

AMORAL GUIDANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

by

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The dismaying tendency persists of assuming that the Bible is silent about issues such as choice of vocation or education. This study of these issues is rigidly limited to ethically neutral situations.

Does God guide? The first step is to prove that amoral issues exist. I Cor. 7:39 et al. provide the proof. Furthermore, God only requires what He reveals as required, and He does not demand everything that would please Him.

The second step is to prove that God has a special amoral plan for every believer's life. Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 1:11 supply this proof. The Scriptures contain many historical illustrations of the principle.

The final step is to prove that these special plans are revealed to believers. The evidence comes easily for Christ and the apostles, but finds no NT support for other saints unless they have contact with a prophet. God guides only through prophets, in amoral matters.

By what methods may Christians find what pleases God most in adiaphorous areas? The utilization of the methods may be loosely termed guidance. The methods fall into two categories.

The category of unambiguous methods includes OT prophecy (e.g., Mt. 26:53-56), chain of command (e.g., Mt. 4:19-22), selection of officers (e.g., Ac. 1:15-26), miraculous media (viz., appearance of Christ, speaking of Holy Spirit, appearance of angels, signs, visions, dreams) and persecution (e.g., I Pet. 3:17). Four reasons are given for discounting miraculous media for today's saints.

Methods that demand greater responsibility form the second category. Included are principles (e.g., Ro. 15:20-22), plans (e.g., Ro. 1:13), desires (e.g., I Cor. 16:6-7), prayer (e.g., Ac. 22:10) and circumstances (e.g., Heb. 13:23) and the opinions of others (e.g., Ac. 16:15).

Texts that do not apply to this study are treated, including Ro. 8:14; 12:1-2; Eph. 5:10, 17; Phil. 2:13; 3:15; Col. 1:9; Jas. 1:5.

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INTRODUCTION

"What does God want me to do?" Even though this question often reflects a significant crossroad in the life of a Christian, the Bible may fail to rejoin. The present study sifts the New Testament for evidence that God's answer sometimes lies outside of His written Word, albeit governed by its principles.

The paucity of scholarly literature concerning divine guidance has spawned rampant subjectivity. The same believers who at other times cling to the rock of Scripture will dogmatize on the bruised reed of personal experience when they approach this topic.¹ This fact is especially tragic because it is the new convert who is most frequently eager for teaching about this matter. The advice he receives may make God's will into God's secret. One counselor confesses on behalf of many that "it is rather difficult to explain just how a person senses God's guidance."² Bewildered neophytes turn away to the clarity of visions and audible

¹For example William M. Anderson, "How May I Find Out the Will of God?" Bibliotheca Sacra, 103:409 (January-March, 1946), 96, 105 answers the question posed in his title solely on the basis that "I have backed it with some little experience of my own and with wide experience of others." His final appeal: "I find it works."

²Margaret Erb, "God Has a Plan," in Essays on Guidance, by Joseph T. Bayly et al. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 10.

voices.

God guides His children in the daily application of moral truth. This fact is precious and vital. In this paper, however, discussion does not go beyond amoral issues --those which are in themselves neither right nor wrong in God's sight.

CHAPTER I

DOES GOD GUIDE?

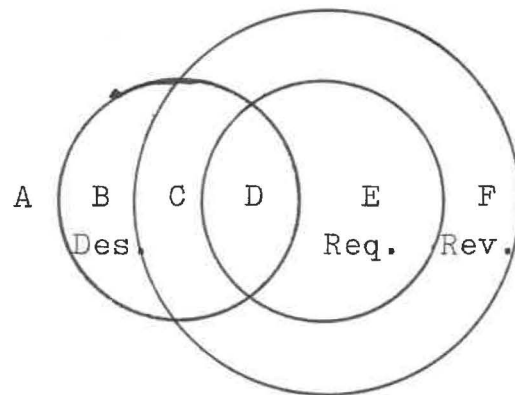
Are There Amoral Issues?

Whether God guides in amoral areas of life will first of all depend on whether such areas exist or not. Clearly possessions, circumstances, temptation and other entities may be ethically neutral; but what about a decision or attitude?

God's Word clearly affirms that freedom from liability sometimes applies to choices. First Corinthians 7:39 illustrates this truth: "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."¹ Paul does not mention anything about the husband the Lord would like her to decide upon--the widow is unrestricted. Her liberty of course ends when she contemplates marriage to an unbelieving man. A second example surfaces in First Corinthians 8:8, where it is said concerning food offered to idols that "we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat." The limitation on this freedom arises when it hurts another Christian (First Corinthians 8:9). Other texts that assert this same principle are

¹All quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Text Edition (La Habra, California: Foundation Press Publications, 1960) unless otherwise designated. The verse cited above was suggested by Hamilton W. Lewis, "Divine Guidance in the New Testament" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974), p. 51.

Romans 14:5-6, 14a, 20b; First Corinthians 7:11, 27-28, 36-38; 9:14-15; 10:23, 25-27; Titus 1:15. Christians frequently feel guilty about God's will even though none of the contemplated actions are wrong! The saints are held accountable only for what God both desires, requires and reveals.



The diagram explains that: (A) God has not told humankind about some decisions that would displease Him and yet not incur penalty (cf. Deuteronomy 29:29 "the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us"), (B) God has not told humankind about some decisions that would please Him but which He does not require (cf. Deuteronomy 29:29), (C) God has revealed that some decisions will please Him, although He does not require that they be made (see on First Corinthians 7:7-9, 35; 9:1-27 below), (D) God wants and demands a certain decision, such as abstinence from sexual immorality, so He reveals His demand (e.g., First Thessalonians 4:3ff), (E) God demands a decision contrary to His own preference, and reveals that He demands it (e.g., Hebrews 10:7, where God has shown the Son that He wills the mutually distasteful sacrifice of

Christ), (F) God neither wants nor requires a given decision, and He reveals this attitude (e.g., Hebrews 10:5, where Old Testament sacrifices were in one sense unwanted, yet God expected Israelites to decide to offer them).

