

Dr. Gary Meadors, Knowing God's Will, Session 3, Patterns of Church Discernment of God's Will

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Welcome back to these lectures on Biblical Theology for Knowing God's Will. I expect by now you're wondering why so many subjects that seem not to be primarily related to that question. I'm not answering your question very quickly.

Well, I hope that you can see that we're building a foundation, a foundation in terms of this issue of the transformed mind, of making decisions from the standpoint of the Bible and its interaction with our culture and the research that's involved in trying to do that. Now, this lecture is GM3, and it's called The Patterns of Church Discernment. What I'm doing here in this particular presentation is to alert you to some of the ways in which the church in its larger venue has gone about dealing with issues about knowing God's will.

Typically, people think about knowing God's will on an individual basis, but that's because sometimes I think our culture is so focused on individualism that it doesn't realize that it's the church in its largest sense that is really what's crucial. And so, I want to take this time to talk about, in Lecture 3, Patterns of Church Discernment of God's Will, in which I'll give you some ideas and, of course, all these things you can follow up on yourself as well. So, you should have GM3 slides with you. There aren't very many slides, but there's an extensive note package.

So, be sure you have GM3 notes as well so that they can be there as we discuss this. As usual, I'll go through the notes. I won't just read them to you, even though I should probably read more of it because the sentences are carefully crafted, but nonetheless, we'll make our way through this.

I'm trying to do more of an overview in this particular domain. Excuse me. All right.

So, on page one of the notes relates to this issue, and if you just look there, I introduce it by many asking about what is the will of God for, and then you fill in the blank. And that question, as I've mentioned, is usually more in the personal domain than it is in the larger domain. And yet, the larger domain, in many ways, maybe more important.

But for us individually, should I marry? Should I go to college? And where should I go? What career should I pursue? Should I consider a change in career? For whom should I vote in this election? All those items that have been on previous charts come up once again individually, but the church has to deal with other things where

churches come to agreement as a congregation, as a denomination, in relation to gender, in relation to sexuality, in relation to war, and so many large topics of which every one of those has a huge body of literature debating the question of how do you understand those categories of war and gender and all the other larger issues of culture, politics, education, and so forth. Throughout church history, discerning God's will has a history in both the appropriate application of the Bible and the consensus judgment of the church when the Bible provides no direct instruction. In America, we have such a long history of individualism.

We have such a long history of independence, and we tend to force that into biblical categories. We don't think of churches making a decision. We think of us as a church or us as an individual making a decision.

But that's not the way that it happened in biblical times, nor is it the way it's happened in most of church history. So, let's jump into this and think about how the church has gone about categorizing and defining its pursuit of God's will. All right, categories the church has examined when it processes discernment.

We're going to see a variety of things in our handouts. The categories I'm going to talk about the church has examined are on pages one to three. As you can see, I've noted it on the slide.

The categories are identified. We're going to talk about identifying categories on pages one to three, and we're going to talk about delineating categories on pages three to five. All right, the identification of categories.

As you might expect, the dominant use in church history is Scripture. The whole Bible is our dominant category for discerning God's will in the world, particularly when we don't have a direct teaching about it but we're working off of implications and constructs. And in consort with Scripture and with the questions that are raised in the larger church, reason is a classic rational process.

Research in Scripture is what reflects reason. We have huge, huge libraries. Biblical studies and theology probably make up some of the biggest libraries in the world.

I used to go to a library in Chicago, which was a consortium of about six schools, and it had about a million volumes in religion. I used to do research in journals, and it was journals and books. A huge body of literature in the Western world has been generated to answer the questions about what the church thinks about this. What does the church think about that? Tradition, from the apostolic fathers to the development of denominations in the modern world, and not so modern back into the 1600s, certainly at least, we have strands of the tradition of how the Bible was viewed by churches under the umbrella of the church, the larger church.

I'm not talking about the Roman Catholic Church here, but I'm talking about the body of Christ, wherever it might be. And then there's experience. We all accrue certain experiences in the process of living Christianly ourselves, and those experiences become data for us to proceed in evaluating the questions that come to us.

We delineate experiences by theological systems many times and by denominations, which are part of the big tradition, and then you have all these minor traditions. So, a variety of groups have taken the lead, reflected in the early church, and created a process that has been adopted by many. It's interesting in the Western world, the Anglican John Wesley.

You think of Wesley from the standpoint of Methodism, the churches that have sprung from him, but Wesley was quite a scholar from Oxford, and he developed what became known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. And quad, of course, means four, so that was just a fancy term for what we just talked about: scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. And that became a major church grid in dealing with issues.

For example, if you brought war to this, and that's something the total church should be concerned and interested in, you go to scripture, you go to reason among the churches. The same thing was true in the early church when it studied Christology and Trinity and so forth. You look at tradition, and you look at experience.

All of that's important in making those decisions. His theory took three items that had long been recognized and brought in a fourth item, which, of course, for him, was on the experience side. Now, I'm not going to represent the Roman Catholic Church's model here.

