

Bible Study - Lecture VI  
Brookland Baptist Church  
Wednesday, April 22, 2020  
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## GOD'S CIRCUMSTANTIAL WILL

(God's plan and provision within certain circumstances and conditions.)

**God's Circumstantial Will** - that is, how evil circumstances may momentarily counter God's ideal purposes; and God's Ultimate Will that is, how God's ideal purposes may finally be realized though temporarily derailed. We understand that human folly and sin often delay or prevent God's intentional will from coming to fruition in our lives. Thus in the circumstances created by evil or neglect, there is a "**will within the will of God.**" This means that God will make provision to help us overcome and bring good out of current circumstances.

Consider, for example, *the matter of disease*. The Christian minister is continually confronted, as they do their visiting, by the question as to whether the onset of disease is the will of God. *The important answer is No.* The will of God for man is perfect health. The point may be seen, perhaps, by thinking of those diseases which are due to an invasion of germs. I suppose God is responsible for the creation of germs, even the germs of disease. Why they are created I don't know. It may be that they serve some good function *about which we know nothing*.

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Here again let me repeat that the circumstantial will can be viewed from two angles: the first natural, and the second spiritual. There is the physical condition which we call disease; but, second, there is the possibility of the patient's making such a splendid response to that circumstance that he creates out of it a spiritual asset in the community of

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much more value than most people's health. It is because the saints have thus reacted to evil that the fallacy has got about that disease and suffering are the will of God.

Let us put it this way. Given a spiritual awakening, so glorious, that *the person lives in close co-operation with God*, the healthy body is more in line with his will. But so many healthy people are spiritually asleep and are not co-operating with God, at all. Many sick people have, through their sickness, become spiritually awakened during their illness, that out of the circumstances of their illness, they have created and set free *spiritual energies* far more valuable than the spiritual apathy of the healthy person.

I am quite sure that the battle *against* disease is the will of God, and *I thank God for all those people who are taking part in it*. In olden days in this country, wolves used to descend from the woods upon a village and do a great deal of harm. But our sturdy forefathers did not call the invasion of the wolves "the will of God." They called up all their resources, and they "liquidated" the wolves.

When any community is set upon by an invasion of germs or viruses that is not the will of God. The situation is just the same. With the help of God, that community should call-up all their resources, and seek to "liquidate" the disease.

I cannot understand how anybody who has read the New Testament - can ever stand at the bedside of a patient and, without explaining himself, utter the pathetic complaint that disease is the will of God. I always imagine that Jesus would speak with anger about such a thoughtless dictum. As far as I can understand Jesus' attitude, both in the words he spoke and the healing miracles he so gloriously wrought, He always regarded disease as part of the kingdom of evil, and with all His powers he fought it and instructed His followers to do the same.

I like to think of our Lord standing by the bedside of the patient and working with the doctors and nurses toward the regaining of health, working on the mind and spirit of the patient - as the physicians work on the body. Then, if the latter fail, I like to think of Jesus showing the sufferer that, in co-operation with Him, *victory may still be wrested from defeat and the purposes of God realized*.

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One final thought. If you say, "Well, it's a bit casual of God to allow these things to happen if they are not his intention," - I agree that there is mystery there. It would be foolish to speak as if all the ways of God to men were clear.

8 “*For my thoughts* are not your thoughts, neither are your ways *my ways*,” declares the Lord. 9 “As the heavens are *higher than the earth*, so are *my ways higher* than your ways and *my thoughts* than your thoughts. . . . .” - **Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)**

### **KEY CONCEPTS – (Review of The Circumstantial Will of God)**

- 1.) **In the particular circumstances of life, God's will for us has two sides:**
  - (a) to accept that we are subject to the divinely ordered natural laws of the universe; and
  - (b) to actively respond to evil, positively and creatively, as to wrest good out of evil circumstances. By so doing we open the way to God's ultimate triumph.
- 2.) **God has ordered the natural realm.** God ordains that universal laws remain in place, even when human violation of natural law results in suffering and death. And we suffer not just from the consequences of our own sins, but from the sins of others. There is a oneness within the great human family. Evil among other members of it may create circumstances which disturb God's intention for us.
- 3.) **God is at work and we also can participate in the outcome of events by our choices.** Finding God's provision and redemption in God's circumstantial will requires human cooperation. We know that we are choosing cooperation with God's circumstantial will when we react to suffering and tragedy in ways that are consistent with the following:
  - (a) our actions are of use to the community or they benefit the common good of humankind.
  - (b) our actions or attitudes are satisfying a true God-given need.
  - (c) our actions and attitudes are in harmony with personal and spiritual values.