The diagram indicates that the Lord requires nothing that He has not revealed. As long as a Christian obeys the revelation of the Bible, he is free to marry whom he will, attend the seminary of his choice, and so forth, provided that no other revelation comes to him on the matter from God. Caution must be maintained in this regard, however, since sin in the heart lends a moral tinge to amoral situations. Titus was told for instance that "to the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure" (Titus 1:15). The apostle Paul maintains the same principle in other places as well: Romans 14:14b-16, 20b, 23; First Corinthians 8:7-13; 10:23 with 28-29, 31-33. Romans 14:5b ("Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind") and First Corinthians 10:24 ("Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor"), 31 ("Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God") summarize the attitudes that enable perfect freedom in amoral matters.

The diagram also points out that the Lord does not demand everything that would please Him. Some believers choose with the apostle Paul to go beyond mere avoidance of culpability in this way. "I have not used any of these rights" (First Corinthians 9:15 NIV) he exclaimed, referring to eating, drinking, marrying and refraining from work, all

of which are amoral crossroads in context. Other texts that explain this approach to the Christian life are First Corinthians 7:7-9, 35; 9:16-27. Yet the apostle himself warns that not everyone should follow his footsteps to this extent. The warning comes in precept (First Corinthians 7:7 "each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that") and in the example of others (First Corinthians 9:5-6, where even the rest of the apostles, the Lord's brothers and Peter do not go so far as does Paul!). Stress should not be laid on the imitation of Paul's highest ideals. Young Christians in particular must be directed to obedience to the Word of God instead of to the yielding of rights and the adoption of optional vows. When freedom is given up for the sake of greater ministry, young Christians often become overly enthused about this amoral aspect of Christian living. When freedom is given up in hopes of direct guidance, decisions are made irrationally or even foregone. A decision to remain celibate may create a false sense of spirituality, though ministry is increased; a decision to ask God for more revelation about the advisability of further education--which request amounts to abdication of freedom of choice--may lead to late submission of the application form. These examples emphasize that both approaches are unbalanced when practiced by most recent converts.

Does God Have a Special Plan
For Every Believer's Life?

Reply From General Considerations

Romans 8:28 states that all events--including the outcome of every amoral decision--are indeed arranged in advance by God. Several problems emerge in connection with this interpretation of the verse.

First, must the word πάντα be pressed absolutely so as to include amoral issues? Πάντα ("all things") appears in relatively emphatic position in the text, which suggests that the word may be used absolutely. In addition, the context shows that persecution (which is amoral from the standpoint of the persecuted individual) is primarily in view in this verse. Romans 8:17-18 deal with suffering. Verses nineteen through twenty-three discuss the resurrection body against the background of a groaning universe and groaning believers. In the next two verses hope and perseverance are highlighted. Those who are groaning need to experience good, according to verses twenty-six to thirty. Persecutors and other difficulties cannot separate the Christian from God's love (Romans 8:31-39). Persecution and suffering pervade the entire atmosphere in which Romans 8:28 breathes.

Second, what if ὁ θεός ("God") is rejected from the text of Romans 8:28 as spurious? This possibility looms large; the battle over this variant has not been decisively won by either side. Assuming that the variant is incorrect, two translations of the text are possible. The first makes

Paul say that "all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28 KJV). Nevertheless, God must be understood as the Agent behind this process. Prayer to God (Romans 8:26-27) results in God working (Romans 8:28), and God working (Romans 8:28) is defined by "He foreknew," "He predestined," etc. (Romans 8:29ff). The passage focuses on the activity of the Deity. The second possible general understanding of this verse renders God the understood subject of the verb: "He works all things together for good" (Romans 8:28 literal translation). The ὁ ἐραυνῶν ("the One who searches") and θεὸν ("God") of the preceding verse join with the fact that God is the clearly intended subject of the series of verbs in verses twenty-nine and thirty, with the result that the foundation for this second interpretation of the text stands quite firmly.

Ephesians 1:11 strongly corroborates these findings in Romans 8:28. The verse asserts that God "works all things after the counsel of His will;" but again the scope of the word τὰ πάντα ("all things") must be examined. The context discusses God's purpose to glorify believers, but with the phrase "the counsel of His will" the writer broadens his theme temporarily. The scope of "all things" remains undetermined by the context as a result of these two facts. However, word order tips the scales incontrovertibly in favor of an unlimited τὰ πάντα. The argument of the passage has been preparing the reader for emphasis in verse eleven on the independence of God's decisions. Instead, the stress actually is transferred to τὰ πάντα by its radically

forward-projected placement. God's sovereignty would have been underscored by either: (1) τοῦ ἐνεργοῦντος τὰ πάντα κατὰ κ.τ.λ., (2) τοῦ κατὰ ... τὰ πάντα ἐνεργοῦντος, or (3) τοῦ κατὰ ... ἐνεργοῦντος τὰ πάντα. Paul emphasized the scope of the sovereignty rather than the sovereignty itself, and the outcome of every amoral decision must accordingly be included in Paul's thought. God does indeed have a plan for every believer's life.

Reply From Specific Considerations

God had a special plan for the life of King David. Acts 13:22 records this fact with the words, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will." This rather neutral translation has been clarified in two ways. "Carry out My program fully" (Acts 13:22 Amplified) points to the entire theocratic project. "Do everything I want him to do" (Acts 13:22 NIV) looks more narrowly at David's individual projects within the larger program. The Old Testament makes the choice clear, for First Samuel 13:14 uses parallel language concerning an isolated act of Saul, and First Samuel 15:23, 26 confirms this.

God had a special plan for the earthly sojourn of Jesus Christ. Much of this plan was publicized in the Old Testament beforehand (Matthew 5:17).

In particular, the Messiah's place of domicile was chosen for Him (Matthew 4:13-14, "He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and

Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet...). Once He left carpentry, His vocation was a foregone conclusion: Christ won souls (Luke 4:16-21; 19:10; John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work"¹); He exorcised and healed (Matthew 8:16-17, "He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill; in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet..."); He taught parabolically (Matthew 13:34-35, "so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled"). His was to be a life of suffering (John 15:20b with 25, "in order that the word might be fulfilled"). God wanted Him to undergo a special sacrificial death (Luke 22:42; Acts 3:15, 18; Hebrews 10:7, 9²) including betrayal (Matthew 27:9; John 13:18, 21), calm arrest (Matthew 26:53-56, "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?"), legs not being broken (John 19:33 with 36) and the cry "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). More lies ahead, for the Son must resurrect the saints (John 6:38-40, "this is the will of Him who sent Me").

