

To Do God's Will

Jeremiah 20:7-13, John 7:1-24 (ESV)

March 4, 2007

“My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.” Here is the gospel not only of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ but also of the promise of our knowing the same if we seek to do God’s will. What a remarkable promise! “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” How do we arrive at this?

The underlying premise of today’s reading is that Jesus does not speak on his own. He does not teach on his own. He does minister on his own. He does not work on his own. He is here at the bidding of another. Jesus says this plainly before the promise: “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.” He says it again after the promise, contrasting his own practice of pointing away and beyond himself with that of teachers parading their own learning: “The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.” The significance of this is that Jesus speaks on behalf of God because he is from God, and since he is from God, he is God himself with us and among us. That is how and why he does not speak on his own.

Of course, saying that it is so does not make it so. It does not make it *not* so, either, but it does not make it so. This puts us in the position of having to make a decision. Is this man of God or not? It has to be one or the other. Does he speak the truth or not? There is no in between. Is he seeking his own glory or that of him who sent him? The two are mutually exclusive. This last question gives us an opening, an insight through which to address the others. I assure you that there is nothing glorious about being crucified by Roman soldiers on a hill outside Jerusalem. That is horrible. We are twelve chapters away from the crucifixion, but the shadow of the cross already falls across today’s chapter and the ones before it. The intent of people to kill him is a major dynamic in today’s reading. Jesus did not seek his own glory. He sought the glory of the one who sent him, and he did so even at the cost of his own demise.

Given that, we are given an inroad into answering the other questions. Is this man of God or not? It has to be one or the other. Does he speak the truth or not?

There is no in between. If someone were to speak to his own advantage, we might reasonably suspect that he was not speaking the truth. When someone speaks to his own detriment, we can reasonably conclude that he is speaking the truth. What Jesus says here, pointing out the people's disobedience of the law of God, exacerbates their intent to kill him. Surely what he says is true. And given that what he says is true, not only is his teaching is not his own, and not only does his teaching have its origin in God, but also Jesus himself was sent to us from God, so that Jesus is God himself living among us. All of this flows back from the crucifixion.

And these truths lead into the promise. "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." What does this mean? If you cannot tell what teaching is from God and what is not, then you must not be committed to doing the will of God. If you do not care about doing the will of God, then it is not likely that you are going to care about the teachings. But if you are committed—heart, soul, mind, and strength—to doing the will of God, then God will see to it that you know whether the teaching is from God or not. What a wonderful promise this is! As John Calvin wrote of this passage:

[I]f we are ready to obey God He will never fail to illuminate us by the light of His Spirit, so that we shall be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood....

...God will give us the Spirit of discernment to be our continual Guide and Director if we are entirely given up to His obedience....[T]rue religion...is when we are heartily ready to follow the will of God.¹

With this promise, Jesus Christ gently, courageously, and winsomely invites us into the inner chamber of truth and calls on us to make a decision. God has sent him to us for this very purpose, to win us back to himself. Thus he says that God has designed and made us for this purpose, that we serve and glorify God. What is it going to be? Is it your life's will to do God's will or to do your own? Those are your two choices. If you commit yourself to serving God, God will show you the way. It will not always be easy! There might be tremendous struggle. But God will never

¹John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. 4: *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1988), 4:186-187.

desert you. If, on the other hand, you choose to go your own way, you might have great clarity of vision, singleness of purpose, and even worldly success, but you will never know the truth, you will never know the word or will of God, and you will never find, let alone fulfill, the purpose of your life. It is your choice, within the larger context of God already having chosen you as his own in Jesus Christ. That is, we are being called upon to respond and to obey.

How did the people then respond? The crowd said, none too politely, "You have a demon!" Why did they say that? Jesus had pointed out to them that while they questioned the source of his teaching, they accepted that the law in what we call the Old Testament was from Moses. Nevertheless, in that they were seeking to kill him, they were violating the very law they claimed to cherish, since one of the Ten Commandments is, "You shall not kill." This is not exactly the way to win friends and influence people. But it was true.

We still do not obey the Ten Commandments completely, and sometimes not very much at all, still today. But the question here is, Do we want to? Are we committed to obeying God? It is not a question of achievement. It is not a question of accomplishment. It is a matter of attitude and orientation. If being right with God depended on what we could do, none of us would make it. Not a single one. That is not the question here. As William Temple noted of this promise, "It is not necessary for this that a man should have reached the point of perfect obedience; but it is necessary that he should intend perfect obedience."² The point is, God himself has come to us in Jesus Christ, to draw us back to himself. Are we interested? Are we attracted to that? Is that at least the direction we want to be going, even in our feet are carrying us off in another direction? Can we admit that the one good reason we have for living is to serve God, can we will to do the will of God, and can we promise to help each other and to pray for guidance along the way? God will help us. Jesus promises us, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." We will be guided in, and know, the truth. And the truth is that Jesus Christ has come here from God in order to reclaim us as his own and to regather us into his home. This is the life for which we were created. Shall we take it up and live it, or shall we pursue some other?

The table is set today for the Lord's Supper: communion with God and his Christ and all the saints in all times and places, a time to give thanks for all God's blessings, a remembrance that God was in Christ, a remembrance that Jesus gave

²William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel*, London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1949, p. 120.

himself to death for us in order that we might live, a remembrance that God raised Christ to new life so that we need not fear death, and—blessed assurance—a foretaste of glory divine at the great heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God. See how great is the love of God! As we gather around the table today, consider the ultimate lengths to which Jesus was willing to go to win us back to God, and see whether his offering does not turn your heart. Consider how great the gifts of God are to us, and see whether we do not rejoice in turn. Remember that Christ won the victory only by complete obedience even unto death, and see whether we are not moved and stirred to do the will of God in our own lives, day in and day out, at home, school, work, and play, in big ways and little ways, forever and ever.

“If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” This is a wonderful promise. It opens up to us the possibility of true knowledge and confidence about God and his Christ and about his will for our lives. And it gives us the opportunity to find the meaning, purpose, and direction of our own lives, which is something we all want and need. Are we willing to commit ourselves today—heart, soul, mind, and strength—to do God’s will?

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

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