That's a big chunk of the Western world, of course, but that's not in my purview. An author named Richard Hayes wrote a book called *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, a comprehensive introduction to New Testament ethics. Now, decision-making is a part of ethical thinking and discussion.

The questions that often come to us are questions of ethics, particularly in the larger church setting. And so we think about that a little bit on pages two and three. For example, Hayes lays out some of this.

Scripture is the norming norm. Scholars tend to use Latin terms sometimes. It's in your notes on page two, not on the slide.

Scripture is the norming norm. That's always the foundation. Everybody claims that this is the foundation, and yet we have a variety of opinions.

Well, we've talked a little about that, and we'll talk more. In its illustration, God's normative imperatives, which are the commands, are still subject to interpretation across Scripture. See the later chart on modes, which we'll get to eventually.

But the norming norm, and yet we still debate it. For example, thou shalt not kill. What does that mean? Is that a proof text for pacifism, which means Christians cannot be combatants and be in war? We have those who have a conscientious objection to war on religious grounds.

That's been honored by lots of countries. And then you can be a corpsman and not be a combatant, which is no small challenge, frankly, in terms of wartime. It's just as important because you're taking care of those troops whose conscience allows them to do that.

And then there are many. The Baptist traditions, for example, have never really viewed non-combatants as a category for them. And that's been explained in a lot of different ways. So, Scripture is the norming norm.

We know that well. Tradition. And that's not the general customs, but it refers specifically to the church's time-honored practices.

It's time-honored practices of worship, service to the church and to the community, and critical reflection. History is important. And many times, certain denominations in the United States don't care much about history.

I grew up as a non-Christian. I became a Christian while I was in the Navy in the 60s. And I've been mostly associated with what they call Bible churches and Baptist churches.

And I don't think either one of those denominations would be able to explain to you the Christian calendar other than Easter and Christmas. They don't observe the traditions that the early church and the church historically have practiced. And we've lost some things in that regard.

History, however, is important. For example, just war theory. It used to be that in just war theory, it was not permissible to be preemptive in Christian countries.

America would not strike first. Other countries would not strike first but would posture for when struck, and they would strike back. However, war theory changed during the era of terrorism.

When terrorism came about on our own soil, with the towers in New York and many other places, the whole idea of just war was rethought, particularly in the category of preemption. What's God's will here? Well, that's what the church was thinking

about. What is it that would best reflect what God permits or doesn't permit? And it gets pretty creative in terms of thinking about those categories.

It would be very easy to just sit back and take a noncombatant view. The more you want to engage in war, the more you have to come up with reasons for that particular approach. In the illustration of tradition, ancient creeds, orthodoxy, dogma, and providentially key figures in church history, including key teachers, God has given various church expressions without violating Jesus.

Exhortations of warning to all those who abandon the commandment of God and hold the human tradition. Well, the bottom line is Jesus said, then will my servants fight when he told the disciples to let it go, that he was going to be taken and was going to be crucified. When Peter pulled out that sword and cut off the ear, Jesus healed that person right there, according to the biblical text, and later said, then will my servants fight?

Many have used that for pacifism in their traditions, but not everyone views it that way. So, we've got tradition as part of this quadrilateral. The reason is the definition.

Reason is an aspect of being created in the image of God, and gaining an understanding through systematic philosophical reflection and scientific investigation brings data to the table. We do that, and we even do it internally in the Bible. Many times, human reason is cultural logic. We have to rise above that with biblical logic, and that's the challenge to us, to find ways in which the Bible interprets and speaks to the culture and sometimes speaks against the culture. Christianity has had many historical experiences in both of those directions.

Today, the church has less power in America than it's ever had, and we have sometimes forgotten to speak to the culture. We drink deeply from the well of our current culture, and speaking against the culture in certain areas is something that the church is now beginning to deal with. Experience.

Experience is part of this, and it is the fourth piece of the quadrilateral, which is what Wesley kind of added and emphasized, but this experience refers to the collective experience of the community of faith. It's not talking about individualism. Individualism is not here.

It's the community of faith coming together like in the New Testament at the Council of Jerusalem, and things like that, where the community is talking, reasoning, and praying for wisdom about how to apply God's teaching to their current circumstances. So, as the illustration says, privately claimed revelatory experiences are not normal and are not norming for the church. The church does not take private claims as the authority.

The church looks for consensus as an authority. The witness of the apostles is norming, but that's, of course, scripture. Church history figures have had major norming influences, but not always in agreement, as you well know from church history.

Apostolic Fathers and post-apostolic Fathers, Luther and Calvin talk about one aspect of tradition. Experience is the living appropriation of the text, which becomes self-attesting as it is experienced in faith. In other words, as we live out the Bible in our culture, we morph and learn through that experience exactly what we can do in terms of dealing with our current culture.