¹Three factors define "will" in this verse to be God's will that Jesus win souls: (1) "Food" bespeaks daily life rather than the cross, (2) This verse responds to verse thirty-one, where the disciples allude to their search for bread, during which absence Jesus had spoken with the Samaritan woman, (3) John 4:35ff concern soul-winning.

²Two factors define "will" in this verse: (1) Each verse of the context shows that the performance of this will is sacrifice, (2) Verse ten specifically defines this "will" to be Christ going to the cross as a man.

The lives of the apostles offer further proof that God plans the amoral aspects of the believer's life. The Twelve were taught to pray, "Do not lead us into temptation" (Matthew 6:13 parallel Luke 11:4). This prayer assumes that the Father does indeed lead the disciples, and the leading is spatial.¹ The Eleven were to stay in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4), and were directed to the temple (Acts 5:20). Their words were directed as they spoke in other languages at Pentecost (Acts 2:4ff).

Peter was told to get dressed in Acts 12:8 and then followed God's ordained pathway out of the prison (Acts 12:9-10).

Paul tells Timothy that his entire life was mapped out by God in Second Timothy 4:7 when he employs the term δρόμος ("course") to evoke the image of a divinely constructed race track.² The extent of God's planning is very broad here, for Paul is reviewing his entire ministry. In Acts 20:24 the same word δρόμος is used in a similar setting.

¹The idea of spatiality derives from an understanding of temptation that is equivalent to persecution. See Konrad Weiss, "φέρω, ἀναφέρω, τὰ διαφέροντα, διαφοράς (ἀδιαφορον), εἰσφέρω, προσφέρω, προσφορά, συμφέρω, συμφορος, φόρος, φορέω, φορτίον, φορτιζω," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IX, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 64.

²This definition derives from the three usages of the word in the New Testament: (1) In Acts 13:25 there is an allusion to Isaiah 40:1-3. The clause "and as John fulfilled his course" is superfluous if it is not God's course; (2) Acts 20:24 links the word to Paul's commission, which this verse calls God's revelation to Paul concerning his life path; (3) Paul has achieved nothing in Second Timothy 4:7 if he has completed a course that God has not designed.

It must be remembered that for Paul the ministry was the whole of life, not just a large segment. God arranged in advance for Paul to be a teacher (Colossians 1:25 NIV, "the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fulness"); a preacher (Acts 9:15; Galatians 1:15-16); a witness (Acts 22:15; 26:16); a minister (Acts 26:16; Colossians 1:25, "Of this church I was made a minister"). He was destined to suffer (Acts 9:16; 20:23; 21:11, 14). God led him in his first steps as a Christian (Acts 22:10, "Go on into Damascus"); throughout the first missionary journey (Acts 13:2, 4 "the work to which I have called them" and "sent out by the Holy Spirit") as for example in Acts 13:4-6 which mentions Seleucia, Cyprus and Salamis including Paphos; during portions of the third journey (Acts 21:14; 23:11; Romans 1:10; First Corinthians 16:7); and after his Roman imprisonment (Philemon 22).¹ His words were often guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:9ff; Second Peter 3:15-16).

Acts 13:2, 4 says that Barnabas' life during the first missionary venture of the Church was planned by God. Barnabas was an apostle.

Silas, another apostle, traveled a foreordained path during at least part of the second missionary trip (Acts 16:6-10).

The apostolic associates are also singled out in this way in Scripture, so that the general fact of amoral

¹The verse says "I will be given to you." Since this is the result of prayer, God must be the Agent.

predestination is reiterated more specifically.

There may be direct evidence that Apollos' place of ministry during part of the third missionary journey was determined by God (First Corinthians 16:12b).¹

Colossians 4:17 may refer to Archippus' call to the Colossian pastorate.² This call is extended immediately by Paul and ultimately by God.

The Scriptural record specifies that God had a plan for Aristarchus, Gaius of Derbe, Luke, Secundus, Sopater, Timothy, Trophimus and Tychicus. Acts 21:14 shows that the question of their travel to Jerusalem during the third missionary journey was settled in advance.³

The determination of part of John Mark's amoral pathway is mentioned in Acts 13:4-5.

Philip's course was divinely arranged, and again the fact is known even without Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 1:11. He was directed to a particular road, and then to a certain chariot on that road (Acts 8:26, 29).

Stephen's words were directed (Acts 6:9 with 10;

¹"It was not God's will that he should go now" (First Corinthians 16:12b, Amplified). So also Gottlob Schrenk, "θέλω, θέλημα, θέλησις," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. III, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 59. But others refer θέλημα ("will") to Apollos rather than to God.

²See William Hendriksen, Exposition of Colossians and Philemon, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), pp. 198-99.

³Acts 20:4-6 shows that these were the men who were involved in Acts 21:14.

7:2ff with 55).

Simeon, Lucius and Manaean were directed in the work of commissioning (Acts 13:1-3).

In addition to the immediate apostolic associates, several men experienced leading--which is the expression of divine intention--when they had contact with the apostles.

Ananias was given very specific directions relative to Paul: "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying" (Acts 9:11).

God planned for Cornelius to summon Peter to himself (Acts 10:3-5).

The words of Agabus were foreordained (Acts 11:28). They were directed to Paul.

The words of the disciples who had been baptized in relation to John the Baptist were also ordained (Acts 19:6).

Lastly, a small amount of biblical information on this subject relates to completely "ordinary" Christians. The smallness of this corpus of data should be expected, since the Bible deals with major people and events in the historical sections, and doctrinal material tends to treat moral issues, which are of greater importance than amoral leading.

Luke 21:21-22 ("flee to the mountains") and Revelation 21:24b ("the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it," i.e., into the eternal city) fall into this category, although they speak to saints of the future and are not directed to individuals.

Matthew 6:13 and Luke 11:4 have been mentioned above in connection with the Twelve. These verses probably also apply to "ordinary" believers of both Jesus' day and the present. They imply that God leads saints in amoral matters such as persecution. Similarly, Acts 21:14 ("The will of the Lord be done!") refers to God's will concerning the apostle Paul, but the implication is that the Lord has a will (an intention) for every believer in every situation. In this case suffering at Jerusalem is in view. First Peter 3:17 confirms that Christians suffer because of God's plan; so also First Peter 4:19. According to James 4:15, God decides when each believer dies and whether business plans will come to pass.

