

Dr. Gary Meadors, Knowing God's Will, Session 16, Prominent Competing Models, Blackaby, Smith and Friesen

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Welcome to the last lecture, lecture 16, GM 16, in your notes. And you will need the notes, and I'll be working mostly from the note pack today. The video slides basically keep us on track here.

And that's the note pack of Biblical Theology for Knowing God's Will, Popular Views for Knowing God's Will. I call it Wade and Watting. I call this an appendix in the slides because I thought it was good to present other views to you so that you can do your own research.

My view is really a fourth view. When the book on three views was published, for whatever reason, the editor decided, I think in concert with Friesen, that my view was basically sort of like Friesen's view. Well, nothing could be farther from the church on that one.

I'm not sure whether they didn't read my material well enough or what the issue is, but mine is a very different view from Friesen. I'm just going to give an overview of these three views. I'm not going to try to go into great detail.

I would suggest that you read the primary books. I wouldn't suggest you read the book *The Three Views*. I don't think that it adequately presents his views.

Friesen's original publication on decision-making and the will of God was probably the best presentation he made. When he did his 25th-anniversary volume, I felt that it wasn't quite as powerful as the original. So, I highly recommend reading the original.

You can probably get it in used books and things of that nature. So, I'm just going to give you a bit of an overview. I'm going to do it very closely in relation to my notes.

I ask for your patience a little bit. I'm having trouble with my eyes, and I have some readers, but they don't help me a whole lot with small print, and I need to do this. So, just take your notes now, and we'll follow along in that regard.

Popular Options, Weighed and Found Wanting. I'll come to this after the introduction. Please note page one of your notes.

There are as many views of knowing God's will as there are books on the subject. The body of literature, however, will usually fall into three major paradigms. While we cannot represent all of the options, a volume published by Kriegel gives those three, and I've given it to you here, and you can get that if you can't get the others.

These three views are drawn from Blackaby, a father-son team who wrote a book that was very, very popular, particularly in Southern Baptist churches for a while. Smith, who is in the Wesleyan tradition, and Gary Friesen, who I suppose is a Bible Church person. The value of this used book is that each author responds to the other, so there's some value there.

You get a conversation between those three. But I think that mine is a definite, significant fourth view, and I think you'll see that when you see their views and compare them to the model that I presented to you. I will readily admit that my model is more challenging, particularly in the sense that you must study scripture in deeper ways than what typically lay people would do.

For those who are leaders, I think it's an obligation for them to do that. So, it becomes self-evident after listening to my lectures, reading my notes, and so forth, as you compare it to these views I'm going to critique. So, our purpose is just a survey.

I'm not going to take a great deal of time on this because I think it's important for you to do your own work. But let me start. I call it the single-will view, the radical subjectivism.

The Blackaby's probably do give the best presentation of what the Keswick movement held and conditioned a lot of American churches, particularly in the independent traditions. That's what Friesen wrote against in his dissertation at Dallas, which later became the book. So, what you read and hear about in terms of the Blackaby's best represents the rampant subjectivism, the radical subjectivism of that particular movement.

Here are some central assumptions from the Blackaby's. The core belief of this perspective, and this is a quote, is that God not only has a specific will for individuals but also communicates that will, and I would add in advance, to people so they can follow it. Now, they say here, you do not discover God's will. God reveals it to you out of the intimacy of your walk with him.

But it is still the believer's responsibility to find God's will within their walk. Okay. Well, you hear some things here that you've heard me labor in a number of ways.

First of all, we've said there is no such thing as an individual personal will to be discovered in life. Your obligation is to do God's will as he's revealed it in the Word. It's not to find something.

Let's put it this way. God finds you. You don't find some secret path you have to disclose ahead of time in order to do God's will.

But they are asserting, and strongly so, this subjective process. They talk about God revealing, and it's a revelation of content, I take it they're mine, and so forth. You have to read it to get it.

Number two, in concert with the core belief, the believer must learn to recognize the direct voice of God that communicates God's will to them. To me, that's sort of the competition with Scripture itself. You won't find the deep study of the Word of God in the black-and-gray model.

You'll find the encouragement to find this inner devotional life. Now, that was extremely prominent in the American church, and in England, it was as well because most of that came over from England. And yet, I very much believe that it's misguided.

Number three, God's voice comes in many ways, but we must learn to hear when God speaks. When you read to a black person, you don't get encouraged to hear it from the Word. Oh, they'll talk about that, but you've got to hear it outside of that.

