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**The Will of God**

This morning, our segment is The Children of God, segment number 5, as we continue with Romans 8:14-17. Romans 8:14 says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." A very dramatic and wonderful statement, and we've been considering the whole issue of personal guidance by the living God into that which is the best for us, which we call "the will of God."

There is a great deal of confusion, and as we listen to people talk about this subject. It makes our hearts go out to them in sadness that there is such great ignorance concerning the will of God. For many Christians, it's not a very important topic; they're not particularly interested in the will of God. For other, even in the unsaved world, they sense that this is a matter that would be to their benefit, but they have no capacity to relate to it.

On television last night, I couldn't help observing this condition demonstrated by one of the people who was being interviewed concerning the hostages that are being held on the hijacked airline. And this lady, who had just come from a religious service, on behalf of these people who are still being held captive, said, "I know it's all going to turn out right. It's all going to be ok if we all just stick in there and we all stay together, and it's going to come out all right." And it was a very confident statement concerning the sovereignty of God, and I wondered how she knew it that specifically. She was not obviously concerned about that warning that James has given us, that qualification that James has given us, to say, "If the Lord wills, this is what's going to happen." If we all just hang in together and hope for the best, it's all going to turn out all right. And that, of course, is a very humanistic point of view on this matter of the will of God and what happens to us.

Now, the Apostle Paul was obviously a man who knew that God had a plan for his life. And furthermore, he accepted that plan as the design of a sovereign, loving, and omniscient God who is governed by His own holiness. For this reason, when the Lord Jesus told the Apostle that he was going to be the voice to the Gentile world, the Apostle Paul knew that this was God's sovereign plan, that it was one that was for his best, and he was happy to execute it.

So, we read in Romans 11:13 that Paul says, "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." Paul declared that he honored and expanded and magnified the plan of God for him because he devoted himself to being that voice to the Gentiles. Paul's positive volition decree did not end simply with his service simply on earth, because it had eternal implications.

Because he was positive to the plan of God as encased in the decree of God, in 2 Timothy 4:8, Paul could say at the end of his life, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Here is this special medal of honor. Not all Christians will receive it; only some will receive the crown of righteousness, a crown given to those who have maximized their life in Christian service fulfilling the will of God for them.

**Divine Guidance**

So, all who are children of God, Romans 8:14 tells us, those who are children of God by regeneration are the recipients of divine guidance through the Bible and through God the Holy Spirit. That is an established fact. Furthermore, as life goes by, we all look back on actions which seemed a good idea at the time but which, from later perspective, we have seen to be not of God but of our own volition. God's permissive will came in to let us do something.

And we look upon those times, and we regret that we did that. It seemed ok at the time. It seemed wise. We didn't even give it a second thought. Now, we look back and wish that we had acted with more wisdom. However, even our most foolish, useless, and self-injurious actions we must remind ourselves are part of the master plan of God's decree. There are no surprises. Yes, our volition can take different paths, and we can take a fouled-up path, but all that is in the decree of God as well. His directive and overruling will are in operation. God's decree thus incorporates things that are not His desire for us but which human volition is permitted to impose upon itself within God's sovereignty including human suffering.

So, we look back on things we have done, and we wish that we hadn't taken that course. It's within the decree of God, but it also could have been our opportunity, had we approached it in the right way, to have saved ourselves the trouble and the agony and the wounding.

Divine guidance, I remind you again, is always directed to the absolute righteousness in a person which is what God can bless, and that's all He can bless so that no unbeliever has divine guidance. There is no divine guidance to an unbeliever. He can pray himself 'til he's exhausted. God does not listen to the prayers of unbelievers. That means He does not listen to the prayers of anyone who is not in the family of God. That means, yes, maybe I should whisper it, "God does not listen to the prayers of Jews." I don't want to create another furor over that statement publicly. God does not listen to the prayers of Buddhists or the prayers of the Muslims or anybody else who is not in the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Only the believer has guidance, and only those believers through regeneration, through new birth, are the ones God listens to. You must understand that very explicitly.