Does God Reveal His Plans for Individuals?

So far as the amoral pathway of Jesus Christ is concerned, the Old Testament messianic prophecies unveiled much information in advance. Besides the Old Testament, the Son possessed prophetic prerogatives. John 8:28 ("When you lift up the Son of Man," predicting the crucifixion) illustrates this phenomenon, where Christ knows in advance the manner of His death. Other passages are Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22; 13:33; 24:19; John 3:14; 4:19; 5:19-20, 30; 6:14; 8:26-27; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24; 15:15; 17:6-8, 26; Acts 3:22-23 and parallel Deuteronomy 18:15; cf. Matthew 21:11, 46; Luke 7:16; John 7:40; 9:17. The newness of the Master's teaching (e.g., Matthew 24:5-11) also implies that He was a prophet.

The apostles enjoyed the prophetic ministry of Jesus, when for example He told them that they would meet a man with a pitcher and be led into a certain house (Luke 22:10-12 parallel Matthew 26:18 parallel Mark 14:13-15). More examples may be found in Matthew 21:1ff parallel Mark 11:1ff parallel Luke 19:29ff; Luke 22:36, 38. Paul (Acts 13:1) and Silas (Acts 15:32) were prophets, and Barnabas probably was also, since apostles are so closely linked with prophets in the New Testament¹ and Barnabas himself is closely associated with the prophets of Acts 13:1-2. Being prophets, all of these men often discovered God's plans for their lives in advance.

The apostolic associates knew much of God's will by virtue of the apostles' directives. When Paul went to a city his co-laborers went with him. Legates were instructed where to minister. Advice would be readily available from the apostles.

Even the apostles did not always know what was next

¹Walter Schmithals develops this point in The Office of Apostle in the Early Church, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 31. Paul's prophetic office is taken for granted because of his apostolic office (First Corinthians 11:23; Second Corinthians 4:6; 5:20; Galatians 1:11-12), and his use of the phrase τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου ("my Gospel") alludes to his privileged position as a messenger of God (as in Ephesians 3:1-6). See Romans 2:16; 16:25; First Thessalonians 1:5; Second Timothy 2:8. J. B. Lightfoot similarly concludes that "the two order seem to have been closely allied to each other in the nature of their spiritual gifts, though the Apostle was superior in rank and had administrative functions which were wanting to the prophet," in St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes, and Dissertations, 4th ed. (London: MacMillan and Company, 1874), p. 97.

for them on God's agenda (see below on hesitancy in planning), and those without access to a prophet do well to assume that they cannot know their amoral future in advance.

CHAPTER II

METHODS OF GUIDANCE

Unambiguous methods

Old Testament Prophecy

Jesus had to decide whether or not to call for divine assistance when the crucifixion began to loom large on the horizon, and He made this decision based on concrete amoral Scripture (Matthew 26:53-56 parallel Mark 14:48-50). Other examples of God's people using the Old Testament in this way are found in Matthew 4:12-13 with Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 8:4 parallel Mark 1:43-44 parallel Luke 5:14 with Leviticus 13:49 and 14:2-32; Matthew 21:1ff parallel Mark 11:1ff parallel Luke 19:29ff with Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:11; Acts 1:16-17, 20-21 with Psalm 69:25 and 109:8.

Chain of Command

The Twelve were led in very many geographic and other amoral matters by Christ, beginning in Matthew 4:19-22 (parallel Mark 1:17-20 parallel Luke 5:3-4, 11) where Simon is asked to put out his boat a small distance from the shore.

The apostles in turn directed their associates. Two apostolic legates were directed to Corinth by Paul (Second Corinthians 8:18; 9:3; 12:17-18). One of them received his call to the apostolic assistantship by the

appointment or election of the churches (Second Corinthians 8:19).

Unambiguous amoral guidance is still available today through civil and ecclesiastical authority (Romans 13:1, 5; Hebrews 13:17; First Peter 2:13); through employers, husbands and fathers (Ephesians 5:22; 6:1, 5; Colossians 3:18, 20, 22; First Peter 2:18; 3:1).

Selection of Officers

The details of the New Testament procedure for determining who will govern in the local assembly are not certain. The proceedings were largely uncontrolled by the candidates themselves at any rate, so from their standpoint the process was unambiguous. The results of the process were unquestioned. In Acts 1:15-26 Matthias is nominated and then chosen by lot. The seven food commissioners of Acts 6:1-6 are selected by the congregation of the Jerusalem church and then installed by the apostles. In the case of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (Acts 14:23), as well as in the situation at Ephesus (First Timothy 3:1-13), the elders may have been elected, appointed, or both. At Crete (Titus 1:5-9) the presbyters evidently were appointed, although this ordination may again have been a ratification of election results. The common denominator binding all of these diverse cases? "The Holy Spirit has made you (officers)" (Acts 20:28, emphasis supplied).

Miraculous Media

One kind of miraculous leading has been the personal

involvement of the Lord Jesus Christ. His guidance prior to the crucifixion may be considered prophetic, and His guidance after the resurrection miraculous. A classic illustration of this phenomenon occurs in Acts 9:5-7. Jesus personally tells Saul to go to Damascus for further instructions. Nothing in the four Lukan descriptions of Paul's conversion (Acts 9:5-7; 9:17; 22:9-10; 26:13-18) intimates that Paul was merely in a trance. In fact, this appearance of Christ was so real that the bystanders saw the blinding light of His glory (Acts 22:9) and heard the voice (Acts 9:7). The Master acted in much the same way in Matthew 26:32 with 28:10, 16; Acts 7:2-3 parallel Hebrews 11:8-9 parallel Genesis 12:1, 7; Acts 7:30ff parallel Exodus 3:4ff; possibly Acts 23:11.