And the areas that are unrevealed that we've talked a lot about, that you need a transformed mind and value system, they're not going to talk about that. They're going to talk about your getting those subjective feelings. That's why I call it radical or rampant subjectivism.

Number four, the experiential side of life, is the door to knowing God and his will. Well, I think the Scriptures say the very opposite explicitly. Number five, the vocabulary of the Bible is a springboard to enhancing your experiential side.

So, reading the Bible to them is a stimulus. You're not reading the Bible to understand it. You're reading the words of the Bible, and that sort of is a stimulus for you to move into areas.

So, if you find words in the Bible that you're looking for what to do, then that becomes a new Word of God to you in a sense because it does not represent the context. Number six, every text in the Bible addresses knowing God and his will, which is immediately a model for us to follow. There are no contextual boundaries but total continuity of meaning and application from then to now.

So, Gideon put the fleece out. Well, give it a try. The seeking of direct revelation is promoted for things that you need to know about in life.

So, you can see that it's very much the very opposite of what you've been hearing from me and what I've been unpacking in terms of the biblical text and the ethics that are involved in this process of doing God's will. They also explicitly say that the Holy Spirit currently works on revealing God and his will, and I've spoken very much against that. Knowing the character of God helps to distinguish and recognize the voice of God.

Well, if the voice of God is scripture, knowing the character, understanding the character of God from reading the Bible, I'd go along with that, but I don't believe that's what they mean. The critique of the Blackabee model. The Blackabee clan, I say, demeans the rationale for the experiential while never asking the question about how to decide whether their experiential reasoning is really God or just their own interpretation of their own experience.

Everything is experience-centered. There's one thing about this: nobody can really argue with them. You can't argue with a person who's basing their life on experience rather than on that transformed mind and value system.

They're not apologetic. They're not bashful about pushing the experiential side as the key to living the Christian life and moving through this world. Everything has to be revealed to you personally.

The Bible was given full lip service. Who wouldn't do that? However, the process of understanding text is purely subjective and experiential rather than contextual, hermeneutical analysis of the original intended meaning of a text. So the Bible becomes a tool to fulfill your internal feelings and experiences.

I'm sorry, many Christians do run that way with their faith, but that is not the way the Bible presents itself nor encourages us to live our lives. Number three, biblical texts and stories are used in a tabular manner and become proof texts to support our experiential views. So, if you're trying to make a decision and you want wisdom, well, you just open the Bible and start reading anywhere, and sooner or later, you'll find something that encourages you and what you were already thinking.

That's really what it comes down to. It may guide you a little differently or something, but it is still not the unpacking of the scriptures to create a transformed mind. It is the use of the scriptures to fulfill your own experiential life.

The original intended meaning of a text, why waste your time? Number four, well, let me go back to this and then finish three. Blackabee's composition lacks evidence of

what I'll call professional biblical awareness. The critical and careful study of the text is not present.

Theological and exegetical consciousness is foreign to Blackaby. In fact, being a happy pastor may require rejecting such rational requirements. There's a side of life, there's a side in which life seems easier and more fun, but I want you to know that it's not going to get you what God wants you to be by any stretch.

Fourth, their system is captive to internal voices. We've talked about that. That's the conscience relating to your worldview values, and it does it in a Blackabee person as well.

But what they insert is a direct content input from God that you have to learn to hear. Now, we have a special class of people, I guess, who can hear God's voice. When people tell me they hear God talking to them, my question always to them is, that's interesting because I've always wondered, is God's voice male or female? Now, that's a little bit of a tease, I suppose.

But the fact is, is that this inner voice, I only do what the little voices tell me to do, is a scenario that is not running on the basis of God's teaching but is running on the basis of your imagination. So, their system is captive to these internal voices. It does not provide a reason to critique.

Of their self-authenticating, they're completely self-authenticating experiential assertions. They affirm that when God speaks to people today, he's not providing new revelations or writing an addendum to scripture. He is applying his word to the particulars of our lives.

Now, there's a mixed statement. How does God speak without supplying something if it's not already in the text? So, they're trying to maintain one side while giving in and actually destroying that side, as far as I'm concerned. So, they affirm that he's providing new revelations.

They say he's not providing new revelation. Well, then, how in the world do you get an answer to a question that's not in the Bible? So, it just doesn't go. It doesn't float.

But the application of the word they illustrate is proof text rather than context based. Just find words in the Bible that relate to what you're looking for, even in an accidental way, and that's your guidance. This promotes the Bible as the dummy in the hands of ventriloquists, which is the person looking for God's will.