But what God blesses in us, then, is that absolute righteousness that He's put into us. God is pleased, and He's glorified with providing grace blessings to the absolute righteousness in spiritual Christians. For that reason, we remind ourselves again that God is not impressed by anything we do or anything we promise to do. He is only impressed by His own righteousness. He is only impressed by what He's done for us, and that's the target of His blessing.

The carnality of Christians, however, squanders the potential blessings of grace, and instead, they bring upon themselves discipline. It is the will of God to bless, but it is in the decree of God that when you are in carnality, He will discipline. All things depend upon the will of God. Nothing is certain apart from His will. This is the only plan of man that works.

So, if you are a spiritual Christian, if you are a mature Christian, you will seek to make your plans at every step possible coincide with God's plan within His decree. That's the world of reality: to make your plans coincide with the plan that God has already established in His decree because that's what's going to be executed.

Human philosophy is fallen man's puny attempt to achieve some understanding of the meaning of life which God always has in His decree and which is revealed in His Word, the Bible. And when puny man comes up with a philosophy, he always comes up with a losing system. That's what the poor lady was saying on television yesterday, "If we all just hang in here together, and we all just support one another, it's all going to turn out well." Well, hanging in together and all supporting one another doesn't mean things are going to turn out well at all. And they may yet bring the bodies of many Americans home out of that aircraft.

**The Attacks Upon the Will of God**

The will of God is under attack, of course, by Satan from the liberals on the left and from the charismatics on the right. There is a two-fold attack on the Word of God today and on the Will of God. On the left, that attack comes from the liberals who completely discredit the inerrancy of scripture, who completely discredit the basic, fundamental doctrines of scripture. On the right, the attack on the Word of God comes from the charismatics who violate the fundamental doctrine of the church age: the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit. Having violated that doctrine, everything they do is satanically manipulated to bring discredit, to bring confusion, and to keep people chasing rabbits instead of the will of God and functioning in a way that God can bless them.

So, these are the two elements that are the dangerous extremes that attack the Word of God. Liberals on one side, charismatics on the other. Both satanically manipulated. Both of them, you see, are seeking to determine the will of God. They do it, on part of the liberals, by human reason; on the part of the charismatics, they try to do it by emotional experiences. Neither one of them seek to apply the very doctrines of scripture as the very voice of God.

So, we have people who do not know that there is such a thing as the leading of God and don't know how to go about it. Instead, the spiritually disoriented type are going to seek the will of God by how they feel about something. "I just feel that this is what the Lord wants me to do. The Lord has just made me feel that this is what I should do." How do you know? Maybe you're allergic to milk, and that's what you're feeling because you had milk on your cereal this morning. Feelings are the playground of the devil. The spiritually disoriented think they're going to get the will of God by how they feel about something.

Or, I'll find the will of God by somebody I'm impressed with. I love to listen to these preachers who can talk in a pontifical way with resonant vowels bouncing off of their tongue and just makes you sit on the edge of your seat. And those are impressive people; whatever they say must be the will of God.

Or, if it's some religious pontificator who puts on a show and declares that God has just spoken to him, and this is what God has said. I have been in circles with charismatics where some character stands up and said, "The Lord gave me a word of prophecy this morning," and there's a murmur through the audience. And then, this jerk sounds off with something that sounds like it came from the King James Bible that makes utter nonsense, and this is the prophecy from God. A word of knowledge. What arrogance convened presumably to be the will of God.

Or, there are people who seek the will of God because somebody was nice to you. Somebody was nice to you, and so, you believe what they say. Somebody comes, and they pray with you. Somebody comes, and they emote with you. Oh, they're so nice. They bring you a plate of cookies. Surely, God must be talking to you through the cookie baker.

Or, the best way, oh I love this, a thought has just popped into my head, "The Lord just popped a thought into my head to tell me what He wants me to do!" And all you have usually is an electrical short-circuit in your brain cells rather than that God has been speaking to you.

And the best one of all, oh I love this: I'm going to put out the fleece. Oh, I love Gideon. I'm going to put out the fleece. "Lord, I don't know what you want me to do, but here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to put my canoe here in the water. And if the water ends up in the canoe, I know what you want me to do tomorrow."

Well, you see, you can't put out the fleece today unless you want to do it like Gideon did. Gideon's fleece, you remember, was asking for a miracle. That's what he did. He asked for a miracle. He asked for this lambskin to be wet, everything dry, or the lambskin to be dry and everything around it wet. Now, that's a miracle, and that's what he asked for.

