

the *Kerygma*



NEWSLETTER OF REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 3 MAY/ JUNE 2006

*Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be!
Lead me by Thine own hand,
Choose out the path for me.*

*Smooth let it be or rough,
It will be still the best;
Winding, or straight, it leads
Right onward to Thy rest.*

*I dare not choose my lot;
I would not if I might;
Choose Thou for me, my
God,
So shall I walk aright.*

*Thy kingdom that I seek
Is Thine, so let the way
That leads to it be Thine
Else I must surely stray.*

*Take Thou my cup, and it
With joy or sorrow fill,
As best to Thee may seem;
Choose Thou my good and
ill.*

*Choose Thou for me my
friends,
My sickness or my health;
Choose Thou my cares for
me,
My poverty or wealth.*

*Not mine, not mine the
choice,
In things or great or small;
Be Thou my Guide, my
Strength,
My Wisdom, and my All.*

- Horatius Bonar

DIVINE GUIDANCE BY TOM GIBBS

Do you ever wonder why God puts children with parents? From a parent's perspective the reason is because God knows that parents hopefully know more of life's pitfalls and will steer their children from those mistakes that may have entrapped them as children. However, from a child's perspective parents are sent by God to prevent them from having any fun, joy or life. Sadly, children far too often view their parents as the ones who want to rob them of life's fulfillment. The last people in the world they want to listen to are their parents. Of course, we know what happens when children spurn parental guidance. They are like ships cut off from their anchors, adrift on the ocean.

In the same way, the church of America is adrift on the ocean because she has failed to listen to her spiritual parents—those Christians who have gone before her. As a result, we are falling into many of the same mistakes they fell into; in fact, our problems are worse in many ways. Chief among those errors is how we view the guidance of the Holy Spirit—what we may call divine guidance.

The Shorter Catechism the briefest explanation of what we believe as Christians. It was composed in the middle of the 17th century at Westminster Abbey at the command of the English Parliament. In many ways it became the standard tool for teaching what the Bible instructs for children, adults and those who converted to the Christian faith. What is interesting about the Catechism is that it begins with such a profound question, "What is the chief end of man?" Its answer is no less profound, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." However, the question immediately arises, "How do we know how to glorify and enjoy this God?" *And this is the question of guidance.* The Catechism's answer is, "The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him." In other words, the Catechism is teaching that God guides his people according to the Bible. But is this true?

After all, we are so familiar today with language like: "The Lord told me his will for your life." or, "The Lord spoke to me in prayer this morning." or, "I know that is the Lord's will for my life to do this or that." What are we to do with all of this "Holy Spirit" talk about guidance?

The first thing we need to realize is that this creates some big problems for the Christian community. Those that fail to have God talk to them become disillusioned with the faith. Also, the more impressionable slowly begin to adopt the lingo and find themselves also "led by God."

The second thing we need to address is should we really expect this as Christians? Does God lead his people through this sort of direct communication, whether it is words, dreams, visions, etc? We do know that he used to do this, but is this how he works today? How does God really guide his people? I think we can answer that question by looking at scripture passages which essentially teach what our Catechism has already taught us—

God guides his people by his Word through the Holy Spirit.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak, and he will disclose to you what is to come. (John 16:13)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

As is probably clear, this creates some profound tensions. Which is true? Well, at the outset let me say that I am not saying God does not make use of feelings, impressions, dreams or seeming coincidences to lead his people. He certainly has done that and will continue to do that. My point is simply that we are not to look to these things as infallible guides or rules. If anything at all, they are confirmatory signs. It is my conviction that when these things rise to the level of the ordinary way God leads his people, they supplant the Scripture itself.

It is also sometimes asserted that being led immediately by God through a vision is more spiritual than through the Bible. *Really the question of divine guidance revolves around three concepts: knowledge, commands and liberty.* The question is: "How do I arrive at the knowledge to guide my life, the trust to know that the path before me is within God's will and the personal freedom to walk in it?" We need to know how the Bible deals with each of these issues.



REDEEMER EXTENDING THE KINGDOM

MISSIONS MINUTE : WORLD MISSIONS

Doug and Masha Shepherd in the Western Ukraine

Doug's journey in missions started at Texas Tech University while working on his undergraduate degree. His summer mission experiences resulted in a four year commitment with MTW to minister in Ukraine. There, Doug was involved with the university ministry in the emerging church. He also had an active role in training MTW interns in cross-cultural missions through an internship program called "Odessa Project." Masha's life began behind the Iron Curtain in Ukraine. After the fall of Communism, she came into contact with the university ministry and the Presbyterian Church of Ukraine. The Lord graciously transformed her heart, and in the next two years she became an active leader of the university ministry and an associate member of the MTW team. After getting married in 2000, Doug and Masha attended Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Doug went on to finish his Th.M. at Fuller Seminary School of World Mission in Pasadena, CA. Their son, Chaz, was born in June, 2005.