Remember, God's will is not lost. It doesn't have to be found. It's already been given to us.

As we pursue the scriptures and do God's will, the other aspects of life will fall in line through the sovereign guidance of God and through the circumstances of the community in which we operate. Number five, the act of revelation, and I'd the word personal there. The act of personal revelation is assumed.

If you don't have revelation, you're not hearing God. And subjectively validated without an adequate theological evaluation of this domain. They insist that the Holy Spirit is using the word, but their illustrations demonstrate no responsible process of knowing what that word says or interpreting the scripture.

But rather, it's a word association. Here's a word in the Bible, here's your life; that word relates to your life, so therefore, go for it. A word association from text to our experience with the assumption that it's a direct word of the Spirit.

That is all assumed. But that cannot be sustained from the exegesis and what the scriptures have to say about how we follow God. There's an old dictum: a person with an experience is never at the mercy of a person with an argument.

I talked to a lot of different people, and when I talked to someone who was in this, I was kind of trapped in this way of thinking. You can't argue with that kind of person. You can try to find questions to ask them and to discuss with them about how you know this is the voice of God. How do you know this inner sense? Is God really talking to you and not some other voice of yourself talking to yourself? But that won't dent their armor because they have become convinced that the voices they hear are the voices of God.

I taught a seminar a long time ago in Virginia, and there was a young lady in that seminar, it was a bunch of college students. She told me that God guides her to work every day. Now, when she leaves the house, she listens to God when she comes to a stop sign.

Do I turn left? Do I turn right? Should I go straight? And she'd hear that voice, and she'd go, and she says, I've been doing that for years, and I've never had an accident because God guided me to get to work every day. It was always by a different route, but that's the guidance of God protecting me. And there was no way I could talk her into thinking that maybe that was herself talking to herself.

She had set up a false concept of how God communicates, and it was guiding her life in every way. I tell you, that's not a very good place to be in life, and the Blackabee motto, in my opinion, is radical subjectivism. And a lot of people live in that domain.

The Keswick movement lived in that domain. A lot of early Christian experience in America infected a lot of churches with this kind of mindset, but thankfully, we're

kind of finally emerging out of that sort of trap. The relational view, Christian existentialism, comes in with Gordon Smith.

Smith, reading Smith after reading Blackabee is a breath of fresh air because you get an authentic engagement with Scripture, with both a recognition of our sinful selves, as well as a recognition that we just don't know everything. So I would highly recommend you look at Smith's work. As I mentioned, he's in the Wesleyan and Christian Missionary Alliance circles, and their view of God's will would go along with Gordon Smith's pretty much.

There are some central assertions in Smith's model. First, he says we are created in the image of God. Yes.

With the resulting capacity to choose courses of action. Yes. God allows the nature of his creation to operate without micromanaging it by an imposing direct process.

You see, that is a direct contradiction of Keswick and of the Blackaby's. Our relationship with God and the community creates a matrix for decision-making. So, decision-making here is we're created in the image of God, we're thinking, feeling, choosing beings, and we live our lives not micromanaged by God, and he'll say more about but managed by Scripture and by that worldview, and our relationships in the community.

From the Wesleyan view, the community is very important. It's very important in the Bible. For example, if a person says, I'm called to be a pastor, and they go to a church and say, I'd like you to ordain me.

I'm responding to 1 Timothy 3. I desire the office of a pastor. He calls it a bishop there. And what's the church supposed to do? Bow down to that person's claim? No.

If you read Timothy, that person's call is a claim. But the church evaluates that person and actually is the voice of God. The church as a community as to they should be in the pastorate or not.

Perhaps not now, perhaps after some other training or after some other experience, but not now. But in America, those kinds of individuals go to the church. The church doesn't do what it wants to do, what it says God wants it to do.

They just go down the street to another church until they find one that will follow their way of thinking. Smith doesn't do that. Black could be one, but not Smith.

Smith sees the community as important in distinguishing God's will. I think it is, too, because the community has that worldview and values process, which, from my

point of view, will help guide people. Number two, Smith rejects a blueprint view of finding a specific will in order to make a decision.

In that blueprint view, he uses that nomenclature. What that means is in the subjective approaches, they say you have to find the dot. That means you have to find God's will so you can do it.

And we've been through the Bible. There's no place in the Bible that ever says that. And Smith himself rejects it.

He's got a good sense of how Scripture's operating here. He just brings more of the experiential side, but thankfully, it's a much more guarded experiential side and a much more controlled experiential side than in the black of the domain. He goes on.