Now, let's move on from there a little bit. That's the point of this quadrilateral issue. Page three, the right relation of scripture to each of those sources of authority, those four sources, has been a perennial problem for theology.

The challenge has taken slightly different forms in different historical eras, but the church must always struggle to get the balance among these four factors. So, Christianity is not me, myself, and I. That's American rugged individualism. It infects the church in America a great deal.

Individualism, rugged individualism, is a part of American culture. But the church in America needs a broader base of wisdom from the totality of churches that are actually under the umbrella of Jesus and being the church. Many Christians, groups, and denominations have adopted the quadrilateral as a form to process issues, and we can do the same.

We can do it individually, but we must remember that it's that the church, at the end of the day, is what's going to address the big issues of culture. Today, some of the big issues, of course, are gender. Not the simple aspect of gender in terms of a woman's role in ministry, but we're talking about gender in terms of transgender, in terms of sexual categories that are very highly debated and have infected, frankly, many denominations.

So, at the end of the day, on page three, third paragraph, even after all of the analysis that we might do with these categories, we end up with diversity that reads the same Bible but reads it differently. We have pacifists in the Christian tradition. We have what we call hawks in the Christian tradition that think any kind of conflict and war and killing is okay.

Whenever it comes to killing another human being, Christians should have great pangs, but some don't. They sometimes have American viciousness about that. We need to be careful about that and not just assume that's appropriate.

We will discuss the issue of diversity in biblical interpretation all the way through these lessons, but this is another point of it. Okay, those are the categories identified. Let's talk about the categories delineated on page three.

Scripture has always carried the ultimate victory, excuse me, the ultimate authority for the church since it was produced, and that's always been the foundation—Notice Hays's four modes of how the scripture provides guidance here. We say the Bible is our guide.

Okay, well, here is a model for thinking about how the Bible provides information for us. Well, it provides information on page three near the bottom, in the sense of rules. He calls these modes, rules, principles, and paradigms in the symbolic world. Rules, direct commands, we call these imperatives, either positive or negative, don't do this or do that.

Illustrations of rules come up within the divorce discussion a great deal, and yet there is one text in the exception, so-called exception clauses in Matthew, that are highly debated. If we didn't have those texts, there wouldn't be a debate because everything else is in agreement until we get to those causes. How are you going to deal with those? And that's a huge piece that, even in the domain of rules, is debated.

Principles are the general framework of moral consideration by which particular decisions or actions are governed. Love is a principle. It's probably the largest principle, but the problem is how you define love. Do you define it like Valentine's Day, wearing a heart on your heart, giving certain colored roses to mothers in relation to Mother's Day, or taking care of individuals who have great needs? What is love? We're going to talk about love a little later, but right now, love is a command, and it's a command that Jesus says is the greatest commandment.

Love God, love your neighbor. He brings those two together in a unique way. Even in the tradition of the Old Testament, they were typically looked at individually, but he brings them together and commands us to do that.

Well, we have to ask, well, how do I love? The new commandment is to love your neighbor, to form a model of love. And so, to say you should love says nothing. You must ask the question, what is love? What does it mean to love? Now, I'd like to talk a lot about this right now, but I have to restrict myself because we'll get to that later.

Love, first of all, you're going to find out that it is a covenant term. It's a God so loved the world and God loved us before we were ever born. Love is a term that has intrinsic to it the decision to move toward people with their greatest good in view.

Now, you have to define the word good. What does it mean to be good? So, you can see that we can make simple statements, but unpacking them brings a lot of questions to the table. All right.

So, notice the paradigms. Paradigms are this third mode. Stories or accounts of characters who model exemplary or negative conduct.

I think a lot about the negative conduct of Lot and Abraham in the Genesis narrative. I mean, Lot had the privilege of being the only man with whom God was communicating in terms of scriptural things at that time. There were others; Melchizedek came up on the scene, and even Balaam knew there were a lot of questions about the ancient world and how much goes into scripture and how much doesn't.

But the fact is, is that Lot would be considered to be an unbeliever if we just took the Old Testament statements about Lot and what he did in relation to Sodom and Gomorrah and his family and his daughters after the escape from Sodom when God destroyed it. But Peter refers to Lot. I'll give you something on this later.

Peter refers to Lot and talks about that righteous person. He uses the word righteous about four times in his reference because, frankly, we're pretty slow to believe that Lot was a righteous man. And what Peter means by Lot being righteous is the fact that he was right with God.

He didn't act very righteously. It tells us that Lot's conscience and soul were under conviction because he was violating the values that Abraham had taught him before he gave himself to the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. And he was sitting in the gate, which means he was part of the political power and process, which makes him like a judge under mafia control.

So here's Lot. He's a paradigm for the negative side of decision-making and fulfilling God's will. On the positive side, we find other characters in the Old Testament that shine in the midst of trouble.

Deborah, for example, doesn't get as much credit as she deserves. Hannah. It goes on and on in the Old Testament with individuals who please God and fulfill his will in that time and space.