And furthermore, he asked for it after God had already given up several miraculous confirmation. God had eaten up his offering on the altar with fire. God had spoken to him directly. He had had all kinds of information. That's why he apologized last time. He said, "Lord, I hope you're not going to get mad at me, but would you just do this for me? Show me another miracle." Because what he was asking, Gideon says, "So I'll believe what you've already told me." He was asking for a reinforcement of faith of what he already knew was the will of God.

You can't put out a fleece today. That's not God's way. You'll get in a lot of trouble if you try to pursue that, and if you do try to pursue that, at least be persistent and ask God to give you a fleece evidenced in the form of a great miracle. Otherwise, it's not the same thing.

You will notice that in New Testament, they don't do this. The only time we have anything this is the casting of lots in order to replace Judas, and it fell on Matthias, and that's the last we ever hear of him. And there's serious doubt that what they did was the leading of the Spirit of God, because the apostle that really came along under God's appointment was the Apostle Paul who, in all likelihood, was the one who was a replacement for Judas because, indeed, the scriptures do tell us that in the New Jerusalem, there are twelve apostles who are functioning. And Judas had to be replaced. But the lot system very seriously was to be held in question as being the means by which God made that appointment, for the simple reason that only God can appoint an apostle.

Any of these churches, like the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Methodist church, who claim to pass on apostolic authority is a bunch of nonsense. The apostolic gift cannot be passed from one person to another. It is a special, unique gift for the New Testament before the scriptures were written. And only God can give it. So, a group of Christians sitting around casting lots and picking straws could not have selected the apostle, could not have given a person that marvelous gift which was supreme authority in the New Testament church.

**Human Good Apart from God's Will**

So, the noblest aspirations of fallen man who tries to find the will of God operating apart from a genuine, divine guidance system only produces human good. And human good is an evil from the sin nature, and it's reductive of human suffering; it is not the will of God. And when you are not functioning in the will of God, you are producing either human good or sin; either case, you have ended up with something that is evil and produces suffering.

We have so many examples of this attempt at doing what people think is what God wants them to do, producing some human good, some noble aspiration, but apart from the Word of God and the principles of God and the guidance of doctrine.

We have only looked at the agonies which are currently taking place in Ethiopia. When you see those people, those little infants with those bulging eyes, those bloated stomachs, all these signs of malnutrition with their skin glues to their bones on the last stage of their life, and you look at that, and you realize that those people are suffering the starvation now basically because of Marxism-Leninism which imposed upon the country by its diluted leaders who said, "We're going to provide people with a good life, and we're going to spread the wealth." And so, they imposed upon the farmers certain conditions which ensured that famine and starvation.

We have only to look at the fact that the United States government, which should be the most enlightened government on the face of the earth with its Christian heritage, is currently providing huge financial aid to the communist country of Mozambique because the communist rulers there have said, "We'll behave ourselves if you helps us." Help us to do what? They are on the ropes. The freedom patriots of Mozambique have just about taken back their country. They have the communist rulers on the ropes, and they know that they are about to go do, and they have appealed to the United States. The United States says, "Sure, we'll help you if you'll promise to behave yourself." And so, we are giving money under the guise of producing some human good so we don't have any conflict. We're going to help the people of Mozambique, the communists, to defeat the freedom patriots.

Here, we have the United States Congress refusing to give military aid to the freedom fighters in Afghanistan and in Nicaragua under the guise, again, that we do not want to create something that is not good for people. This is human good. We do not help the freedom fighters which have been a terror to the communist Russians where they've had a chance, and we will not help now the people in Nicaragua.

I read an article, a little comment, recently that puts this in perspective. In the review of the news from June 12, 1985, "A Latin-American U.N. delegate was heard remarking, 'After the Sandinistas took power [that's the communist group in Nicaragua], after the Sandinistas took power, your government [that is, the United States] gave $118 million in aid to the Sandinistas which was more than your total aid to Nicaragua in the previous twenty years. Your government also underwrote $292 million in international loans. It is the United States that established the Marxist regime at an early stage and gave the Sandinistas so much help. They did not need to make concessions to the Democratic opposition.' Thank you, Jimmy and Tip."