As I said, my answer bothered me. Smith appropriately reflects on the tension of how sin affects the human process. We discern as well as we live, and we live as well as we discern.

So, there is that constant discerning process going on. He would present it as a process of your Christian maturation, sanctification, and work in the community. There's a lot that's good there.

At the same time, I want to come back and say, well, the real control is to transform the worldview, mindset, and values that make decisions about the issues of life.

Third, decision-making is best perceived from the context of a union with Christ that is so intimate as to necessitate divine participation in our decision-making. Well, I think God is involved in our decision-making.

He's given us his word. He exercises his providence. He's put us in communities that help to guide us.

And so, no problem here. Smith adds a great deal to the Wesleyan tradition of the experiential side. If you remember, when we talked about the quadrilateral experience, it was the last piece of that.

And as we're listening to Smith, we're hearing that piece, which is probably the way that Wesleyan would have liked to talk about it. And I think there's some value to it, but at the end of the day, it's not the final arbiter. So, decision-making is best perceived from the context of a union with Christ that's very intimate.

Smith's reasons about how intimacy with God is directed by biblical understandings assist our decision-making. Well, I don't disagree with that because I think it's important that our Christian life, our prayer life, our life with other Christians, and

doing the work of ministry as either as lay or as vocational workers, all of that goes into the mix of how our lives are being directed by God through community and through the Word. No problem.

Smith writes from an articulate theological grid, while Blackaby lacks the grid and writes exclusively from an experiential grid that bends Scripture to serve their purposes. Consequently, even if one does not agree with Smith, there are reasons to respect his reasoned subjectivism, as I'll call it. As far as my size is concerned, I've used a little different terminology, but reasoned subjectivism is the way that I talk about Smith.

Smith himself is also very guarded in his assertions about subjective perceptions. He puts the brakes on a good deal. Number four, out of the above context, Smith affirms that God speaks, but this speech is subtle and complex.

Smith avoids the assertion about hearing God's speech. He affirms that discernment is a critical reflection in faith and humility that enables us to more fully be his disciples. Discerning God's voice requires critical thinking, and one must guard against assuming voices are automatically authoritative.

So, he's using God's voice basically as a bit of a synonym with the voice of God's revelation, which is in Scripture and is extended by the Wesleyans strongly into the community. I think the community is extremely important. It's just an issue of authority, and yet the Scriptures do give the community authority in certain ways, as we mentioned in 1 Timothy 3. Smith cautions against using the Bible's text, which would be proof text and stories as normative guidance clips.

Such practices can abuse Scripture by forcing it into our own perceptions. So, here again, you hear a lot of echoes of what I was saying, minus giving authority to the subjective realm, and Smith is even careful there. So, let's critique this.

Reading Smith immediately impresses one that careful theological reflection was taking place. Smith's model is reasoned subjectivism, based on a relational growth model guided by godly living. Smith does not insist on some specific will, that individual will we've talked about, that has to be found, and in Blackaby's model, that will has to be found in advance to do the right thing.

He does, however, affirm an internal guidance process. I'm not going to reject an internal guidance process; I'm just going to define it myself in my view. That internal guidance process relates to conscience and spirit, and understanding how that operates inside of our thinking process, as we've been over that.

So, we have a lot more in common with Smith, although there are still some differences. Critique of the Smith model. Reading Smith immediately impresses one that careful theological reflection has taken place.

It's reasoned subjectivism, and he does affirm the internal guidance, as I just mentioned. It is good that Smith starts with the analogy of being created in God's image and what that means for managing the world. Smith's subjectivism is clear but cautious.

Smith's view of the witness and promptings of the spirit, which we did in my lecture on the spirit. Smith is much more judicious than Blackaby in regard to how sin has affected human processes and what role the Bible plays in decision-making. So, read Gordon Smith's work and read it against the things that I've been talking to you about, and you can ferret out where you see the Bible leading you or where you see the Bible not leading you.

That's the one thing that I'm going to insist upon. If it's not in the Scriptures as a direct teaching, then you are into the implications. Implications can be read in a lot of different ways, or you're into creating constructs where you're actually telling the Bible what to think rather than the Bible telling you.

Although constructs can be more valid in theological views, we just have to be careful with how we put them together. We need big narrative proof. Then we come to Gary Friesen and what I call Christian pragmatism.

Friesen's popular book, *Decision-Making in the Will of God, a Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View*. That was written from a dissertation that he wrote at Dowell Seminary, which was a critique of the Catholic movement in America. It came over from England.