A second type of miraculous leading is that provided by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit controls the gifts of prophecy (Acts 19:6; First Corinthians 12:3, 7, 11, which deals with the whole subject of gifts) and revelation (implied by First Corinthians 14:26), and He has used these gifts to direct the amoral affairs of men. The Son of Man said, "When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you should say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:11-12). Other occurrences are in Matthew 4:1 parallel Mark 1:12 parallel Luke 4:1; Matthew 10:5-23 parallel Mark 6:8-11 parallel Luke 9:3-5; Matthew 16:21 (knowledge to the exact day); Matthew 21:1ff

parallel Mark 11:1ff parallel Luke 19:29ff; Matthew 21:12-13 parallel Mark 11:15-16 parallel Luke 19:45; Matthew 21:19 parallel Mark 11:13-14; Matthew 26:18 parallel Mark 14:13-15 parallel Luke 22:10-12; Luke 2:25-27; 12:11-12; Acts 6:9-10; 8:29, 39(!); 10:19-20 with 23 with 11:12; 10:38; 11:28; 13:2, 4, 9ff; 15:6ff with 28; 16:6b-7; 19:6; cf. 19:21 with 20:22; 20:28; 21:4, 10-11; First Corinthians 12:10, 29; 13:2, 8; 14:1, 3-6, 22, 24, 29-32, 37, 39 (this chapter deals with edification but allows for amoral issues also); Galatians 2:1-2; Philippians 1:19 (implied by Paul's trust); 2:24 (implied again by Paul's trust); Hebrews 11:29 (implied --see Exodus 14:15ff); James 5:15 (implied by the unconditional promise of answered prayer).

The Holy Spirit not only employs the gifts of prophecy and revelation to guide God's children. He has also used the gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues. He controls these gifts (Acts 2:4; 19:6; 10:44-46; First Corinthians 12:3, 7, 11, which deals with the whole subject of gifts). They appear in passages like Acts 2:4, where "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." (Speeches in the Acts may be considered amoral since only the *précis* are inspired, not the original words. The point is that the concepts spoken had to be true--morally correct--but the truth could be expressed in a number of acceptable ways. If the speeches were inspired, even the expression of the truth would be a matter of right or wrong.) See also Acts 10:44-46; 19:6; First Corinthians 13:8-9;

12:10, 30; 14:1, 4-6, 13-14, 18-19, 21-23, 26-28, 39).

Finally, the third Person of the Trinity can bestow the gifts of discerning of prophets (First Corinthians 12:3, 7, 11, which deals with the whole subject of gifts), word of knowledge (First Corinthians 12:8) and word of wisdom (First Corinthians 12:8). The use of these gifts is discussed in First Corinthians 12:10; 14:29, 32; in First Corinthians 12:8; 13:8; 14:6; and in First Corinthians 12:8 respectively.

Christ and the Spirit guide; so do angels. The shepherds learned in advance that they would find the Messiah as a "baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:9-12). Angels make real appearances for the purpose of directing or revealing the amoral future for a person in: Matthew 28:6-7; Luke 1:26-38; Acts 5:19-20; 8:26; 10:3-6 parallel 10:30-33 parallel 11:13-14; 12:7ff; 27:10 with 27:22-26, 31.

Leading is accomplished through signs, as the shepherds will again attest (Luke 2:9-12 "this will be a sign for you"). See also Matthew 2:2, 9ff.

Visions and dreams constitute the last area of the Spirit's activity. A vision may be considered real, while a dream is purely subjective; both find the recipient in a sleep-like state. The trance may be natural or suddenly induced; it may be at night or in the daylight.

The above definitions are helpful, but are not shared by the biblical authors. Luke uses the same Greek expression for that which is real (Acts 10:3-6 parallel

10:30-33 parallel 11:13-14) and that which is purely subjective (Acts 16:6-9)!

The New Testament visions have been listed above under the discussions concerning the personal leading of Jesus (pages nineteen and twenty) and the angels (page twenty-two). The dreams appear in Matthew 1:20 (angel); 2:12, 13, 19-20, 22-23 (in each case the dream is about an angel); 27:19 (something that causes a painful experience); Luke 1:11 with 22 (angel); Acts 2:17 (bis; unspecified); 9:10-11 (Lord), 12 (Ananias); 11:5ff (sheet); 16:9-12 (a Macedonian); 18:9-10 (Lord); 22:17-21 (Lord); 23:11 (Lord; but this may be a vision).

What should be the contemporary reaction to the fact that the Holy Spirit led God's people in miraculous ways in times past? The proper reaction will take at least four factors into account.

(1) Independently verifiable leading--such as a star in the East--should regularly appear. Any movement that claims to reproduce New Testament Christianity must reproduce this major aspect of it.

(2) Jesus and Paul were notable for their planning and praying, and these factors were more important in their guidance than were miraculous means (see below under Methods of Guidance). Most leading--even for the apostles --was non-miraculous and non-obvious. In the second half of the Book of Acts (chosen because of (4) below) the number of unexplained, non-miraculous decisions made is astounding: Acts 15:2-3, 22, 33-41; 16:1-6a, 8, 13, 15,

28, 34, 37, 40; 17:1-2, 10, 14-15, 16ff; 18:1-7; 11, 18-19, 22-23, 26-27; 19:1ff, 8-9; cf. 19:21 with 20:22; 19:22, 30-31; 20:1-7, 11, 16-17, 38; 21:4-6, 7-8, 12-16, 17-19, 26, 37ff; 22:25ff; 24:10ff; 26:1ff; 28:17ff, 30. The number of express or implicit references to the miraculous leading of God in these same chapters is very small in comparison. No indication is given that these decisions were made on a prophetic basis, much less through signs, angels, etc.

(3) There is no promise that believers today will receive the same gifts that the early Church received; and if there were, there would still be no right to expect miraculous leading, since the apostles themselves did not expect it.¹ They accepted it with surprise on the few occasions that it came. In point of fact, the apostles were uniquely strategic in God's program--as was Christ--and the affairs in which they were led were just as crucial. They were not led in the everyday affairs of life.² Prophets are unnecessary today. They would add nothing special to the Body of Christ!

(4) The Book of Acts itself exhibits the decline of miraculous leading! The first half of the book continues the tone set by Acts 2:4ff. The Spirit makes Himself known! Miraculous leading is assumed, and mentioned almost at

¹See Hamilton W. Lewis, "Divine Guidance in the New Testament," Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974, pp. 52-53.