And I heard a commentator, a man who walks in the halls of Congress, on a radio interview show the other day that said, "You would not believe it, but when Congress was considering giving aid to the freedom fighters in Nicaragua, Ortega, the dictator of Nicaragua was on the telephone talking to various Congressmen promoting his cause that the aid should not be given." How many Americans know that? Well, the evening news forgot to tell us about that. And, why? Because we think in our disillusioned mentalities that the will of God is for us to bring peace, and we can do it by helping evil.

We have, of course, the current demonstration of the anti-South Africa movement against the apartheid system asking major corporations not to do business in South Africa, to disinvest South Africa. Why? So we can have this good thing which must be the will of God to make life better for the black citizens, in the process, ready to destroy the nation as the Carter administration destroyed Rhodesia which was anti-communist and pro-American and which now struggles in the agonies of communism with all the shortages that that produces. It is strange that the people who are antagonistic to the denial of certain human rights in South Africa, such as in the Dallas City Council, are not also asking us to stop doing business with communist Russia which is infinitely greater oppressor than South Africa ever thought of being. But you see, South Africa lies at one of those critical choke-points in the world.

The British Empire became a great empire because their leaders looked at a map, and they said, "You know, here's a choke-point. Here's a choke-point. Here's a choke-point at Gibraltar. If we hold this choke-point and the nations around it, we control the whole Mediterranean Sea. Here's a choke-point here. Here's a choke-point here." Eight, ten choke-points in the whole world. The British Empire held every one of them. They took them one by one, established their interests in nations around them, and they were an invincible power. At the bottom of Africa, the country of South Africa is such a choke-point. If it ever falls into the hands of the communists, God help the oil needs of the western world.

The Straits of Hormuz is another one of those choke-points, and the communists are moving as fast as they can to move into Iran and to take control of that one. You wonder what's going on in the minds of the men in Congress who are thinking in terms of doing something for human good.

Here in South Africa, one of the largest tribes of the South African blacks, the Zulu tribe, recently signed a petition. The article in the review of the news of June 12, 1985, says, "About one thousand Zulu tribesmen petitioned the United States government not to impose economic sanctions against South Africa because such a policy will hurt blacks more than whites. Led by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, chief of six million Zulus, the delegation from Inkatha from the Inkatha movement presents a movement to U.S. counsel Harry Geisel. It reads, 'On behalf of black South Africa, we petition President Reagan, the Senators of the United States of America and its congressmen, to reject pressures exerted on them to express abhorrence of apartheid through disinvestment in South Africa.'" The petition says that withdrawal of U.S. investment would penalize blacks and would promote rather than prevent violence.

So, where is the wisdom when you try to determine what is good in terms of the will of God apart from the guidance of the Spirit of God? It's absolutely not to be found there.

We have, of course, in the religious world, we just had the spectacle in the Southern Baptist Convention which just recently closed, of a detente, which has been established between the liberals and the fundamentalists in that denomination. And this group which was concerned for presenting unity and their friendship together before the world, presenting a good image before the world, I'm afraid presented one that can only be treated as loathing.

Two pastors from Missouri who were messengers to that convention came by to talk to me. They said, "While we were in Dallas, we just wanted to let you know, we've been on your tapes for about ten years." One of them says, "I'm struggling in my church. I'm just a doormat there, and it's because we're trying to introduce the instruction in the Word of God, and it's getting great resistance. But we want you and Berean Church to know that your tapes have given us a basis of enlightenment to know what in the world we're supposed to be doing in the local church." And he said, "You, Dr. Danish, are my primary encouragement to know that even the series in prophecy that your church puts out was the basis of a man being saved. And he told me of a very interesting story of a man who got on those tapes, and in it, he picked up that there was a difference between human viewpoint and God's divine viewpoint, and he said, "That led us on a trail; before we were through, this man was born again."

So, anyhow, these two men were grieved over what had happened. That while the fundamentalists maintained the position of the presidency, that there was compromise to bring in the liberal as the vice president. Well, what's the point of that? The point of that is a coalition to maintain some kind of imagined unity that is going to be divine good, but it's human good. Historically, in coalitions, liberals always win.