Jesus uses the Good Samaritan as an answer to the question, who is my neighbor? That's an interesting text because Samaritans were not neighbors by Jewish definition. They were outcasts. And Jesus asked the Jewish lawyer, who proved to be my neighbor? In that passage, he switched subjects and objects.

And the lawyer couldn't even say the Samaritan. He said he was the one who showed mercy. Because to say a Samaritan would conflict with his own values, negative values towards Samaritans.

So, there are all kinds of paradigms in the stories of Scripture that give us insight into how we ought to order our lives and the ethics we should have, and what that means about bringing those ethics to other questions about God's will—the symbolic world. I'll let you take a look at Hayes' writing on this to clarify this a bit.

But items that create perceptual categories through which we interpret reality. These represent the human condition and depict the character of God. Respect for human life, for example, is one of those categories.

Like for example, with abortion, we don't have a context that says, don't you ever have an abortion. But we have the context that talks about the value of human life and respect toward human life. And so by implications, we come back to that issue from that angle.

So these modes that he gives us give us lots of areas for creative thinking about how to derive ethics and behavior in the decisions that we face from the Scriptures themselves, even though they do not always directly address those questions. So that's the issue of Scripture. I'll let you read the rest of page four.

Also, reason is another category. Reason in our quadrilateral basically has to do with reasoning theology, reasoning the biblical meaning of the text. That's where it's focused.

Reasoning is much larger than that, but we bring reason to the biblical text. The biblical text, in reasoning, talks about deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning leads to certainty, and it's an assertion.

We have a deductive Bible that God gave us, which makes assertions that are non-negotiable. But many times, we inductively study the Bible to try to come up with systems that address the issues that we deal with in life. Those inductive processes are also part of the category of reason itself.

Then we have tradition. Tradition is very much tied to our church traditions, and they can be very strong. Most every church, this is on page five top, every church has its constitution.

And in that constitution, you will find the church's traditions about certain issues. When I was a pastor many years ago, the deacons came to me with their church constitution, and they said they would like me to rewrite the section on divorce and remarriage. That section had been written, I don't know, 20 or 30 years before that.

The church had moved and changed some of its thinking about some of those categories about absolutely no and absolutely no remarriage, and they wanted me to rewrite it. I told them that I would help them rewrite it because it was their responsibility and their need, really, to think through the issues of divorce and remarriage because that was a major traditional change. That's true in American culture.

In the 20s and 30s, divorce in the church was extremely low, and it was frowned upon in so many ways, even when good people suffered, unfortunately. But today, divorce is hardly a question, even in our Christian culture. There are very interesting pieces, such as those in John Piper's church, where John Piper holds a very strict view of this.

His whole staff held a more, we'll say, liberal Christian view to it. And so, here we have a major person, the pastor, who disagrees even with his staff about a major issue. So, tradition can be something that guides us.

It can trap us sometimes. But a healthy church is able to take a look at its traditions from time to time and say, is this really biblical, or did we reflect a certain time and space in our understanding of the Bible? I don't want to get into a lot of illustrations there, and I'll talk about some later, but divorce and remarriage become a big domain in this particular category. Experience here again.

This is the experience of the church at large, and we learn sometimes by our mistakes. That's a part of experience, and that becomes a part of the quadrilateral. Wesley put a lot more meaning into that than I'm going to go into here.

Okay, so scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. The larger church has used these categories to discern God's will and work it out. There are all kinds of publications that relate to how that goes on.

Well, that's not all, though—the issues of how scripture guides us. We've just talked about Hades.

We're not going to repeat that, but I want to talk to you about a model that I have called the levels model. There are three levels in which the Bible teaches us about using the scriptures in relation to the questions that we bring to the Bible. So, if you look at the bottom of page five, when we use the Bible as a source of knowledge and make claims about what it teaches, we engage the discipline of knowing, of epistemology.

How do we know what we claim to know, and why is our view more valid than another? The church and individuals have argued this domain a great deal, both

claiming the authority of scripture. The fact that we have one inspired text and numerous uninspired interpreters presents a problem. It's a problem; I think we can say without hesitation that it's part of God's decree.

That is the way it is. God could have planned life to be different, but he didn't. He gave us this tension that the church and all of its parts have to work out.

We have an inspired text, but we don't agree as godly interpreters equally qualified to investigate the text at every level of academic investigation, and yet still disagree. Now, that's a fascinating piece of worldview, and it's a reality that we live with, and God hasn't explained it, but he has given it to us just by the fact that it exists in our world, and he hasn't spoken against it. Okay, so some claim, notice that, let me read this so that I don't confuse you here, the bottom of page five, while there are some core beliefs that have bound religions to the bible, there has never been a fully unified theology in many domains.

