculty meetings at BCA reading through the book of Proverbs, and one proverb after another has such enormous impact. I'm bowled over as I sit there listening to these people reading these proverbs and the significance of them at this point in history or at this point in our lives. And I just thought one morning probably a parent could do nothing better to a child that they're rearing than to encourage that child to be reading the book of Proverbs one at a time, thinking through what it says. It will save you such enormous grief, such enormous heartache, and it will bring you such enormous success. It's the greatest success book in the world, the book of Proverbs. And, of course, 80% of it being written by the man who had the greatest amount of divine viewpoint that ever lived. King Solomon makes it understandable, and that’s why there's such a great book for personal guidance.

We have no visions or voices. If you have a vision from God, you wake up some night and there's a glow at the foot of your bed and a voice speaks to you, get up and call 911 immediately because you need a lot of help. At least see your doctor the next morning. God is not giving visions, and He is not talking to us in audible voices. He leads us through the word of God, which has been stored as doctrine in our human spirits. And when you store principles like the Book of Proverbs, you have enormous guidance to what you should do and what you should not do. The grace system of perception that God has provided for us enables the believer to store God's word for use and guidance. And when it is stored in the human spirit as the Bible says, then at the proper moment it is cycled up into the bind.

You don't have to push a button and say, “I got a problem with this sexual matter, I want to push that button.” When you face it, when you already had the information on God's purpose and will in that matter that doctrine if you are in temporal fellowship will pop right back up to your mind. You won't even have to make a conscious effort, and suddenly you'll find that there will come to your mind a word of God. Sometimes people will find themselves talking to unbelievers, sometimes family members, and all of a sudden, they get into a discussion that somehow becomes really intense and heated, and they are on a high roll in meeting the objections in giving the testimony. And I've had them come to me and say, “I couldn't believe how things kept popping into my mind, the very things I should say, the answers to what they were giving me.” Well, what they were experiencing was doctrine flowing up from the human spirit being projected up there by God, the Holy Spirit to give them guidance.

Now, if you don't have doctrine or you have got no content for that, you are like grocery lists, you are not going to make it. You're going to come up short, and you're going to be in a fret and you're going to be just mentally under tension. You're going to be emotionally disoriented. You will not be able to get on track with the will of God for you, and you'll go bouncing around like a ball in a pinball machine. So, the third point of guidance is the revelation of the word of God. Notice verse 11. Here we have guidance through providential circumstances. “And behold, at that moment, three men appeared before the house in which we were staying having been sent to me from Caesarea. Peter at this time is in Joppa. Three men arrived even while Peter was still on a rooftop in Joppa debating what to do.”

**Importance of knowing scripture, doctrine, principles of the Bible**

These men had left Caesarea for Joppa sometime before Peter ever had the vision. God's hand was already creating the circumstances necessary for the guidance that Peter needed. God was directing the men so to act, and thus a providential circumstance was set up. However, you must test circumstances with the statements, the doctrines, and the principles of the Bible to verify them as indeed providential. But you should not ignore providential circumstances that arrive but that arise. Something out of the blue comes about, and you should give it a thought. One of the things that comes to us as Christians as we mature is I suppose you'd call it an instinct, an instinctual sense of something, a thought that comes through the mind. And I find that when a thought comes through the mind like that triggered by some circumstance at the moment, and I ignored or pass by, I'm almost sorry, almost always sorry for it because it was a clue, it was a signal from God himself that I should be on guard, or I should take an action, or something should be done. And circumstances that are not contrary to the word of God to the principles of doctrine should be considered. You have to be careful because Satan does set up circumstances and opportunities for us to do evil and to reject the will of God. The way out from Christ for Christian then, very often I've observed, is to say they have an exception in their case. I remember one lady years ago who married an unsaved man, and she divorced him. While he was still living, she remarried, and she said, “I can justify this because I was young, and the Bible says I should not marry an unsaved man.” But the Bible also says that God hates divorce, and that marriage cannot just be turned on and off by a human judge because it's an act of God. So, she defended herself on something that Satan had set up because she got emotionally involved and wanted to have her own will on this, that the will of God could no longer be considered by her.