And I asked these two men whether they had read Dr. Lindsell's book on the "Battle For the Bible." One of them had, the other hadn't. And I said, you may want to read that and reread that. It'll give you the perspective on what's happening, because Dr. Lindsell in that book delineates step-by-step how every major denomination in the United States which once was biblically oriented compromised with the liberals on the one issue of the inerrancy of scripture. And that's what the battle is over. The liberals in the Southern Baptist Convention do not believe that the Bible is without error, and that's what the battle is over.

Now, the compromise has been made, and Lindsell has shown that once coalition is made, the liberals always win. And every denomination has fallen. And now, the Southern Baptist, one of the two remaining which have not been taken over by the liberals, is on the skids. The picture is not very bright, and when communists come into a coalition, as well, you know, the communists always win.

So, this is a foolish thing, but it's done under the guise of the will of God. It is the will of God for us to have unity; no, it is not the will of God for us to have unity. That's a very arrogant attitude. The Lord Jesus said, "Hey, if you think I came on this earth to bring unity to people, you are very much mistaken. I have come to bring a message, which is the truth, and it is the absolute and eternal truth, and because it is so absolutely, eternally true, it's even going to shatter your family members one from another."

The ultimate expression in human good, in this world, of course, is going to be the tribulation world government takeover of the antichrist. There was a convention held last year by an organization called the World Future Society. The convention was called Worldview 84. It openly called for a new age of mankind via a world government to secure peace and plenty.

Funding for this world government organization comes from some very interesting corporations. Let me just read a few to you. These are the people who finance a convention Worldview 84 with the idea of bringing about a world government so that mankind can finally enjoy peace, prosperity, and enjoy the good life for everybody: Alliance Network Inc., AT&T, Bic Pen Company, Control Data Corp., General Electric Corp., General Motors Inc., GTE Labs, IBM Ltd., Mitchell Energy Corp., Ortho Pharmaceutical Corp., Weyerhaeuser Corp., Xerox Corp., and on they go. The great corporations contributing to this convention, sponsoring this convention so that a world view may be presented of one government.

The thing that is fascinating about the reports, the printed reports of the speakers, was that they emphasized one basic concept. And that is that throughout history, you may trace that there were certain critical periods that arose in human history where the social system became shattered. We are approaching such a system in the world today. The example they gave was preceding World War II with what had happened with the depression in Europe and in Germany particularly and how out of that came a leader. And their point was, world crises are always solved by a strong leader rising to lead out. And they said Adolf Hitler arose in Germany and led Europe out of the crises of poverty and everything else that it struggled under. We are now in such a period, they said, and such a leader must arise.

Fascinating, really, when you know the Bible. They're talking about the antichrist. And it is out of crises that they're going to arise. The world is now approaching that kind of a point of instability. A world leader is going to have to arise, and organizations like the World Future Society are preparing people to think in terms of a man who can lead them back to sanity. But he will lead them to the insanity of another Tower of Babel instead. The ultimate human good on the horizon is indeed going to be what the power elite, the international bankers, the multinational corporations are creating in the form of a new Tower of Babel under the antichrist, but that's in the decree of God.

The power of the one world government movement is dispersed, as you know, through a network of hundreds of organizations, so you cannot stop it with one blow. I have found it interesting that the word "network" has become a characteristic word. Keep it in mind. I am amazed at how often I have heard the word "network" used currently on television and news comments. We have to start networking together. First, I thought they said "nut-working," but it's N-E-T - networking together. It's a natural mistake when you listen to the people who are using the word.

Well, I think it's sad that the United States can no longer elect men to national office who are true both to the Constitution and its objective of personal freedom and to the principles of scripture from which that Constitution was created. Such men do not get elected in a human viewpoint society in majority numbers. Here and there, one can rise, but even when they get to that hallowed hall of Congress, there is no greater they can do.

No greater example from recent times can be seen than that of Senator Rand Paul in south Texas. It is a temptation then to run for Congress by pretending to be like the rest of the world on the idea that once you get there, you can do better. But even after men are elected who know better, they find they cannot change the system. Because what people are in the nation is what they send to Congress to control it. And it's human good that's considered to be the will of God.