Why? If we have one Bible and one God, why has this kind of unity never existed? Furthermore, some claim that the holy spirit is the trump card and tells us what scripture means. That claim, I am going to assert, is odd and even arrogant. First of all, we will talk in our lecture about the holy spirit very much about the relationship of the holy spirit to the scriptures and into interpretation, but some use the Spirit as a trump card and say we're right because the Spirit told me this.

God illuminated me, and this is what he told me, and this is the way it is, and I'm not open to any other conversation. Well, I'm sorry, but that is, that's an overstepping of the boundaries of the ministry of the spirit, and I'll have to explain that later, even though you're going to kind of push back right now and say, wow, I've understood all my life that the spirit tells me what the bible means, and the spirit convicts me about what's right and what's wrong, particularly what's true. Well, convictions have to be confirmed through scripture.

Convictions have to be adjudicated through an understanding of what the Bible teaches. Those claims are subjective claims, and we're going to investigate them later. Now, going on, on pages five to nine, I'm going to go into these three levels of how the bible teaches us.

First of all, on page six, I have a chart, and I want to talk a little bit about where the bible is located and how Christian tradition in theology and the study of the Bible goes about things. At the bottom of page six is a chart called the Theological Encyclopedia. This is slide number four, and that slide, which you can see on the chart, but you've got it in your notes there. You'll notice it's kind of a pyramid because I'm not really creative with how I design these things.

My printed chart is reversed, but we got the bottom is always the foundation of any kind of chart. The bottom is the foundation, and we have exegesis. We could even go beyond that and say the establishment of the text of scripture, but we start here with exegesis, the competency to make reasoned judgments about biblical texts.

Then, we move to biblical theology, which provides a structural and conceptual model in which exegesis operates. We talked about the holistic view of the Bible as it is, not taking into account its categories and imposing them. Historical theology is the church's record of reflection upon the bible.

We've just talked a little about that. Systematic theology is in a larger category than it usually gets treated. Systematic theology is not the same as dogmatic theology.

Dogmatic theology asserts certain views and uses proof texts from the bible to argue them. Systematic theology is technically a church or tradition that brings into reflective focus its own teaching based on its derived conceptual model. Now, that's a pretty fancy statement for the fact that systematic theology is at the top of the pyramid.

It's a creative construct, and we're going to give you the chart on that in just a moment. You can come back and think about that. There's philosophical theology.

Systematic and philosophical theology deal with a lot of the implications of the bible that are not directly stated and bring reason to bear as to what they're teaching us. This is the primary category where you're going to deal with things that are not addressed by text in scripture but are implied or are a part of our larger categories of biblical narrative understanding. Apologetic theology is where we defend our conceptual framework, and all of that feeds into ministry theology.

Doing theology in the context of ministry. You know, this is interesting in our current culture. I'd like to say that the church, probably in many corners, has a less educated ministry than it's ever had.

Many churches don't even talk to their candidates about what their education is, how they did in school, and what they studied. The Master of Divinity, which was a classic three-year program in languages, theology, and biblical exegesis, used to be the norm. In fact, you couldn't be a chaplain in the military if you didn't have a three-year Master of Divinity.

But culture has downgraded all of that, and it's almost gotten to the place sometimes that churches choose pastors on the basis of somebody they like or like to listen to and do not probe adequately into the mental framework of that individual and of the training and their skills to be able to use the Bible, to be able to understand the Bible,

to be able to teach the Bible. But this is called the encyclopedia, and it's kind of a unit, even though it consists of individual pieces. I think of it as a water fountain.

You have the pool at the bottom, and the water comes up and drips back down. All of this integrates in some way. They all relate to each other.

They depend on each other even though there are different disciplines within this encyclopedia. Now, moving on from that, I want to talk about this issue of the three levels of biblical teaching on page seven of your notes. Okay, there are three levels of how the Bible teaches.

I've mentioned this, but this is the moment that I want to unpack it a little bit more. In these three levels, I'm asserting, and this isn't just me. I actually got this model, the idea of the model, from an individual who was teaching in Australia, and an Australian theologian came up to the individual and told the model that you're teaching, is that directly taught by the Bible? Is it implied by the Bible, or is it your own construct? And in a conversation, a loose conversation, that struck me, and I followed up on it for years, and I've developed my own model in relation to this that the Bible does teach us at these three levels.

It teaches direct. That's the teaching intent of a passage that we can demonstrate by a sound exegetical method. And by and large, most of those direct passages are across-the-board agreement with most denominations.

Not all of them because you've got this big barrier between Calvinism and Arminianism sometimes. But that's direct teaching. Teaching intent of the text.

Then, you move to the implied level and the creative construct level. When you go from the bottom, teaching intent, and you go up, you have theological analysis. Theological analysis is what we call a taxonomy.

I don't think I have that in this particular chart. I had some trouble producing these from other notes or copying them. But in my full teaching of this, this is what we call low taxonomy.

In other words, it's pretty obvious it's direct. But when you get up here higher in the pyramid, you've got to bring lots of lines of reason together to make an assertion. It's a higher level of critical thinking, to put it that way.