It was an extremely subjective, devotional movement. I remember that I lived during this era, and people who were following these teachings would go out into graveyards in Norfolk, Virginia, which had a lot of crosses and a lot of things, and sit there and watch the sun come up. When the sun came up, the way the shadows fell gave them great devotional feelings and got them ready for their day.

Sometimes, the shadow of a cross would follow them where they were sitting, and that was just a divine act, as it were. Extremely, extremely subjective. So Friesen went after that, and I think soundly pointed out that that view, which would be represented by the black beliefs, is just not acceptable and that it is a violation of what the Scriptures themselves teach.

Friesen's focus, the fourth line on the right side, therefore, was far too narrow in one sense to represent the broader theological traditions. You see, Friesen was after the

Keswick movement, which would have been the proto-Blackaby. Blackaby wasn't on the scene yet.

It would have been a lot of the subjective denominations of the Bible church, to some extent, where the Keswick movement had influence, a big influence in those churches, but in a lot of independent settings. J. Oswald Songbirds and some others were big in the Keswick movement and very, very subjective in the way that they presented the Word. And we've all read those books, and early in my Christian life, I was blessed by them.

But as I have come to understand, I don't run my life by their model because their model is a model of self-direction, not God-direction. So many Baptists, independent Bible church traditions in the USA, naively adopted the assumptions that were prevalent in that subjective movement. When Friesen came and pointed out that there is no individual will, there's a sovereign and moral will, and then there is the model that he gave to make decisions.

I'm telling you, it was a bombshell. I was teaching at an independent Baptist school in the South at that time and nearly was fired because the alumni were complaining so loudly that I was using Friesen's book as a module within my ethics class. Wow.

I mean, they were adamant because they were claiming Friesen takes the Holy Spirit out of the Bible, which is absurd. And because he was kicking against things they had adopted, sometimes even unknowingly, out of the subjectivism that had crawled into the American independent church movement. I think we've moved beyond that in any of those settings, but not completely by any stretch.

From 79 to 83, I used Friesen's book and appreciated it. But as I went on for decades, thinking about this issue of God's will, I came to see that the things that were missing in Friesen are, to me, the things that the Bible emphasizes. We've talked about that in our Old Testament and New Testament module, as well as the fact of the transformed mind.

He was so wrapped up in responding to one small segment of Christianity that I'm afraid that he gave it too much credence because he never treated the Calvinistic views of this. He never treated the mainline Protestants. He didn't treat even the charismatic groups, even though subjectivism could go over there.

He was focused on a very narrow issue that needed focus, but then it broadened out as the book got published in ways that I think might not have been a good idea. All right, so what are Friesen's central assumptions? Okay, number one, he says there is no specific will. That's a big point in the context in which he was speaking, and it was like a bomb because everybody was trying to find God's will for their life, and that meant finding that information ahead of time in order to make the right decision.

And a lot of time is spent in prayer, asking questions, but not studying the Scriptures. The Scriptures never say find God's will. The Scriptures say to do God's will, and in the process of doing with a number of other issues, your life will be managed into paths that are appropriate and work for you under God's tutelage.

All right, what did he say? Well, he said several things. Here are four of them, and I'm taking almost all my things from his original book, which I think was his best. Where God commands, we must obey.

No question. The imperatives have to be obeyed. I don't recall him speaking enough about the progress of Revelation and the issue of description and prescription that we noted in terms of those commands.

So, we have to be careful about imperatives because not every imperative in the Bible is for me. It may have been for another audience in time. Remember, the Bible is not written to us.

The Bible is written for us. We learn from it, but you have to be careful about making it direct to you. But nonetheless, we still agree.

If it's an imperative, we better find out if that's an imperative that applies to us, and if so, we obey. No question. My chart makes that point.

Where there is no command, God gives us freedom and responsibility to choose. Well, I agree with that, too. And yet, I don't find an adequate model in Friesen's writing to talk about what freedom means.

We're not free. We're bound by our nature. We're bound by our worldview and value system.

And if it's wrong, then we're wrong. We've got to work on that particular area to be able to make good decisions according to the teachings of Scripture. And yes, we're at wisdom.

He says God gives us wisdom. Well, how does he give us? When he gets to this thing about God giving wisdom, he becomes subjective himself. Because I think wisdom is derived from adjudicating biblical texts.

That's what the Proverbs did. That's what the wisdom literature of the Bible does. It doesn't quote the law, but it takes the principles of the law and transfers them into life.

And that's how wisdom is derived. Wisdom becomes knowledge of its own. It's not just spiritual expediency.

