

IN RESPONSE - DIVINE GUIDANCE, PART III

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Last time I promised we would look at two things. First I promised an example of *direct* guidance which must be *deduced* from the Bible. And second, I promised an answer to the question of what we do when there is no direct reference in the Bible to guide us.

To begin, we should take very seriously a principle set down for us in the Westminster Confession of Faith. "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture" (I:VI). The point is that we do not always find explicit and direct guidance in the Word of God. For example, we regard the command, "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15), a plain and binding bit of guidance!

When we study the command however, we discover that there is a positive as well as a negative side to this injunction. We are required to actively preserve the property of others in the keeping of this command. This is a proper inference drawn from the precept. Our problem is that we neglect the kind of hard study of the Word of God which brings us to make such legitimate deductions. And so when there is no explicit command speaking to the issue at hand, we throw our hands in the air as if there were no answer at all.

Dr. Jay Adams gives an excellent example of all of this in a discussion of 'Personal Guidance.'¹ The perennial question concerns the quest for a mate. Who shall I marry? One of the texts which gives us guidance is 1 Corinthians 7:39, "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." We are concerned with the end of this particular verse. Paul tells us that believers are to marry "in the Lord." We first understand this to mean that a believing widow may marry only another believer. But the good and necessary deduction from the text is that it applies to all single people. So the options for the marriage are now

narrowed. All those individuals whom you know who are unbelievers are excluded from consideration.

But now what do we do? In God's providence, there are two acceptable candidates for marriage. Which one is *the* one? Well, we must first analyze Paul's directions further. Paul tells us that the widow, or any unmarried person, "is free to be married to whom she [he] wishes." The great importance of personal wishes is not overlooked! And so, concerning the two acceptable candidates for a marriage proposal, the legitimate and biblical question to be asked is this: Who do you *want* to marry?

The answer to this question may not be easy. But it provides the guidance necessary from the biblical perspective. And so we continue to reason from the general precept to a more explicit conclusion. And we do so by asking *how*, within the biblical parameters, you determine who you want to marry.

The answer can come only through more information. That is, you look at interests, educational levels, social and family backgrounds, church affiliations, theological perspective, desires for children, health considerations, racial differences, if they exist, etc., etc. The gaining of this information is done informally during dating and or courtship. The point is, decisions can only be made when there is adequate information. You can never determine what you want without adequate information. Thus you gradually narrow your options as you follow the direct path of Scripture plus the path necessarily deduced from Scripture.

But what do we do if there is neither a direct nor indirect answer from the Bible? Scripture guides us here too. After all, we are really discussing the proper use of Scripture in divine guidance. Deuteronomy 29:29 declares, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." The secret things are the plans and purposes of God. They are hidden. They only become known in the unfolding of God's providence. And the wonderful thing is that God "works all things after the counsel of His own

will" (Ephesians 1:11). This means we can be confident that everything that takes place around us or in our lives is the unfolding of the plans and purposes of God! In fact, we must have this confidence.

On the other hand, Moses again directs us to the revealed will of God in Scripture. That which is revealed is revealed for the purpose of our following it. And our objective is to see the providence of God and the revealed will of God in the Bible dovetail. For example, 1 Peter 4:10 exhorts, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Peter is telling us that we each have gifts! Now, how do I determine my gift?

We may look at the ministry. As a young man in a congregation I might truly desire to pursue the ministry. If our deductions from 1 Corinthians 7:39 are correct, personal wishes and desires which are submissive to Scripture are important. But the simple desire is not enough. Such a young man is examined by his local elders and these local elders may recommend that the young man be taken under care of the presbytery with a view to his studying for the ministry. While in seminary, the young man may appeal to presbytery to be licensed to preach. This is another step in the process of testing gifts for ministry. When the presbytery grants the license, it is further affirming the desires of the young man for the ministry. This is all part of the process of seeking the Lord's guidance. In it you follow the demands of Scripture and rely upon God's providential dealings in the normal course of affairs.

In this example, a young man would graduate from seminary and make himself available for a call. If a local congregation concurs that the requisite gifts for the ministry exist the presbytery is called upon to examine and ordain the young man for the gospel ministry. In all of this three things come together. There is a sense of personal call, the objective call of a congregation, and the confirmation of the presbytery through examination and ordination. In all of this a personal desire is checked and balanced

¹ Jay E. Adams, *More Than Redemption* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), pp. 23-34.

through God's providential dealings in a given process.

The same would be true if a person is interested in teaching. Such a person would enter training for teaching. In the normal course of events he or she would be introduced to a classroom and be evaluated. There would also be a period of practice teaching. As the individual seeks the Lord in prayer, he or she also sees the hand of God's providence in the training process. As God's providence unfolds in these circumstances, God's will is revealed.

Now what do these two examples have in common? Proverbs 16:9 tells us. "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." Planning for the future is of utmost importance. Two of the greatest failures of Christians is their neglect in gathering adequate information and in properly planning. God has given us minds to plan our way. And we are to do so being very mindful of the broad directions given to us in Scripture. At the same time we must have the confidence that the Lord does direct our steps. His providences are sure. And as we see them unfold, we see the will of God for us unfold in a very wonderful way!

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