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### **CASE STUDY #1 - Peter's Story**

While in the hospital, Peter, a nine-month-old baby with AIDS, becomes a ward of

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the state. A foster mother is contacted to consider taking him into her home. She currently is the foster mother to another infant. This woman formerly was a nurse on the AIDS ward of an urban hospital. She certainly has the skills to care for Peter, but can she handle two infants with special needs on her own? The stipend for foster care is modest. Can she make it financially? She seeks the wisdom of friends, fellow church members, doctors and parents of other children with HIV/ AIDS. The advice she receives is divided. Many fear she is taking on too much. Others remind her that she became a foster mother precisely with the idea in mind of providing a home for AIDS-affected children.

### CONSIDERATIONS:

- 1.) **Weatherhead points out that "because of our oneness with the great human family ... evil among other members of it may create circumstances which disturb God's intention for us."** How has this "oneness" influenced Peter's life both negatively and positively?
- 2.) **What natural laws are in effect in Peter's life?** Natural laws of the universe continue to operate despite abuses of human freedom, and are not broken by God (except through miracles) to save us from suffering. In the book *The Will of God* it states: If "germs invade a body the resistance of which evil circumstance have lowered, the result is disease." **In other words, germs and viruses cause disease.** If our bodies come in contact with them and our immune systems are weak **[in this case through drug abuse]** then we will be infected-that is a natural law.
- 3.) **Does God overrule natural laws and provide miracles?**
  - 1.) What would be a miracle in this situation?
  - 2.) Do you believe one could happen?
- 4.) **Regarding Peter's life, how can we understand the circumstantial will of God in the spiritual realm?**
  - How could others cooperate with God to wrest good out of the evil that has befallen Peter?
- 5.) **How do these acts of cooperation meet Weatherhead's guidelines?**

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- (a) actions are of use to the community or benefit the common good of humankind.
- (b) actions or attitudes are satisfying a true need.
- (c) actions and attitudes are in harmony with personal and spiritual values.

### **FOR FURTHER INQUIRY, LOOK UP THESE SCRIPTURE VERSES:**

1.) **Micah 6:8-9** (God's requirements of us)

**8** But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously - take God seriously. **9** Attention! God calls out to the city! If you know what's good for you, you'll listen. So listen, all of you! This is serious business. **The Message (MSG)**

2.) **Mark 3:31-35** (Jesus defines the spiritual nature of family)

**31** Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. **32** A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." **33** "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. **34** Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! **35** Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." **(NIV)**

3.) **Psalms 68:5-6** (In God's circumstantial will, an extended family is provided to care for orphans, the sick, and the lonely)

**5** A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. **6** God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. **(NIV)**

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### **CASE STUDY #2 - The Story of Ed and Trina**

After a violent domestic episode that followed the completions of the first semester of medical school, Trina moves away from her husband, Ed. They live apart for a few months and together see a counselor. Trina learns that Ed's father occasionally beat his mother-this

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is news to her after all these years of knowing him. Ed doesn't think his background or one violent episode determines that he will repeatedly harm his wife. They agree to try again, but after a few months Ed gets violent again-this time after his research funding isn't renewed. Ed doesn't physically hurt Trina but he burns her class notes in the fireplace and breaks household objects. Trina moves out again. She lives by herself and transfers to another medical school an hour away, so that she and Ed won't be in situations that might make Ed feel that she is competing with him. She vows to continue to fulfill her calling but wonders what is God's will for her marriage in these terrible days.