The Shepherd's are committed to planting new churches, training national leaders, and assisting in training future missionaries. Please pray for them as they share the gospel of Christ with the people of Western Ukraine through bible studies, outreach and worship. More specifically you can pray for their support raising. They are seeking the last 40% of their support over the future months.

Bill and Jeanine Allen in Peru, by Lori Fitch

Bill and Jeanine Allen, along with their daughters Noelle and Sarah live in Cusco, Peru and minister to the Quechua people. Bill, a doctor by trade offers a Health Ministry. The rest of the time, he travels to the small surrounding villages. He visits with the villagers, inquires about their families, treats their ailments, shares with them the message of hope and love and hopefully through all this develops a relationship with them. The Quechua are very reserved people and do not easily open up and are slow to accept. They lead a life of extreme poverty, alcoholism is rampant, domestic abuse is common and life in general is hard. Jeanine, Bill's wife, has started a women's Bible Study with some of the Peruvians who attend the church in San Geronimo. Jeanine also goes into villages around Cusco and meets the families, hoping to get to know them and show them God's amazing grace. She and Bill continue to find ways to broaden the scope of the Health Ministry and to continue to grow God's church.

A team from Redeemer will once again be going this summer to work with some of the locals from the church in San Geronimo on a new church in a village by the name of Usphabamba. One of God's blessings is that a small minority of the families in Usphabamba have accepted Christ and are leading a Christ filled life. By building a church in this village, many are hoping that it will fill the need of providing a gathering spot for those that can't or won't make the difficult trip to Cusco and provide a place of worship where all can learn of God's hope.

REDEEMER NEWS

NEW MEMBERS



Emery Anthony



Matthew Beham



Ben Cairns



Joel Cook



Diane Deng



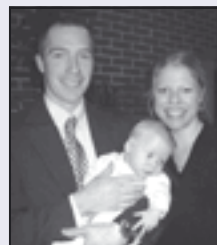
Emma Dodson



Thomas Gibbs, jr.



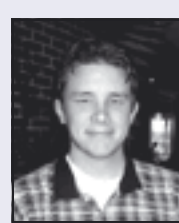
Glen and Ginny Glass



*Bill and Regan Luthin Will**



George and Evie McVicar



Jordan McVicar



Ryan and Cyndi O'Leary



Ansley Pantsari



*Henry and Mary Kessler Sauer
Henry, IV, Wyatt*, Lindy**



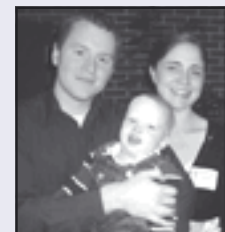
Henry Sauer, IV



*Jim and Allison Stokes
Eleanor*, Georgia**



Jim and Becky Stokes



*Brent and Jessica Watkins
Timothy**

* non-communing member

Divine Knowledge: The Biblical Path

The Bible speaks about the will of God in two ways: his perfect, decreed will and his revealed will for our lives. The first problem that we have to address is focused on the first use of this term.

What the Bible asserts is that God has a perfect plan for the history of the world. It is his sovereign, perfect will. However, the Bible also teaches us that this will is secret and not revealed. *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the thing revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law* (Deuteronomy 29:29). In other words, God does have a sovereign, unchangeable path for your life, but it is secret from you. He hasn't revealed it to his people.

So what is our response to this sovereign, secret will? Romans 8:28 says *"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."* That is, our response to God's secret will is submission and trust in the confidence that nothing can happen to us that is not orchestrated according to God's power and goodness. Horatius Bonar (quoted by Sinclair Ferguson, *Discovering God's Will*, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982, pp. 37-8.) captured this well (See sidebar quote on the front page of this newsletter.)

Divine Knowledge: The So-called Spiritual Path:

Most folks think there is a perfect will for their life. We seek to find out the secret knowledge of God. And it is at this point that the spiritual voices begin to dominate the landscape of our lives. We imagine if I could just get my hands on the who, what, and where of the future, my life will turn out okay. What's wrong with this sort of teaching?

The Bible never asks us to ponder the question, "What is God's perfect will for my life?" The Bible actually forbids the quest for this sort of information. It calls it divination. Isaiah 8:19-20 says *"And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spirits who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn."* In other words, God condemns looking for secret knowledge and sends us to the Bible for discovering his will.

Why are we drawn to looking for this secret kind of knowledge? Because we don't want to trust, we want to know. We want to have a kind of certainty that only God has. Therefore, far from being more spiritual, the continual quest for secret knowledge is not unlike the pagans' quest that leads to death. Far more spiritual is the path of trust and submission to the will of God.