I do not suggest that you hang out a fleece in the Gideon fashion. I question whether that is a legitimate practice for us to do today because we have a completed scripture. We have the word of God with lots of information for our conduct and our decision making. Furthermore, we in the age of grace have a permanent indwelling by God, the Holy Spirit and He is there for the specific purpose of moving us in the right direction. Just don't resist Him. Just when that intuitive thought comes to you, pay attention to it. And we look to Him, we don't look to the hanging out of the fleece. And that brings us to verse 12, which is the prime element in finding the will of God, the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit told me to go with him without misgivings. And these six brethren also went with me, and we entered the man's house. Paul took a party, saw Peter took a party with him and they joined these three men and they returned with him to Caesarea. The Holy Spirit never guides a believer apart from the word of God. Peter here was being guided in a way that was confirming the word of God that had been given to him. He never guides a believer apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit. If you are out of fellowship with God the Father, if you are living your life as a doing your own thing, then forget about guidance. You're never going to get it. He never gives guidance to those who are out of the filling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit never guides a believer apart from knowledge of the word of God. And here you see, he told me to go is a signal from the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. For us we don't hear words, but He will give us a strong impression what to do. He will burden our heart to go, or not go. Be very definite and the more closely you walk in that temporal fellowship and the more sensitive you are and the more willing you are to do it his way, you will see that you are channeled in the right direction. You will bring a circumstance if necessary to veer you off into the right direction. Just be open to His leaning.

And then in Act 7:13-15, we have another element of guidance which is through comparison. That is through a frame of reference. “And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here, and he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved you and all your household.’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did upon us at the beginning.” So here you have the phenomenon of Pentecost taking place before Peter's eyes here among the Gentiles at Caesarea in the household of Cornelius. This confirmed to Peter that Gentile Christians were as much part of the body of Christ as Jewish believers were.

That is the point of Ephesians 2:14 for He may, for He Himself is our peace Who made both groups Jew and Gentile into one, and broke down the barrier or the middle wall of petition broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.” There was a great separation indeed between Jews and Gentiles. Now Peter sees that this has been broken down. Peter uses as a frame of reference what happened in his experience at Pentecost. He saw what took place when these people were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ on a day of Pentecost. So, God set up an occasion here for Peter to make a comparison, and Peter used that as a frame of reference. And the next point of guidance is scripture memory, Verse 16, “and I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

**Pentecost**

It is this verse that tells us what happened on the day of Pentecost was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. You don't read about that in Acts. In Acts, we were simply told that the tongues appeared as flames upon them, and that they were all filled with the Spirit. Well, when you are baptized with the Holy Spirit at the point of your salvation, you are also filled with the Spirit. But in Acts, the Holy Spirit didn't specify that. We come here to this point of the book of Acts in chapter 11, and we are told exactly that that is what happened on day of Pentecost. These people were baptized in the Holy Spirit for the first time, thus uniting them to Christ in this new body of Jews and Gentiles into one body called the Church. So here Peter remembered what Jesus said in Acts 1:5 and Peter knew the word to recall at the proper time for guidance into the will of God at that point in his life.

**The importance of memorizing scripture**

So, this is why it is good and important to memorize scripture, at least to have enough of a reading acquaintance with it that the gist of the thing, the principle will come back to your mind. So here you have it, Paul, like all of us had to decide what was the will of God for him. What was his gift? What was God calling him to do? That guidance came to him through prayer, came to him through his mind, meditating upon the issue, while filled with the Spirit. It came to him through the guidance of the principles of the doctrine. It came through him through providential circumstances. It came through him through the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. It came through him through the guidance of a frame of reference comparison, and it came through to him by remembering the word of God, the scriptures, the revelation that had been given to him.