It's what's known as a high taxonomy or a low taxonomy. For example, if you take an exam, even though multiple choice questions, when they're correctly written by experts, can be the most challenging of all questions and can get to what an exam is about in ways that you don't even know. A good exam of that nature, you walk out, you'll say, well, I answered it, but I don't have a clue how I did.

That's actually a pretty good exam. And oftentimes, that's in that category. But in many places, people talk about multiple choices, multiple guesses.

Well, that means they weren't well-designed. And so we think of a multiple choice test as kind of a low category when it really isn't, but we use it that way. We think of an essay exam as a higher category where you have to be able to write and put things into an understandable statement and defend it.

Good exams cause you to do that. They're easier to make up and harder to grade. I know that from a lot of experience.

Down at the bottom of DIRECT, that teaching intent, what we can demonstrate the text states, then the implications. Implications, and I'm not going to read all this handout to you. I lay this out in more detail on the following pages.

Even the teaching of the Trinity, God's Trinity, is in the implied area. We have no simple proof text about Trinity. But we have plenty of implications of the text.

The baptism, Jesus is there, the Spirit is there, and God the Father speaks from heaven. The baptismal formula, the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. There are all kinds of biblical implications of the Trinity, but the Trinity as a doctrine wasn't worked out for a while.

The church saw it, understood it, affirmed it, but it took actually a long, long time before the church as THE church, the church collectively, was able to get together after persecution and state what they understood about Jesus, state what they understood about the Trinity. Major conferences, the Council of Nicaea, the Council of Chalcedon, and numerous others where hammered these things out. The Schaff church history volumes by Schaff, they're quite old now, but they're still very good because it work you through all of those early centuries, particularly the first five centuries of the church, and how the church continued to define what they already believed but hadn't been able because of persecution until in the early 300s after Constantine.

They were able to get together as a church and arm these things out, and it's fascinating to read church history in that regard. So what about me as an individual? And I talk about this a little more on page 989, but I'm not going to read it to you. Whenever you're dealing with a Bible verse that you're going to use to prove something, and hopefully you don't do that. Hopefully, you have a context, and you have something that's legitimate to that context, you have to ask yourself the question, when you're using the Bible to say this is God's will, you have to answer the question, is the Bible passage that I'm using direct teaching about what I'm saying, or am I getting implications about what I'm saying, or am I taking the words of Scripture

and coming up with a larger category called a creative construct about what I'm saying? There are a lot of things that are important at the implicational level.

We talked about the Trinity. The Trinity is an implicational teaching. I have a quote from Alistair McGrath that you can read in the notes there later.

However, creative constructs, for example, this whole category of eschatology and millennialism, and even worse, the rapture issues, how many are there, views that is. And we have books that look at these things. Those are all creative constructs.

They're trying to make sense of these categories of eschatology from the Bible's witness. But you find a great variety of people who take the same text and make a different sense out of it. That's up in the upper taxonomy, in the upper critical thinking category, trying to bring the whole narrative together.

It does work all the way from the Old Testament through the New Testament. These millennial views about the future are dependent upon what has been forecast by some thinking from the past through the Old Testament into the new and on from there. Huge books were written on what we call creative constructs. But you don't have a simple proof text.

There is no proof text about the rapture in the Bible. Now you've got some that you're going to cite. But if you look at that in a larger way through the exegetical traditions, you won't find what you're asserting.

You find what you're asserting in the creative construct about eschatology. Now, I know I've said a lot there, and it would take several lessons to unpack that idea. But I just want you to get this idea for the moment.

When you're dealing with text in the Bible and applying those texts to what you're claiming is a responsibility in ethics or responsibility in decision making, you have to ask yourself the question, am I using the direct teaching of the Bible? Or am I in the implicational area of the Bible? Or have I slipped up even into a more difficult thing to prove into the creative constructs that come from the Bible? Nothing wrong with creative constructs. We all live by them. But we have to have lines of reason.

Lines of reason. The creative constructs are not up here by themselves, but they claim direct teaching. They claim implied teaching.

Yet, constructs will differ in those claims. You've experienced that even in the lower levels of the church sometimes. But we have to have a consciousness of this paradigm.

Does the Bible teach us this thing directly, implied, or is it a creative construct? And how do the creative constructs connect down here? Many, many times, those connections require a certain perspective on biblical text to do that. Let me mention one interesting illustration of this perhaps. I. Howard Marshall was a premier biblical scholar in England.

He was the follow-up and the chair of a major university to F. F. Bruce's protege. He became the person who followed Bruce. And Bruce was a monster biblical scholar in that particular period.

Trained many, many doctoral students. The dissertation that Marshall wrote was called *Kept by the Power*. And it became a book that you can find probably in used books, maybe not even much money.

Kept by the Power. Now, I. Howard Marshall is Wesley. He was also arguing for what's known as conditional perseverance, as opposed to the Calvinist doctrine of full perseverance.