²Ibid., pp. 27-28.

random: Acts 4:8ff; 29-31, 33; 6:9-10; 8:29, 39. Acts 13 is "framed" by miracles, as though the intervening events were summarized thus. The Holy Spirit empowers every sermon (Acts 5:32), but Luke seldom bothers to remind the reader of this fact. Acts 13:2-4 indicates that the whole of the first missionary journey is the Spirit's work, but the writer sees no need to remind Theophilus continually of the fact. Miraculous leading is implied in Acts 2:14ff, 43-46; 3:7, 12ff; 4:32, 34-37; 5:3ff, 12, 29-31; 6:2ff, 5-6; 7:2ff; 8:4ff, 25, 30, 35ff; 9:30, 38-39, 40, 43; 10:23, 34ff, 46, 48b; 11:2, 19-20, 22, 25-26, 27, 30; 12:12, 17, 25; 13:13-14, 42, 44, 51; 14:3, 6, 9-10, 14, 20-21, 23-28.

Yet after the first journey has ended, Luke finds other subjects to record. The Holy Spirit, His filling, His miracles (including leading), His unifying effects, His conversions--all decrease greatly. They are largely replaced by the first doctrinal dissension and an apologetic travelogue. Could Luke have changed his historian's perspective because of a change in history?

The epistles show fewer miracles and more problems than does Acts in the pre-epistolary chapters. In fact, the spectacular conversions of Acts 2:41 and 4:4 were apparently not duplicated by even the ten subsequent chapters, and Acts 15:6-7; 15:37-40; 21:12-14; 23:3-5; 25:11 with 26:32 present thorny problems that seem to preclude spiritual attitudes.

Persecution

Amoral leading can occur when circumstances overwhelm the individual. "Lead us not into testing" the disciples were taught to pray (Matthew 6:13, lit. trans.; parallel Luke 11:4).¹ Peter agrees that persecution can be a part of God's will for the individual (First Peter 3:17, "if God should will it so" and 4:19, "according to the will of God").

¹Heinrich Seesemann agrees that this verse speaks of testing rather than temptation: "πειρά, πειράω, πειράζω, πειρασμός, ἀπειραστός, ἐκπειράζω," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VI, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), pp. 30-31.

Methods Demanding Greater Responsibility

Attitudes

God expects submissive flexibility (James 4:13-16, "If the Lord wills") and submissive obedience (Luke 22:42, "Not My will, but Thine be done"). The Israelites regretted that they resisted God's Word and God's Spirit when He recompensed their moral failing with amoral calamity. They wandered in the wilderness for forty years (Hebrews 3:19)! The adiabhorous chapters in Paul offer guidelines as well (see pages three and five above).

Principles

The apostle Paul lived single-mindedly. In order to fulfill more effectively his commission, he established self-limitations. For example, he limited his itinerary to churches that he would start, or had started (Romans 15:20-22).

First Corinthians 7:17-28 explicates a principle that is especially important for the persecuted Church (verse twenty-six). The status quo should be maintained in amoral matters--occupation, social position, marital status and optional religious symbols.

Plans

Paul frequently made plans to go to Rome (Romans 1:13; 15:22, 24 NIV), and he resolved to go to Corinth (Second Corinthians 1:15, 17). James 4:15, far from forbidding planning, promotes it when God's sovereignty is duly regarded.

With what finality may plans be made? Paul seems quite certain in Romans 15:24, 28 that he will go to Spain, and in Romans 15:25, 28 that he will go to Jerusalem. He knows furthermore that he will go directly to Jerusalem and only later to Spain. In First Corinthians 16:3a, 5 he apparently knows that God will be pleased by a trip to Corinth, for he leaves no possibility open that he will not arrive there. In First Corinthians 16:5 a trip through Macedonia is definite. In First Corinthians 16:7a it seems clear from the context that he is sure about his future course. In First Corinthians 16:8 a stay in Ephesus is mandatory but in Acts 20:16, 38 it must with as great a certainty be avoided and will never happen again. Another journey to Corinth must take place (Second Corinthians 12:20-21). Paul knows he will be delivered from prison at one juncture (Philippians 1:19; 2:24) and knows he will not be at another (Second Timothy 4:6). Definite travel plans are revealed in Hebrews 13:19 ("I may be restored to you the sooner" implies that the author will indeed come, even if it is later than desired), 23 ("with whom, if he comes soon, I shall see you" implies that he will leave before Timothy comes if Timothy delays).

On the other hand, Paul did not know if he would return to Ephesus or not on one occasion (Acts 18:21). He was at one time unsure about a trip to Jerusalem (First Corinthians 16:3-4), about the length of a stay in Corinth (First Corinthians 16:6a, 7b), and about his further destination (First Corinthians 16:6b). At a later time he did

not know if he would be coming to Corinth at all (Second Corinthians 13:2b). The apostle did not know for sure if he would be able to see the Romans shortly (Romans 1:10). Timothy (First Corinthians 16:10a), Apollos (First Corinthians 16:12) and Mark (Colossians 4:10) all had unsettled plans despite their close cooperation with Paul. The author of Hebrews shows uncertainty (13:19, where the timing is uncertain, and 13:23, where Timothy's plans are undecided). John can only say that he "hopes" to see the chosen lady and her children (Second John 12) and Gaius (Third John 14).

Desires

Whim is not desire. New Testament figures evince a purposiveness that breeds settled, principled desires. Emotions are not an exclusive means of guidance, but they can play a significant role in it. Jesus healed a group of sick people because of compassion (Matthew 14:14; also Matthew 20:32, 34). According to First Corinthians 16:6-7, Paul's personal wishes governed the time and length of one of his stays in Corinth. His desires stimulate his requests for opportunity to go to Rome in Romans 1:9-11 and 15:23-24. Timothy came to Paul because Paul wanted him to (Acts 16:3), and Timothy left Paul for Thessalonica because Paul's emotions dictated it (First Thessalonians 3:1). Barnabas' desire (Acts 15:37-39) caused him to take John Mark with him ("such a sharp irritation" lit. trans.). See also Acts 18:27; First Corinthians 7:39; Hebrews 13:19, 23; Second John 12. Negatively, annoyance (Acts 16:18)

and distress (Acts 17:16-17; Second Corinthians 2:13) can be legitimate signposts to God's will.