**God’s sovereignty**

God guides our service, and what He calls us to is something that He sovereignly decides, which now brings us not only to the doctrine of how do we find the will of God, but who decides the will of God? Do you decide the will of God, or does God decide what His will is? This we call the sovereignty of God. There are only two possible views about God's relationship to the universe. One is all that has ever existed or will exist is by His plan. He is the King. That's what sovereign means. He is the absolute. The first position is that all that has ever existed or will exist is by His plan. The other alternative, the only one is that there are some things in the universe which exists in defiance of God's holy nature and are beyond his control, that denies God his sovereignty.

So, which is? It is the God we read about in the Bible, one Who is sovereign, absolute King, absolute ruler, calls all the plays, or is He one in which things have gotten out of control where Satan has taken off and interrupted that sovereign control of God? The word *sovereign* means that God is supreme. He is in control of all decisions of all events. He is the King, and He is thus the sovereign and that is how the Bible presents Him. This is a simple self-evidence fact that this is the way it must be if God is God. And yet people balk at it because people want free will. People want their own thing. People want to call the plays for their lives. The truth of the matter is that because God is sovereign, as I've already indicated to you, He has a master plan called His decree, and the Bible teaches this.

It teaches it under very a variety of words. These are all technical words to convey the concept of the sovereign decrees of God. One of those words is *purpose* or His *will.* In Ephesians 1:11, the word *counsel* is used there, meaning He takes His own advice. Another word is *determinate plan* in Act 2:23. Another word indicating his sovereign decree is *foreknowledge* in I Peter 1:2. And you understand, don't you, that foreknowledge doesn't mean He looks down the corridors of time to see what people are going to do and then acts accordingly. Foreknowledge means He knows it ahead of time because He decided that that's the way it's going to be. But foreknowledge is a particularly technical word. It means “I have a close intimacy with this individual.” God made a decision to bring you into eternal life. He had foreknowledge of that because He decided that.

But He decided that because you were so dear, He found that He wanted an intimate relationship with you as a child in His family. And the English word, *know*. Old English used to use that word in terms of meaning a sexual relationship. To know a person because of the context of intimacy of such an act, and the word *know* conveys this thought of intimacy. So, God's foreknowledge is part of His decree, but is part of the intimate factor that's involved there. [I Peter 1:2.] There's also the word *choice* in I Thessalonians 1:4; that’s the word *predestinated* in Romans 8:30. There's the word *chosen* in John 15:16. and there is the word *good pleasure* in Ephesians 1:9 that is purposed in him. Of all plans possible, God decreed the best for the universe. Sin and suffering are problems, but God is wise and just that's part of the plan.

Man's understanding is limited. Therefore, he is prone to many errors, some things only God can understand. And don't tell me, “Oh yeah, that's truth” because very often we do not act that way when we are up against something that we can't control, and we can't change, and we wish it wasn't that way or we should be taking comfort from the fact that this is the decree of God. And there are some things that only He can understand as to why this is part of His decree and why we are in this status, in this condition, in this suffering, in this distress, in this whatever. Deuteronomy 29:29 may declare to the Jews; “the secret things belong to the Lord are God’s.” But the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of the law. There are many secret things which God has not revealed to us. They belong to Him, but those that He wants us to know, those He has made known to us. The prophet Isaiah pointed this out. Isaiah 55:8-9, God says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your thoughts are no my ways declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