When we have chosen what is moral and wise, we must trust the sovereign God to work all the details out. Well, we do have to do a lot of trust. And we do have to obey the moral.

But that thing about wisdom needs some critique, particularly. The things that I've talked to you about in terms of wisdom, how it develops, and what it really means are the tip of the iceberg of studying wisdom literature, which is a very important piece in relation to decision-making. I just picked a book up.

It's on my desk—the Hermeneutics of Wisdom. Now there, I just got it.

I got to read it. And I like that statement—the Hermeneutics of Wisdom.

You've got to study the wisdom, and you've got to study what you claim is wisdom just as much. Or you are doing nothing but a subjective claim. And I think it's a wise thing in there for a moment.

I think it's more complicated. Now, I get accused of being too complicated. But I'm sorry.

If you're going to follow a biblical worldview and value system, you've got to do something to generate that and to get your mind in tune with the way the Bible instructs us. Notes. How do we enact responsibility? Well, we enact it, and we're free to do so.

But we're free in boundaries. You've got to understand those boundaries. What does give mean? He talks about God giving wisdom.

Well, he doesn't mean direct revelation. And yet, at the same time, I don't see an adequate explanation given. I think it's assumed.

Wise is neither biblically nor philosophically defined. There is no philosophical piece within Friesen's presentation. There is no ethical theory piece.

Philosophy and ethics are very much a part of the guidance system for Christians when the Bible doesn't speak directly because we have to deal with the implications of pre-construct reasoning to be able to make a judgment. And we've talked a lot about that in so many different ways.

The critique of the Friesen model.

There are some points of agreement between Friesen and myself. As I said, I promoted his book and nearly got fired from a job because I believed it had something good to say. But Friesen and I are on different pages.

We're on different parts of the planet when it comes to how we reason out the issues of life and wisdom in those things. Number two, Friesen often lives in a small world, a rather truncated view of the subject of God's will. For example, the Keswick movement and even the Black Label movement, you can't call that the traditional view.

You can call it an aberrant view internal to American Christian culture. While it infected some of England, they've almost kicked it out because the English biblical scholars weren't going to have anything to do with that. Number three, a critique of Friesen may be more about what he does not say as what he does say.

For example, he does not adequately assign or address a number of crucial issues that I think are important in advising a will of God concept. For example, Friesen has endeavored to copyright the term wisdom. I use the term wisdom, so therefore, I must be in his camp.

Well, I agree with him on a lot of things, but I'm not in his camp. We are worlds apart. He never really unpacks wisdom as a biblical or philosophical construct.

He never asserts it. He merely asserts, do the wise thing. Well, knowing what is the wise thing to do, there's no small matter.

He gives a list of the ways of wisdom on page 266, but it only yields what I call pragmatism. It doesn't yield lines of reason from scripture to decision. Friesen says, do the wise thing.

But how does that happen? What is the wise thing? Well, it ends up being very much what I think is the wise thing. A close look at Friesen reveals that a new subjectivism is born in this thing of wisdom. Third, while Friesen notes God's sovereign will, he does not adequately connect this with the concept of God's providence.

Providence, to me, he does not. Pretty important opener. When I look at my page, I'm sorry, I've got fuzz because I'm dealing with some bad eyesight and a retina problem.

So I beg your forgiveness and tolerance here. He does not address how human nature can function when tainted by sin. I think addressing this issue of the fall is absolutely crucial.

I'm sure it's referred to. That's been a while since I've plowed. I've plowed through that book several times and talked through that book.

So, I'm pretty familiar with it. Always need to get him. But the fact is, he's not dealing with wisdom as the Bible deals with it.

And as we would put it into a model of ethics. But instead, it becomes very pragmatic; it's that new spiritual expediency sort of idea that he promotes. So he's subjecting himself.

Frankly, I think his second volume, which came out 25 years after the first, is even more subjective. I have not critiqued that book thoroughly. But when I read it, I said to myself, geez, he's moved farther in the subjectivism rather than from it.

Number three, while Friesen notes God's sovereign will, he does not actually connect this with the concept of God's providence and how this interfaces with the idea of freedom. We're free. I've said we're not free.

We're bound by our nature. We're free within the boundaries of our nature. And there's also an issue of freedom within the providence of God.

We can't push against that. While Friesen's insistence on freedom has merit, his idea of freedom in terms of its nature and extent needs much more critical thinking. He does not address how human nature can function when tainted by sin.