If a person is truly saved, they persevere to the end. And there's a lot of things to talk about there. But he was arguing for conditional perseverance.

He looked at all the passages that were used in that tradition. The Hebrews warning passages, for example. And other texts that they used for that.

But as he, as a very sound biblical scholar, worked through those texts, he didn't always come to the place where he could say this proves conditional perseverance. In fact, in his title, *Kept by the Power*, when you read through the book and get to the end, you realize that he basically says we've looked at what we believe is biblical evidence for our view. But at the end of the day, my greatest assertion is that we can trust in the fact that we're kept by God's power.

And I found that to be very interesting when I finally got to that point in his argument. That he claimed those texts, and yet, at the end of the day, he came back to the point that we're kept by the power of God. So his creative construct, in his own mind, I think, as an exegete, dealing with the text had some tension.

And at the end of the day, he maintained the denomination of tradition. But at the same time, he said, at the end of the day, we're kept by the power of God. And I really can't say anything beyond that.

It is a very interesting illustration of a creative construct and a major scholar that we all respect and how he dealt with that. So, I know that I've thrown a lot at you here with this. But I definitely want you to give thought to that creative construct of three ways in which the Bible teaches us.

And I'm behind my time thing again. Additional ideas to consider. Prescriptive and descriptive analysis in the book of Acts.

Now, in relation to this, I can't; I just cannot expand my time too much here in these additional ideas to consider. This is on pages six to eight as well. Down at the bottom of page nine, actually.

If you look there for a moment, at the bottom of page nine, I raise it, and I have not expanded on it there. But every time you read a biblical text, you have to ask this question. Is that text prescriptive? Prescriptive means it's commanded me to do it.

Or is it descriptive? It's telling me about it. For example, when you deal with the book of Acts, does going house to house mean that we are prescribed to do visitation in our church's house by house? I've been in churches that pretty much claim that as a proof text, that we've got to go house to house and reach people. Otherwise, we're not obeying the Bible.

Or is Acts merely describing what they did? Whatever you're doing with biblical texts, you've got these two aspects. Are they prescribing behavior? Are they describing behavior? Many times, the Bible won't prescribe behavior. The Old Testament food laws were prescriptive in that time and place.

But when we come into the New Testament, they become descriptive of a part of Israel's history. But they're no longer prescriptive, but now we're treating them in the descriptive domain. Now, so it's not a simple thing to deal with what's prescriptive and what's descriptive.

But prescriptive is something that's always, always normative. There's never an exception to it. Whereas descriptive is God describing to us what happened in redemptive history.

For example, Gordon Fee makes the point in his book on hermeneutics that the book of Acts is descriptive, not prescriptive. Many people take the book of Acts as a mandate for how we're supposed to do things. But that wasn't what the book of Acts was intended to do.

The books of Acts were intended to describe the history and what was going on at that time and place. We come to the book of Acts, and we can learn about its implications. We can reason out of the book of Acts for certain behavioral patterns.

But the book of Acts is not an imperative. The book of Acts is a description of the church fulfilling God's will in that time and place. And we have to fulfill God's will as well.

Probably the principles that they were fulfilling, like evangelism and mission, as we call them. But the fact is that we don't have to do it the same way because it's describing that to us. Now, that's a pretty big chunk that I just laid on you.

I know, but you're baffled about fighting better, as one person once said. What is normative teaching in the Bible? Well, normative teaching is what we can demonstrate is prescriptive wherever we find it for now. So, we'll study a lot of texts that are descriptive, not prescriptive.

But we'll have texts that are prescriptive. And we'll have to deal with that when we come to them in certain contexts. Teaching intent and theological analysis are going to have to define what is prescriptive.

For example, even in something such as the qualifications for a pastor in Ephesians, I'm at my time limit. Are those qualifications prescriptive or descriptive? If they're prescriptive, that means an unmarried person can't be a pastor. If they're descriptive, that means a married person who has no children can't be a pastor.

Have you ever thought about that? But if they're descriptive, that means that if you're called to be a pastor and the church is what who says you're called, not you, the church decides if you are or not, read Timothy carefully, and you're not married, then there are no criticisms that can be brought against you about your married life. Therefore, you pass that particular test in terms of criticism. That's the way it's usually described.

If it's prescriptive, a lot of churches are going to have to rethink the way they think about pastors because of the marriage, the marriage, and the children. I really frankly think that it is, that it ought to be normative, but it's not normative. I kind of think this because if you don't have children, you don't know how to deal with people very well, frankly.

You may learn it, but when you have to deal with children and their wills and their children are different, you are in a crucible in your family that is going to transfer over to your skills in the crucible of the church family where you've got strong-willed church members, and maybe you have church members who need a will and you deal with that in the family, you deal with that in the church. So I think there's wisdom in those things, but churches do have to ask the question, are those prescriptive or descriptive? And you can find in exegetical studies many answers to that. The Beyond the Bible proposals.

