

The Doctrine Of Interaction

Lesson 12

The Issue: Most of us consider self-determinacy to be a right – and, in some cases, an absolute. Human beings operate by means of choices, which they believe can affect material outcomes. However, the Psalmist here encourages the reader to *prefer* the providence of God above all forms of self-determination of events and circumstance.

Underlying Assumptions as Expressed in Everyday Terms:

- 1) If “God helps those who help themselves,” then it becomes important to be very active in developing the direction in which one’s life is going to go. One must try and make the decisions that best suit the lifestyle intent of the individual. This is America, after all.
- 2) One should rely upon God, yes, that is true. But that reliance upon God does not give us an easy way out, so that we passively sit by and just wait for Him to act.
- 3) Most aspects of our life are under our control, to determine results and outcomes. We are free to do this and to achieve as much as we can.

The Generalization: There should be a preference for the providence of God over the sense of self-determination in interacting with the world of matter, energy and information.

The Scripture Passage: Psalms 25:12 – 15

The Lesson:

- 1) Here in this Psalm we find a mind occupied with preferences. Preferences are subjective. That is to say, they exist purely at the discretion of the holder.
- 2) One decides what one’s preferences are and will be. In addition, preferences harden up into a way of life. Thus it forms a loop in thinking: A way of life becomes the basis for reasoning about the preferences that stand behind that way of life.
- 3) We hear a lot about CHOICES. The psychologist Dr. Phil, for example, counsels individuals to make better choices. This is important, because choices have consequences.
- 4) The logic of choices is: If you do not like the consequences, then you should make different and better choices. This teaches us that outcomes in the field of matter and energy are the real driving element of the choices that we make.

5) However, there is a difference between a choice and a preference. Choice is related to material outcomes. Preferences, on the other hand, are related to our understanding of God.

6) In these verses we can see a clash between two inclinations:

- A) The preference for self-determinance, which means the ability to make choices that bring about desired outcomes
- B) However, the Psalmist would have us inclined instead toward a preference for providence:

“...the way chosen for him” v.12

“...prosperity and descendents” v.13

“...Lord confides” v.14

“...only he will release my feet from the snare” v.15

7) Preference comes from some place deeper than mere choice. APPARENTLY THE ENGINE THAT DRIVES PREFERENCE IS SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING!

8) The psalm describes a person who has such spiritual understanding-- “the man that fears the Lord” (verse 12), “those who fear him” (verse 14), “my eyes are ever on the Lord” (verse 15). These statements in the text symbolize a mind that comprehends certain fundamental truths:

- A) God exists
- B) God has a mind and a will
- C) God acts in the human sphere
- D) This action and presence of God will have personal and collective effects-- some good and some bad.

9) Thus such a person “fears” the Lord. He fixes his mind on God. Fear is attached to or focused on a certain understanding of God as He is! In other words, such a mind is focused on the Lord as He has revealed Himself. Not a mind making repeated choices, but one preferring the God who is.

(10) Consequently, some comprehensions of God do not engender fear nor preference for His ways. Our comprehension of God cannot be based on the human model, or a human starting point. A true comprehension of God must be given to us, it must be revealed. No comparison between God and man, with man as the anchor point, can be correct.

(11) Thus, fear of and preference for the revealed God provides for the interaction between God and man.

(12) We prefer providence because we believe that it is superior to self-determinance. We believe that the wisdom of God and the ways of God are superior to the wisdom and ways of man (as exemplified by human intelligence and experience).

(13) In summary, we can see that we prefer what we perceive to be superior – either autonomous choice, or preferring the ways of God.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What do you understand is meant by, “God helps those who help themselves”? Why do you think many Christians subscribe to this sentiment? Is it Biblical? Give examples from Scripture to support your answer.
- 2) According to the lesson, what is the difference between a choice and a preference?
- 3) Look over all of Psalm 25. Where do you see evidence of preference in the Psalmist’s language?
- 4) Does lack of spiritual understanding lead to certain kinds of choices? Explain your response. How could lack of spiritual understanding fuel the desire to make one’s own choices in life?
- 5) Look at Deuteronomy chapter 8. How does this chapter exemplify the distinction between preference and choice?
- 6) The book of Judges in the Old Testament outlines what happens when people operate more on choice than preference for God’s ways. How could it be said that Judges 21:25 sums up this book?
- 7) What choices have you made in your life that you can attribute to a lack of spiritual understanding? How did those choices reflect your view of the superiority of the idea of making choices?
- 8) How could you explain to a teenager the necessity of having a preference for God? How would you relate the concept of choice to this? What Biblical characters could you use as illustrations?
- 9) Think of a situation you are facing. What would help you be able to prefer the ways of God in this situation? What “internal” changes would be necessary?