Prayer

Paul asks "What should I do?" (Acts 22:10) and is told to go to Corinth. He asks for opportunity to go to Rome (Romans 1:10) and to Thessalonica (First Thessalonians 3:10-11). His prayer is continuing, earnest and pointed. So was it also with the Lord Jesus (Matthew 26:39-44 parallel Mark 14:35-41; parallel Luke 22:41-44). Paul and Christ did not ask to know God's will, but that their own desires would be realized! When the heart is without definite direction, prayer is offered through an Interpreter: "We do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26, where the thing requested is probably related to release from suffering, which is amoral). It is furthermore remarkable that both Paul and Jesus received "No" for an answer. Unless miraculous leading chances to come while the saint is at prayer (as Acts 10:2-3), it is futile to wait for so-called "impressions." Prayer is not two-way communication. Lastly, Matthew 6:13 (parallel Luke 11:4) and several other texts depict saints rightfully asking for more favorable circumstances. God does not disdain such a petition. For other examples of prayer for self concerning amoral matters see Mark 1:35-39; Luke 6:12-13; Acts 1:24ff.

The prayers of others also affect amoral matters in one's life. In Second Corinthians 1:10-11 the Corinthians

will participate in Paul's deliverance from future persecution. In Philippians 1:19 the Philippians will share responsibility for Paul's release from prison. Philemon 22 reveals that Philemon, Apphia, Archippus and the church that meets in Philemon's house will help Paul to come to them by praying to that end. Other verses proving this principle are Romans 15:30-32; Colossians 4:12; Hebrews 13:19.

Circumstances

Interpreted by priorities

Paul took Silas with him rather than John Mark (Acts 15:37-40). This decision was based on his evaluation¹ of Mark's conduct under previous circumstances. It was more important to Paul to travel without Mark than it was to travel with Barnabas!

In Acts 20:16-17 Paul makes a visit to Jerusalem at Pentecost a higher priority than visiting the Asian congregations, even though this means seeing only the elders of the church at Ephesus.

¹At Acts 15:38, the New American Standard Bible, Text edition (La Habra, California: Foundation Press Publications, 1960) and William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, fourth revised and augmented edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 78, see a concept of insistence rather than evaluation. But the older commentators (e.g., Alford, Holtzmann, Lechler, Luther, Meyer and Thayer) stay with the latter meaning, which is closer to the root meaning of the word. A majority of modern scholars probably maintains this older view (e.g., Föhrster, New English Bible, New International Version, Revised Standard Version, Robertson and Schlachter).

Paul had to go to Spain (Romans 1:13; 15:20-28), and to pass through Rome would be convenient. He wrote them that he would finally come! His lowest priority was to get to Rome, however, for he normally preached only in unreached areas, and at the moment there was an even more important need to care for concerning Jerusalem.

It is important to remain in the position in which you are called, but it is more important to accept an offer of emancipation when conditions are ripe (First Corinthians 7:17-28).

Paul arranged a rendezvous with Titus. Titus broke the appointment due to circumstances beyond his control, so Paul went on to Macedonia. The number one priority was to find Titus; the second item on the apostle's list was to take the divinely afforded opportunity to preach the Gospel !

Other examples are found in First Thessalonians 2:17 - 3:2; Hebrews 13:23.

Interpreted by logic

Common sense is biblical! "Because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tentmakers" (Acts 18:3). "When a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia" (Acts 20:3). Other references are: Luke 9:11; Acts 8:1; 9:20 (also 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19, 16; 19:8); 9:23-25; 13:50; 16:13, 37; 17:5-10; 19:8-9; 21:39ff; 22:

25ff; 24:10ff; 26:1ff; 28:17ff.

Interpreted by need

This topic overlaps with those already discussed, but deserves separate mention. Christ and the apostles often performed their miracles on the basis of need, as in Matthew 21:14 ("the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them") and Matthew 9:35; 14:14. They responded more generally to needs also: Matthew 9:18-20, 27-29; 20:32, 34; Philippians 2:19-21, 25; First Thessalonians 3:1ff. On the other hand, one cannot respond to every need (Luke 5:15-16; Second Corinthians 2:13).

Opinions of Others

As in Acts 21:14, where Paul "would not be persuaded," the advice of others will not always be accepted. See also Acts 15:37-40; 19:30; 21:4, 12-13. But as Lydia persuaded Paul (Acts 16:15) and the brethren reassured Apollos by their agreement with him (Acts 18:27), the opinions of other people can provide divine guidance. See also Acts 15:2, 22, 25, 36.

CHAPTER III

INAPPLICABLE TEXTS

Some very popular verses on guidance have been eliminated from this study. These texts are important and precious to the Christian. It will be shown, however, that they do not contribute to the specific topic discussed in this paper.

Matthew 12:50.--This verse refers to God's will in moral matters, for only this will could be the watershed of an individual's salvation.

John 7:17.--In this verse, knowledge is promised to those who are prepared to submit to God's will. This knowledge concerns "the teaching," which refers to the doctrine that Christ explained in the temple. It is safe to assume that the content of His instruction there was basic, moral and derived from the Old Testament Scriptures, because: (1) This was the character of all that Christ taught, (2) The teaching prompted listeners to think of the training in rabbinical schools. In addition, John 7:17 was promised to unbelievers as well as to believers. The verse has little to say in a discussion of amoral Christian leading.

John 8:12.--The "light" of which Jesus speaks is that which brings salvation. There is no indication that amoral information is included here.

John 10:3-4, 9, 16, 27.--These verses all speak of leading that results in conversion.

John 14:16, 26.--The Spirit is given in order to teach. This teaching is doctrinal, however, for it is like Christ's and includes theological content such as is found in John 14:23ff.

John 16:13-14.--Theological facts such as those presented in John 16:7-11 are meant.

Romans 2:15.--The conscience discerns within the moral realm.

Romans 8:14.--This text is particularly popular. It has been adduced by so discerning an exegete as Charles C. Ryrie.¹ An examination of the preceding context shows that Romans 8:14 refers to what ought to be done, to what the flesh does and to spiritual life and death. Charles R. Smith's summary of the meaning of Romans 8:14 corroborates this interpretation: "Mortifying sinful desires and practices."² The Spirit gives believers a sense of right and wrong, and they follow that prompting. This same leading emerges in Romans 8:4c, 5b, 13b, 16.