I was interested to read a comment by a female comedian the other day named Joan Rivers. Occasionally, I have caught her program. She is vulgar, obscene, and most unlady in her humor that she puts out. Somebody had pointed that out to her, and she indignantly said, "If I'm vulgar, then the American people are vulgar, because they pay to come see me, and they laugh at my jokes!" Well, that's incisive, isn't it? That's like a prostitute saying, "If I'm immoral, then my customers are immoral." Yep, that's right. And indeed, the American people are a vulgar people. They are a debase people. The farther they are from the Word of God, the more they are exactly that, and the more that they will find something like Joan Rivers' humor amusing.

I was thinking the other day what a dramatic change there would be in the world if everyone were like myself. Boy, some people would be out of business, zilch. And all the stars of the world would be first on the list.

The goal of world government is going to be realized. It's going to be the ultimate expression of this human good, and it's going to be the ultimate concept as what God desires for the human race. But the Word of God tells us that it is going to come to disaster. We should not fail to remind ourselves of that.

In Daniel 2, because it does get discouraging when you find that good men can't get elected to office, and when you find the evil men indeed continue to prosper. But the word of God says in Daniel 2:44, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." The kingdom of the millennium which Jesus Christ sets up will finally destroy all the kingdoms that human good mentality of mankind has produced.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:3, we have this referred to again, where Paul says, "For when they shall say, 'Peace and safety;' then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." So, the Word of God is a great comfort for us that are children of God to realize that we have guidance from God so that we are preserved from all this nonsense such as we've just reviewed. And we have perspective to see it for what it is and for the destructive effects that all this human good viewed as the will of God is going to produce. It is not the will of God.

**Practical Guidelines for Functioning in the Will of God**

The Apostle Paul, of course, is one of the great examples of a man who knew how to operate within the will of God. And that's the next area that we want to begin moving into now. Some of the practical guidelines are putting this into operation in our own lives. How did the Apostle Paul go about functioning in the will of God? At the beginning of the book of Romans, in verses 8-13, he makes a statement that's interesting when you compare it to the last thing he says in the book of Romans.

Romans 1:8, Paul says, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." Now remember, he has never visited Rome up to this time. "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make petition of you always in my prayers; making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was prevented thus far) that I might have some fruit among you also, also as among other Gentiles."

Here, the Apostle Paul says that he asks God to permit him to go to Rome to teach the believers the great church-age truths which he possessed. It is appropriate for you to make plans.

I used to know a lady who would always recoil at making plans. When you'd say, "Well, I'm going to plan to do . . ., and I'm thinking about doing this," and what I'm going to hear is, "Oh, don't make plans! Don't talk about plans If you talk about them, they won't happen." And her idea of spirituality was never to make plans.

That is not true. The Word of God says you make plans. But you notice that the Apostle Paul had plans that he felt specifically were related to the Word of God and His mission. He wanted to strengthen the local church in the capital of the empire, and he prayed for such an opening. He sought the personal encouragement of seeing God's grace working in the Roman Christians. He wanted to reach, also, he said, the unbelievers in Rome. But all of these objectives was conditioned on the will of God, God permitting him, if it was in the divine essence. So, Romans 1:10 and verse 13 point that out that this is in the will of God and I've been prevented from doing this before.

Now, turn over to the last chapter of the book of Romans. This was his objective, he said, as he began writing this book. In Romans 15, near the end of the book, beginning at verse 20. Paul says, "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: but as it is written, to whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand. For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you. But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire for these many years to come unto you; whenever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way there by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company. But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain. And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ."

Now, what Paul is saying here is that he's always eager to push into new frontiers. He wanted to be the missionary pioneer where no one else had brought the Word of the Gospel before. But it was obvious that while that was his plan, God had hindered his executing that plan. So, Paul now says he is putting the plan into motion again. He says, "I've wanted to do this for some time. In the past, I've been hindered. I'm going to try it again. I believe this is the suitable time." But first, he says, "Instead of going towards Spain, I'm going to go the other direction and go to Jerusalem to take this special offering which has been gathered among the Gentile Christians for the saints who are suffering starvation, famine now in Jerusalem." Then Paul says, "I'm going to go to Spain from Jerusalem, and then I'm going to stop by Rome on the way to Spain." See all that planning? All that laying out? He's got the thing all in mind.