Friesen does not use the last bullet and does not provide a rational model for moving beyond the Bible to decisions. He also basically deals with a lot of decisions that I think are pretty clearly defined within Scripture. He doesn't get into some of these current cultural challenges that we have.

Some of those challenges didn't even exist when he wrote with Rick Roth. Friesen does not provide a rational model for moving beyond the Bible to decisions. If or when the Bible is solid, is the decision maker collaterally to choose? I'd like to say yes is naïve.

The issue of how a worldview and values model functions is absent. He does not reflect that awareness of philosophy and ethics and how it informs the process of Christian thinking. I have several shelves behind me of ethics books in the Christian movement, and I haven't even plugged the depths of those things, and I don't think that he started or included that adequately in his thinking.

Number four. Ironically, when Friesen comes to the core of his theory, wisdom as the *modus operandi* of decision-making, he reverts to this form of subjectiveness. Do the wise thing.

Do the spiritually expedient thing. His third principle is that there is no command of God; God gives us the freedom to choose. And just how does this happen? How does God give us the freedom to choose? Well, he gives us freedom to choose within our own boundaries, the boundaries of what we know, the boundaries of our fallen nature, the boundaries of being sure that we don't catch against providence.

There's a lot of boundaries. Freedom is not absolutely free. And we need to be very careful there, lest we violate an implied or even a creative construct, a view of God from his word totally, that might take us in a different direction than we think is free.

And just how does this happen? In his second edition, he's much more subjective about this than in the original edition. So, you can see, lack of base, I'll just write them off. I think they're just a restatement of the Keswick movement, of absolute rampant subjectivism.

Smith, I respect. I like reading his material. I learn things from it, but I can't go as far as he goes.

But even he himself is cautious about how far he goes into the subjective domain. And with Fraser, I've gained a great deal. I have gained a great deal.

I got stimulated to begin decades ago before I ever wrote a book on God's will and have done these lectures many, many, many years ago. I suppose 30 or 40 years ago, somewhere in that range, but it's not more. This book came out in the 70s.

I taught from 73 to, excuse me, 61. I don't even remember what I taught myself now. It was early, well, it was 79 to 83, actually, because I was writing my dissertation during that period.

And so that's when I was there. His book came out in 78. So, we are both of that same era.

And I used it a great deal at that time. As time went on, I began to develop my worldview and values construct, which I think takes us in a better direction, a more defined direction, a more objective direction, and yet a direction that requires more of us in terms of God's Word, which some object to. I don't know how you can object to that.

I can understand that. You can be honest. Many people can't study like a pastor is studying if the pastor does.

Many can't get the education that's required to get into the scriptures at good depth. But everybody can learn. If you're not a learner, you're not moving forward.

And everyone can go from A to Z in your own life, in your own circumstances, if you're willing to do so. And you should be helped, too. That's where vocational ministers come in, and hopefully, they can provide that help.

So the Black Label model, like its pietistic predecessors, is well-meaning but inadequate, even flawed. This model jumps from a set of assumptions to a less-than-professional theological model of how God operates. The Bible was abused at nearly every level.

The Black Label model thinks it is honoring God when it is actually undermining sound biblical theology. Smith lessens the impact of subjectivism immensely. His writing also honestly exposes the struggle of subjectivism.

How does one operate authoritatively without absolute certainty at the human level? Reason moves the discussion in good directions but falls short in actually providing a model that can demonstrate lines of reason from the question to the solutions that are valid lines of reason. They have critically studied lines of reason, not just a superficial surface reading of the text. That needs more.

Now, number one, what do I think about certain things? The effects of the fall and the resultant darkening of the mind are not adequately factored into any of these views, except for what Smith mentions it. How is the noetic effect of the fall addressed? We are fallen people. We're falling people.

And we have to address that. And the only way to address it is through a very careful unpacking of Scripture in relation to our questions. Scripture is utilized, particularly in the Blackaby Label model, as a concept of doctrine.

That's a term that was put into place in biblical theology. It means you take your concepts and turn them into doctrine. You inform the Bible about what it's saying rather than the Bible informing you.

That's a huge difference. Proof, text, manner, rather than critical thinking. It calls for work.

It calls for leadership to do that kind of work and help their convocations along in the process. We have failed, I think, a great deal. In the subjective traditions, Scripture is too small.

It's just too small. The Bible is a huge book and able to address our questions if we just take the time and effort to chase it. Number four, Friesen's criticisms of the subjective traditions are well-founded, but his own insights into how Scripture guides are short-sighted.