Romans 12:1-2.--The Romans are to dedicate their bodies and be transformed rather than conformed to the

¹Charles Caldwell Ryrie, The Holy Spirit (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 105. He apparently understands Romans 8:14 as referring to leadership in amoral areas, for he illustrates it with Acts 8:29; 10:19-20; 13:2, 4; 16:6-7; 20:22-23.

²Charles R. Smith, "Are There Guidelines? God's Will in Your Life" Grace Alumnews (Spring 1977): 2.

world. The result will then be the proving of God's will. Is it proper to assume that will in this passage refers to God's amoral plans or preferences? No. Something far more important is behind the word. This will is that the Gentiles should be grafted into the kingdom, causing rebellious Israel to become envious and ultimately to believe. This plan of God has been recently referred to by Paul as His judgments, His ways, the mind of the Lord (Romans 11:33-34).

First Corinthians 11:32.--Saints are chastened or disciplined by the Lord. Bertram¹ indicates that instruction must be moral since it corresponds to sinful behavior and condemnation in this passage. As Hebrews 12:11 says, discipline aims at holiness.

Galatians 5:18, 25.--It is possible to be led by and to walk by the Spirit. Both the results of this leading and the results of fleshly leading are amoral (verses twenty-two through twenty-six). It is wonderful for the Christian to know that the Holy Spirit steers him toward righteous character! Yet there is no hint of guidance in amoral affairs of life here.

Ephesians 5:10, 17.--Learning and understanding God's will is required of Christians. These two verses are parallel, with verses eight to seventeen giving the principles of knowing God's will and verses eighteen and

¹Georg Bertram, "παιδεύω, παιδεία, παιδευτής, ἀ-παιδευτος, παιδαγωγός," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. V, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 596-624.

following delineating the specifics of knowing it. Those specifics are moral.

Philippians 2:13.--This verse is the basis for fear in the process of sanctification (verse twelve). It is the incentive for obedience. The primary interpretation of the verse must therefore be moral. There may be an additional, amoral element involved, but it cannot be proven to exist, either on the basis of language or context. It is safest to eliminate this passage from this study.

Philippians 3:15.--The Philippians are promised revelation. This revelation may be more specifically labeled conviction. If a child of God fails to seek to appropriate what God intends for His children to have, then God will show this fact to the individual. This text describes a situation where an attitude problem exists, and sin has been committed. It is moral.

Philippians 4:7.--This verse does not say that there is peace within God's amoral will, but rather within the prayer closet.

Colossians 1:9.--Paul prays that the Colossians will know God's will. The moral quality of this will is evident from the next verse ("worthy of the Lord ... please Him"). Charles R. Smith identifies God's will in this passage with biblical revelation.¹

Colossians 3:15.--Christians are to see that peace

¹Charles R. Smith, "Are There Guidelines? God's Will in Your Life," Grace Alumnews (Spring 1977): 3.

reigns in their hearts, which would presumably make inner peace a confirmation of divine guidance. But the peace of which the author here speaks is that harmony between members of the Church which accompanies forgiveness, patience and other virtues that befit those who have been chosen by God. Personal tranquility is not in view.

Colossians 3:16.--Wise counsel of other Christians has been suggested as a means of finding or confirming God's guidance on the basis of this verse. But this wisdom for teaching and admonishing resides in the word of Christ, which probably refers to prophetic revelation.¹ The concept parallels that in Colossians 1:9.

First Thessalonians 5:18.--God's will here is moral and specific: "In everything give thanks." The injunctions to "rejoice always" and to "pray without ceasing" may also be included in God's will in this passage.

Titus 2:12.--God's grace instructs. There is no hint that this instruction goes beyond character, which is expressed in phrases like "deny ungodliness."

Philemon 12-15.--It would have been unethical for

¹This expression is unique in the New Testament and defies exact definition. Perhaps some mention of the Holy Spirit would be expected if subjective, nonprophetic wisdom were in view. Apparently only Lightfoot sees "no direct reference in this expression to any definite body of truths either written or oral." J. B. Lightfoot, Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. A Revised Text With Introduction, Notes and Dissertations (New York: MacMillan and Company, 1879; reprint edition, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 224.

Paul to have forced Philemon to let Onesimus stay with him. No priorities among amoral choices exist here.

James 1:5.--Wisdom stems from perseverance and is an integral element of maturity. "For James wisdom is a morally upright walk, 3:13, 17f."¹ This definition is unnatural to the western mind, being the result of the refinement of Jewish wisdom literature and the opposing definitions of wisdom espoused by James' opponents.

James 3:17.--Verses thirteen through seventeen reveal that James equates wisdom with godliness.

First Peter 2:15.--Since Peter defines will of God as "doing right" in order to silence the unsaved, it is a moral phrase here.

First Peter 4:2.--The phrase will of God is defined by verses seven and following, which deal with attitudes that are moral. Verses three and four contrast God's will to sinful acts that express the will of unsaved individuals. Being sinful, they are moral.

First John 2:27.--Believers are taught concerning all things. The term all things means "all things about the Person of Jesus Christ," in this context. This restriction is suggested by: (1) John's concern, which is Gnosticism, (2) John's style, which is brevity, (3) John's character, which is Christ-centeredness. If the all things

¹Ulrich Wilckens and Georg Fohrer, "σοφία, σοφός, σοφίζω," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VII, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 524.

were unrestricted, it would introduce utterly superfluous thoughts into the argument, obscuring it. In verse twenty-one the truth is mentioned, yet in the next verse the truth proves to be nothing more than the messiahship of Jesus. So is it also with all things in this passage. John assumes that his thought is being closely monitored, so that careful definitions of words do not have to be multiplied.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to amoral issues, God is more interested in training His children than in giving them information. He wants them to learn to pray, reason, and so forth so that they will increase in holiness.

Amoral guidance is in one sense a misnomer, for in this present age all such guidance is providential. God seldom shows the believer where he is going.

The realization that God gives the believer full freedom in some areas of his life should not be dismaying. That realization actually offers great encouragement and release from guilt and anxiety.

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