Divine Command: The Biblical Path:

As I mentioned earlier, there is another way the Bible uses the term "the will of God." It is the

more dominant usage of the term and refers to God's prescription for our lives—how he wants us to live in a way that pleases him. His prescribed will is how we measure ourselves to be in sin or pleasing to God. This is why the Bible is so important. It is sufficient to give us all the information about how we should or should not lead our lives. A few things should be emphasized when think about how the Bible guides us:

Is it lawful? In other words, I know that a particular activity, thought or lifestyle is or is not within the will of God by what the Bible has spoken about that issue. If the Bible doesn't speak directly to a particular issue, we should be able to discern principles from other examples and commands that will enable us to determine whether something is lawful or not.

Is it wise? Not everything that is lawful is beneficial (1 Corinthians 6:12). The Bible not only points us in the direction of lawfulness; it also urges us to be wise in accordance with who we are. A certain practice, vocation, or activity may be fine for someone and not for someone else. There are a number of factors that the Bible speaks about to help us determine whether or not something is wise: *Will it cause others to stumble? Will it enslave me to idolatry? What kind of temptations will it put in my path? How does it square with God's overall call upon my life—to seek first the kingdom of God and to take up the cross and follow him?*

Is it approved? As the Proverbs remind us, *"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed."* (Proverbs 15:22). It is very important to remember that God has given us individuals who have profound insight into our circumstances, personality and giftedness. God guides us with the insight he has given those around us.

Have I prayed? I mention the importance of prayer not because in prayer we hope to hear some audible answer from God, but because through prayer God begins to shape and mold our understanding of his law and wisdom. We pray not to twist God's will to our own, but so that our desires and plans will be more aligned with his purposes.

Divine Command: The So-called Spiritual Path:

The opposite of allowing the Scripture to guide you into the will of God is clamoring after some secret information so that you can live out God's will. The trouble with this is that the Bible is often completely ignored—its law, its wisdom and its counsel. We discover that this kind of spirituality is often just a cloak for our own autonomy. We quickly find those people who speak, talk and think the very things we are already inclined to agree with regarding the will of God. We leave the authority of Scripture for the authority of ourselves.

Divine Liberty: The Biblical Path

We come now to the area which creates confusion for many people—the freedom or liberty God has given us over the direction our lives should take. By virtue of our being made in the image of God,

God wants us to exercise a certain amount of sovereignty over our own affairs. This is not a sovereignty which negates or short-circuits God's sovereignty, rather it is a contingent sovereignty established by him. In other words, we are responsible to act on the information we have from the revealed will of God and choose between the many options.

This means that we are free to choose between many good things based upon our desires, impressions, gifts, pleasures and opportunities. In this way, we are like little creators, shaping our own destiny within the parameters of God's design. His only requirements are that we choose according to his commands and wisdom. And we gain assurance that even when we not do this we can never thwart his divine will or plan.

Divine Liberty: The so-called Spiritual Path

The flip side of all this is fear and paralysis. Looking for secret knowledge and following various voices always tends toward two extremes: Selfish autonomy and breaking the law of God or fear of acting in any meaningful way at all. We have already looked at the first mistake. Let us now examine the second one.

The reason why this leads to fear is because of our sinfulness and an improper sense of our own dignity as being made in the image of God. Dan Allender and Tremper Longman, III talk about this:

We are odd people. We will fight for freedom and die to protect our right to choose. On the other hand, every day we labor to avoid choice and hunger for someone or something to relieve the awesome burden of choice. Put simply, I will want to kill you if you take away my opportunity to choose and will hate you if you require me to choose. (Dan Allender & Tremper Longman, III, *Bold Love*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1992), pp.56-7.)

We look for information before we act. The trouble is that until we get enough information we don't have that certain "peace" and we remain paralyzed. Thankfully, God has freed us from these sorts of obsessions and given us the liberty to make choices about life's issues in the confidence of the Word of God. Where the Bible gives us freedom, we can exercise our dignity and make responsible, meaningful choices. In fact, this is a significant part of knowing what it means to be God's image bearers. Therefore, enjoy your freedom; by enjoying it you are enjoying God.

The biblical path has clearly sought to keep together the Spirit and the Bible. The so-called spiritual path has consciously or unconsciously separated the two. And here is ultimately the issue. When Jesus and the Spirit are separate we run into trouble. In the same way, when you take away the Spirit from the Word all kinds of trouble arises too. Jesus is perfect revelation of God communicated to us by the Holy Spirit through the truth of God's Word. If we separate Jesus or the Spirit from the Word we are like the ship that has lost its anchor, adrift on the ocean.

PRESBYTERIAN REDEEMER

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Join us
at our worship
location,
The McAllister
Fine Art Center
on Sundays
at 9:30 a.m.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- May 11** Agape Fundraising Dinner
- May 18** Men's Fellowship Night
- May 21** Parents of Youth Meeting
- May 31** Community Groups End
- June 6** Newcomer's Dessert
- June 12-16** Vacation Bible School
- June 14-24** Peru Mission Trip
- June 15** Men's Fellowship Night

MAP



 Sunday Morning Worship Services are held at the McAllister Fine Arts Center