

O Christ, What Burdens Bowed Thy Head

Anne R. Cousin (1824–1906)

O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!
Our load was laid on Thee;
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead,
Didst bear all ill for me.
A Victim led, Thy blood was shed;
Now there's no load for me.

Death and the curse were in our cup:
O Christ, 'twas full for Thee;
But Thou hast drained the last dark drop,
'Tis empty now for me.
That bitter cup, love drank it up;
Now blessing's draught for me.

Jehovah lifted up His rod;
O Christ, it fell on Thee!
Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God;
There's not one stroke for me.
Thy tears, Thy blood, beneath it flowed;
Thy bruising healeth me.

Jehovah bade His sword awake;
O Christ, it woke 'gainst Thee!
Thy blood the flaming blade must slake;
Thine heart its sheath must be;
All for my sake, my peace to make;
Now sleeps that sword for me.

For me, Lord Jesus, Thou hast died,
And I have died in Thee!
Thou'rt ris'n—my hands are all untied,
And now Thou liv'st in me.
When purified, made white and tried,
Thy glory then for me!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Knowing God's Will: Part One

Kevin T. Bauder

Does God have an individual will for each believer? To suggest otherwise is effectively to deny either the infinity of God's wisdom and knowledge, thereby verging upon Open Theism, or else to question God's love for and personal interest in His children. God certainly knows what will be best for each of His people. He certainly wishes the best for each one. For God to wish the best for each believer while simultaneously knowing just what is best is exactly to have an individual will for each believer.

Ought individual believers to seek God's will for their lives? Some have suggested otherwise, opining that by seeking God's will a Christian is *de facto* asking for additional revelation and consequently denying the sufficiency of Scripture. These people insist that the Bible provides every principle necessary to make a wise choice under every circumstance. They reason that God's will extends no further than the exercise of wisdom; any choice made with biblical wisdom is within God's will.

This response wears a patina of biblical faithfulness, but when believers face genuinely hard choices that patina wears thin. When the stakes are very high and all choices seem bad, many believers yearn to know that they are free to ask God to help them find a way forward. They recognize the fragility of their own wisdom, even when it is informed by the Scriptures. They yearn for some level of guidance and direction. Nevertheless, the Bible has a back cover and God is no longer granting new revelations. Could God somehow provide guidance for His children without endangering the finality and sufficiency of Scripture?

I believe the answer to that question is *yes*. If God knows and desires what is best for each believer, then He will not turn away when His people cry out to Him for help. He has provided a way in which each of His children can make choices with confidence that He is directing their paths (Prov. 3:5-6).

Nevertheless, Christians must beware of seeking God's will in the wrong ways and places. Three of these are particularly common. One is seeking God's will through signs and "fleeces" (a reference to Gideon's setting out a fleece to gain assurance from God). In this method, a seeker challenges God to reveal His will through some uncommon event or through some appar-



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ently-chance occurrence such as the flip of a coin or the casting of a lot. God did speak in some of these ways in the past, but He has given no indication that He intends to do so now. To look for signs, to set out fleeces, or to cast lots now is to engage in superstition.

Another false method of discerning God's will is by expecting Him to speak directly to the issue, whether through an audible voice, a dream, or an inner voice. To pursue such experiences is exactly to seek additional revelation. Not surprisingly, people who think that God just tells them what to do often make pretty bad decisions. The reason is simple: whatever voice they think they hear is not the voice of God.

A third false method of discovering God's will is called *bibliomancy*. It is the practice of opening the Bible and reading a verse at random. That verse is thought to reveal the will of God in answer to the seeker's question. This method is grounded in the belief that God speaks through Scripture—which, of course, He does. Scripture is God's Word, inspired and inerrant. Its meaning and applicability, however, are determined by both near and remote context. Every part gains its significance from its place within the overall argument of the whole. To tear a text out of the whole so as to seek answers foreign to the biblical context is worse than superstition. It is an occult practice, no different than seeking God's will by reading tea leaves or sheep entrails.

So how should Christians seek to discern God's will for their lives? The answer to that question has several components. Those will be explained in future publications of *In the Nick of Time*. For the moment, however, one point is worth emphasizing.

It is this: God's will always accords with Scripture rightly understood. Whatever other tools or techniques one uses to discern God's direction, the Bible always has the final word. God will never lead contrary to His revealed will in the Bible.

Of course, the Bible contains different expressions of God's will for different individuals at different times and in different places. God's will for Israel (e.g.) is not necessarily God's will for the Church. The two will share points of similarity and even identity, but they will also manifest points of sharp contrast. Knowing God's revealed will requires careful reading of the Bible and skillful interpretation.

At the end of the day, however, certain aspects of God's will are pretty clear. God's will is never for a believer to rob a gas station, murder an enemy, or abandon a spouse. God's will never includes envy, greed, bitterness, deceit, pride, or malice. God never wills His children to neglect their duties. God's will always entails holiness, justice, faith, hope, and love. No people whose conduct contradicts the teaching of Scripture can ever plead that they are doing God's will.

I believe that God has a specific will for each individual. I also affirm that knowing God's will is not a matter of additional revelation. On the other hand, it is not complicated or mysterious, either. In the next publication of *In the Nick of Time* I plan to talk about how God's leading can be discerned.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