Well, it was in the decree of God for Paul to go to Rome. But you remember what happened? He got to Jerusalem, and then he made a mistake. He decided to play a little bit of legalism hoping to try to get a better hearing with the Jews who are so antagonistic, so he proposed to take one of the old Jewish vows and go through one of the old Jewish ceremonies. Well, the result of his going into the temple to do that was that somebody said, "Hey, he's taken the Gentile dogs in there with him." And that created a riot, and the result was the Roman authorities had to jump in and grab him in order to put him under protective custody to save him from the Jews who were ready to stone him on the spot. And the result was instead of being able to finish mission of delivering the offering in Jerusalem and catch the next boat out of Spain with a stop off at Rome on the way, four years were to intervene before he ever got to Rome.

They took him down to the Mediterranean coast of the great city of Caesarea, and for two years, he was kept in prison at that, what was a crusader's city, and so it became later a great site of a great crusader city, and you can see it to this day. For two years, he's there in Caesarea. Finally, he says, "I want my case to go to Rome. I want to appeal to Nero himself." And so, they sent him to Rome. And it took two years while he sat there in his prison cell before they finally brought his case up before he was released.

Now, he didn't know these were all the details that were in the decree of God, but he was right in being brought to Rome. And of course, when he got to Rome, he wrote those great letters, those prison epistles that we have - Ephesians and Philippians and those letters that have made such a dramatic impact on the Christian community.

So, the Apostle Paul did not just pass through Rome, but he ended up being held there for longer than he'd expected. So, you see, we do make plans, and we look to God to compare this to scripture to what we want to do, and as we proceed, we seek to execute, to open the doors to move into what God is leading us into. And we understand that in the decree are the unknowns. In the sovereign will of God are these unknowns that are going to develop as we go along, and we accept them as that super best plan that God has for us. And it does unravel as we go. Paul's acceptance, you see, of these details enable him to have stability every day of his life during that two-year period that he was imprisoned in Rome.

In the book of Philippians 4, beginning at verse 11, therefore, Paul says, Philippians 4:11-13, Paul can then say, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, it is to be content. [The decree of God: prosperous sometimes, other times not so prosperous.] I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Him who strengtheneth me."

The Apostle Paul had stability because he could accept the details of the will of God for him as the unraveled. You and I don't know everything beforehand as we are seeking to serve the Lord and what we are trying to do in executing His plan for us. But we can follow the plan that the Apostle Paul reflected at the beginning of the end of the book of Romans. What did he do? Number 1: he established an objective that he desired to reach. He made a plan, and he made that plan in compatibility with what he understood was pleasing to God for him to do with his life and his capacity.

So, you come to church some Sunday morning, and we make the announcement that in certain weeks hence, the Vacation Bible School program will be conducted, and you have to make a decision as to whether you are going to be there as a teacher or not. Whether you are going to be there at that Christian service or whether you are going to do that something else, which at the judgment seat of Christ that the "something else" was in the plan of God or it was a terrible mistake. But at any case, at some point in time, you make your decision that this is what you should pursue.

Then, the Apostle Paul arranged the order of events to achieve it. He said, "I'll follow these steps: one, two, three. I see nothing in the Word of God against this. This is the order by which I'll seek to achieve those things." Then, he planned how to execute step one. And then he planned how to go to step two and step three - one step at a time. He backed all this up with prayer for divine wisdom and guidance in the endeavor of how he was to go about reaching this objective and executing the steps in between, and then he waited upon God to bring it all together to be opening the opportunities, to be denying the opportunities. And finally, in God's time, in God's plan, his objective was breached. It's not all clear all the way down the line when we start the path, but we go step by step, one at a time with God who inevitably will lead the willing Christian to do what He wants him to do.

Now, one of the all-time great examples of this is in the experience of the Apostle Peter when he was in the city of Joppa, and God made the great major move to bring the Gentiles into Christianity which up to this time, some seven years after Pentecost were still in the outer fringes and not incorporated. And we'll pick the plan of the guidance of God into His decrees with that example next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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