I've written a book on that, I'll mention it to you there. There's Ethic Text. These are some that I highly recommend: Cosgrove, Hays, and Hollinger, to help you work through issues of normativeness, but I can't talk to you anymore about that.

I'm just ceding if you please, the territory for you as a person who continues to be a lifelong learner. All right. The problem is with proof texts rather than context.

I'm sorry, but I'm going to go over time. I'm out of bounds in what I want to do, but this one is the most out-of-bounds lecture. You can always come and go.

You have the freedom to spend as much time as you want in any of these lessons, and therefore, I'm making it a little longer to do it. The problem of proof text rather than context. Someone has said many times that proof text is a pretext.

We need context. For example, I remember very well how someone would take First Thessalonians, which says to avoid all appearances of evil. That's in the King James Version.

Avoid all appearances of evil. And they'd say, you can't go to the movie theater because there's an appearance of evil there. You can't go to a restaurant that serves liquor because there's an appearance of evil.

I don't know how many times people have been manipulated with that verse. And then a new translation comes out and says, avoid every kind of evil. Wow.

See the value of looking at versions? Every kind of evil is extremely different than guilt by association, which is the appearance of evil present to us. So the problem of proof text rather than context. If we had the correct context on Thessalonians, we wouldn't have the problem of people manipulating us with that phrase of appearance of evil.

But we would say, look, it isn't about the appearance. It's about the kind of evil. And that's a whole other discussion.

We have to read the Bible on its own terms and in its own context. We don't read into the Bible. We read from the Bible.

Now, the dilemma of knowing God's will. The Bible does not provide a direct answer to many of our questions. So we need models.

We've talked a lot about models to think biblically. The transformed mind is the central model. But I wanted to talk today a little bit about how the church has processed issues we haven't talked to specifically as we could, maybe should.

But in our purview here, we just don't have that opportunity. But you can go and look up the issues of war, the issues of non-combatants, for example, issues of

gender, and see how the church, in a large sense, argues its views on these matters. So we need models to think both biblically about the issues of life that we confront.

Reflecting on the reality of how the church has developed, the apostolic era is the New Testament record. And that's a non-negotiable revealed record. And yet, we still negotiate it in the church in terms of understanding its meaning on many occasions.

But most of it is pretty clear. In the post-apostolic era, there were councils. But there was a lot of diversity.

Some people talk about the majority and the minority in the church councils and how sometimes the minority, they think, came out ahead. Well, you'll have to read that. But the councils of Chalcedon, Nicea I, Chalcedon, there was Constantinople.

There are a number of councils and plenty of literature here to see how the church negotiated the questions of knowing God's mind in relation to certain issues. Recognition of sovereignty and moral will is required—massive diversity.

God has programmed diversity into the creative reality that we experience. If we kick against diversity, we're kicking against God. God expects us to negotiate it, to deal with it, and to pursue him and his word even in the diversity because he hasn't given us an inspired commentary on many issues.

Continuing challenges. Church history is dominated by diversity. Why would an all-knowing God design and allow this? If you haven't felt that tension, you haven't been thinking.

We have many godly people of different views. That's diversity. And God hasn't foreseen.

I shouldn't say foreseen. I could say it is because foreseeing is a choice. God hasn't chosen.

God hasn't chosen to give us a different path. He's given us this path of finding unity in the midst of diversity. Now, that brings us to the end of this issue of the church and how we reflect on it in terms of the larger church in our own setting.

Lecture GM3 on slides. Now, I know I've thrown a lot of things at you, and I haven't been able to unpack them very well. But I only have so much time for these kinds of series, and I'm already stretching that and trying to maintain the patience of Dr. Hildebrandt in relation to my lectures.

But I thought this was an important piece. It's a little bit of an aside, but it's an important thing for you to realize that knowing God's will isn't just me, myself, and I.

Knowing God's will at the real level is the church, the church as a whole, the church as a unity in the midst of its diversity. That is a category of knowing God's will that's probably more important, but just as important, but more important than what I should do.

We are so self-centered in our pursuit of that question of knowing God's will that we've come up with new models of doing it so that we can get our answer and feel good about it. But I'm telling you, it's not that simple. It's not pragmatic.

It is a process of the transformed mind being applied to the questions you have, to the questions that our total church has, and coming up with answers that can serve the church and individuals in good ways. Thank you for your patience, really. When we go into the next sections, we're going to be going into specific biblical issues that we've talked about at different times.

We're going to look at the Old Testament. We're going to look at the New Testament in relation to what it says about this specifically. So we've been building some foundations, and we'll come back now to the Bible.

I used to start with the Bible, but there were too many things I had to say to be able to talk about the Bible. Now, when we talk about the Bible, we have all of this as our foundation to be able to plug in our text and the issues that we find into these models of knowing and to the models of the transformed mind. So, thank you again for your patience, and I'll see you in the next lecture on GM4.

Thank you.