### **CONSIDERATIONS:**

- 1.) **Weatherhead points out that "because of our oneness with the great human family ... evil among other members of it may create circumstances which disturb God's intention for us."** How has this "oneness" influenced Ed's and Trina's lives both negatively and positively?
- 2.) **What natural laws are in effect in the lives of this couple?** Natural laws of the universe continue to operate despite abuses of human freedom, and are not broken by God (except through miracles) to save us from suffering.
- 3.) **Does God overrule natural laws and provide miracles?**  
What would be a miracle in this situation?  
Do you believe one could happen?
- 4.) **Regarding Ed and Trina, how can we understand the circumstantial will of God in the spiritual realm?** How could these two cooperate with God to wrest good out of the evil that has befallen them?
- 5.) **How do these acts of cooperation meet Weatherhead's guidelines?**
  - (a) actions are of use to the community or benefit the common good of humankind.
  - (b) actions or attitudes are satisfying a true need.
  - (c) actions and attitudes are in harmony with personal and spiritual values.

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**2.) Matthew 7:21-23 (the eternal importance of doing the will of God)**

**21** "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. **22** Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' **23** Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' **(NIV)**

**3.) John 7:16-18 (characteristics of one who seeks God's will)**

**16** Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. **17** Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. **18** Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. **(NIV)**

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**CASE STUDY #3    Trinity Church**

After a period of decline in membership, the leadership of Trinity Church splits down the middle. One group wants to relocate outside the inner city while the other wants to stay put and refocus the resources of the church on the people who live near the existing building. Several influential families leave; the rest are determined to band together and pray for guidance. The remaining few decide to open a day care center as an outreach ministry to low-income and working class families. A few new families from the neighborhood begin to attend and take leadership in the outreach efforts of the church, but financial problems continue to plague the church and threaten its closure.

## **CONSIDERATIONS:**

1. **Weatherhead points out that "because of our oneness with the great human family ... evil among other members of it may create circumstances which disturb God's intention for us."** How has this "oneness" influenced Trinity Church negatively and positively?
2. **What natural laws are in effect in the life of this church?** Natural laws of the universe continue to operate despite abuses of human freedom, and are not broken by God (except through miracles) to save us from suffering.
3. **Does God overrule natural laws and provide miracles? What would be a miracle in this situation? Do you believe one could happen?**
4. **Regarding Trinity Church:**
  - (a) How can we understand the circumstantial will of God in the spiritual realm?
  - (b) How could the church members cooperate with God to wrest good out of the evil that has befallen them?
5. **How do these acts of cooperation meet Weatherhead's guidelines?**
  - (a) actions are of use to the community or benefit the common good of humankind.
  - (b) actions or attitudes are satisfying a true need.
  - (c) actions and attitudes are in harmony with personal and spiritual values.

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### **2.) Hebrews 10:32-39 - (Persevering in doing God's will)**



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**32** Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. **33** Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. **34** You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. **35** So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. **36** You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. **37** For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay." **38** And, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back." **39** But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved. (NIV)

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### **QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:**

- 1. How has the "oneness with the great human family" and the "evil among other members of it" created circumstances that have disturbed God's intention for your life?**
- 2. What is the legacy of circumstances given you by your immediate family?**
  - How have these circumstances enhanced or hindered God's intention for your life?
- 3. When have you suffered as a result of one of God's natural laws being broken?**
- 4. Think of a time when you reacted positively and creatively to difficult circumstances or great suffering.**
  - What good, if any, came of your positive response?
- 5. Think of another time when you succumbed to suffering or difficulties and let pain or darkness enfold you. What was the eventual outcome?**
- 6. Think of some thorny or baffling problem in your life. Apply the guidelines for cooperating with God's circumstantial will and choose a plan of action:**

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- (a)** my actions will be of use to the community or benefit the common good.
- (b)** my actions or attitudes will satisfy a true need or desire (of mine or another).
- (c)** my actions are in harmony with my personal and spiritual values.

### **7. Do you believe in miracles?**

- Does God intervene and change the course of human events? Why or why not?