**The abortion debate**

I heard a portion this morning on TV of a discussion on a program called Meet the Depressed in which they were discussing the issue of abortion. And one of the administration officials were there defending the abortion position and the representative of the Christian Coalition, which has now presented a 10-point program, a contract for Christian America, for the families of America, and which the leaders of Congress say they are going to take very seriously and to implement. And so that's what the debate was about. And here's this issue of taking a life of an unborn child, and in all this discussion on one side you had this discussion, here is a creature made in the image of God and a creature who is a human being from the moment of conception and who has the right to be protected, not to be killed just because a group of seven evil men on the Supreme Court, some of whom have now learned better because they're in the presence of the Creator, have said that a person who is not born, a child that is unborn is not a person. He is a human being, but he is not a person. And the Constitution only protects people who are persons, and by that little trickery they saw a woman's right and free choice to execute her unborn child. On the other side, the administration spoke about their philosophical, intellectual reasons for this as if the Bible didn't exist, as if there were no God up there at all, as if human beings were just another kind of animal.

And there was the contrast. One knew that there was an eternal decree of God and there was an eternal law of God, and that those things had been revealed concerning life, that only God can begin under whatever stressed circumstance. If it begins, it is an act of God and, therefore, it cannot be treated as some brutal creature that can be destroyed. It cannot be treated as some insignificant creature which can be brutally destroyed. So, God has some things that He does not reveal to us, but what He does reveal to us, we better pay attention to. The nature of God's decree, the purpose of all of God's plans is to bring glory to Himself. Everything in the universe is to bring honor to the Maker. God is supremely worthy, and He is rightly to be glorified. He is a God of great mercy, long suffering and of love, and this God is perfect and everything He does is perfect. And, furthermore, he is alive. He is out there, and He is in charge. Therefore, all of God's decrees are to reflect His perfections, His glory. The plan that God has selected He had eternally in mind. But this plan has been executed in time. I Peter chapter one reminds us of that, and I remind you as we read this passage that you are part of that plan from eternity past. I Peter 1:18-20, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your fruitful way of life, inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood as of a Lamb, unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but as appeared in these last times for the sake of you.” Back in eternity past, God decided to save you, and it was executed in time.

That is part of God bringing glory to Himself. This plan of God is infinitely wise in every respect. In the book of Romans 11:33, we have this, “the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgements and unfathomable His ways?” His plan is sovereign choice. He did this on the basis of His own wisdom. In the book of Isaiah 40:13-14, “Who has directed the spirit of the Lord or as His counselor has informed Him, with whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding, and who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?” The answer is nobody. Furthermore, the plan of God is unconditional. It will not be changed. Isaiah 46:10, “Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times which have not been done saying ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure.’”

**Man’s freedom of choice**

Now, what about the free choice of man in this? God has a plan. It is a sovereign plan. It is His decree. Your choices are within it. I can't tell you how, but what seemingly is your free choice to make a move is within that sovereign decree of God. There are some implications in closing of the sovereignty of God. Every Christian's life is to glorify God. If He has a plan and He has called us from eternity past into this plan, then we are obliged to find our place in it. I Corinthians 6:-20, “For you have been bought with a price, therefore glorified God in your body, the only real happiness for you and me as Christians.” The only real satisfaction is for you and me to yield to this perfect decree of God. The path of normalcy is the path of the decree of God that leads to joy and wellbeing.

The world seeks the immediate welfare and the progress of mankind through materialism, and the world is still dissatisfied. Some seek a sense of wellbeing which is sought in self betterment of the individual and of society, which ignores God's plan and makes no progress. A device works when it is used as it is designed to work. That is the case with us. If you as a human being function the way God designed you as a human being to live and to function, then it works. That's what you become, a normal person. If the word of God tells you not to do something and you keep doing it, you are not a normal person, and you will not find a sense of wellbeing or self-betterment. II Timothy 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity but of power and of love and of discipline.” You are not a wimp. If you are, it is because you choose to do so by ignoring the great plan that God has for you. The apostle Paul said, “I know my plan. I know Who has called me. I know where I'm going.” And at the end, he could say, “I've fought a good fight, I've run the course.” Greatest thing anybody can ever say at the point of his death.

**Closing prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for the Paul, for the Apostle Paul's example in Christ.

**Dr. John E. Danish**