He certainly mentions it. He even gives some illustrations, but those illustrations lack adequate connections to lines of reason. In fact, some of the texts are not even exegetic beyond the surface, and that becomes a bad illustration.

Philosophically, theologically, and exegetically, much work needs to be done. At some point, Friesen himself reverts to subjectivism, particularly with wisdom, because his model does not provide a paradigm for dealing with what wisdom is. How can I argue wisdom from the text of the Bible? We also talk about the direct, implied constructs that can address that.

That helps our critical worldview to expand. The Three Views volume actually only represents a small part of the religious traditions, even in America. They engage the Blackaby-Keswick movement, they engage the Wesleyan and Christian Missionary Alliance group, and they engage Friesen.

Well, the Presbyterians aren't there, the Reformed aren't there, the Anglicans aren't there. How many are not there? And yet, that's presented as the sum total of how to think about God's will in our American Christian culture. Not so.

There is no representative from these traditions, so that book is weighed into our wants. And I don't find Romans 12, 1, and 2 to be very prominent, frankly, in any of these things. Romans 12, 1, and 2, the development of the transformed mind and value system, and adjudicating that through careful study of the Scripture, is, in my opinion, the way the Bible models these things.

It mostly models it to the leaders. Just like in ancient Israel, the Israelites didn't go directly to God. They could pray to God, like, you know, it wasn't like a Roman Catholic thing where the priests and prophets were like that.

But the fact is that they did go to God's spokesman within the nation to get wisdom. But they didn't go and say, what kind of car should I buy? A Chevy car, or a Ford car, or a Dodge car. Just use some good common sense, or you're free to choose.

But you still have value in that way because I buy Chevys because I don't want to take out heavy loans and be in high indebtedness to buy a Ford. And so, you always have values that are coming into the mix of how you make your decisions. All right, leaders' worldview and values model.

Leaders have endeavored to lay out a biblical, philosophical, and ethical model by which the church has processed decisions, especially when there is no direct teaching from the Bible. I inserted that section on the church at large. The Wesleyan quadrilateral is used by many denominations.

It's recognized that the only one that gets squeaked in that view is the experiential source item. The leader's model lays out paradigms for reading Bible translations and ordering issues in relation to how the Bible teaches—those two models.

These paradigms lead us through a biblical analysis of the issues we encounter. You know, lots of times we complain about all the Bible translations, but if you learn how to use them, they can be a blessing because they show you where you need to think, because you see the differences between the versions, sometimes major differences.

Third, biblical believers typically need to make decisions beyond the direct teaching description.

Most of the decisions we make are addressed by a proof text. Now, clear moral commands, the imperatives of the Bible, as we share them out, are pretty easy, but the things that are hard are the things that require a more thorough paradigm to deal with. Freedom is not doing what you think is appropriate.

Rather, it is hounded and bounded by accounting for the soul. Our thinking is affected by many factors. Our freedom is related to our nature.

We must have lines of reason that explain why we are making a decision. And those should be things that we have confidence in explaining. And that's a product of the kind of biblical study that we have to do.

We have to be aware of our lenses. We all have theological assumptions. I explained those to you a little bit in my opening.

I have them. I try to be open to other things. I appreciate a lot what's in Gordon Smith's writing, which is not exactly the same as mine, but it pushes me to be more open and to listen even to myself in terms of the experiential side of life.

But at the end of the day, as Isaiah said, to the law and to the testimony. If that's not in the mix, then we have no place to go. That last part was my paraphrase.

Wisdom in the Bible, number four, is a unique literary genre. Much of it is a product of a biblical mindset. While not quoting Scripture, the Proverbs, and other wisdom genres, we do not quote the Torah.

We reflect on its teaching in its development. And that's one area that I want to do a whole lot more work in. I want to read that literature.

I want to say what was in their mind in terms of the Torah that they were unpacking. Sometimes, those connections can be relatively clear, but they don't tell you what the connections are. And for us, we're doing the same thing.

We're taking the Scriptures and their worldview and values, and we're applying them to something the Bible doesn't necessarily directly address. And we're trying to bring that worldview over and apply it in that setting. That takes some thought.

Wisdom is a unique literary genre. It's a product of a biblical mindset. Biblical wisdom is a product of being saturated with a biblical worldview and values mindset.

Your saturation isn't your experience. Your saturation is the product of your study. Wisdom is actually a form of knowledge in Scripture.

To do the wise thing requires an explanation of why, why, why. It is wise not to just do what you think is best without a defined reason. So why is it wise? You're not wise if you can't explain if you can't show lines of understanding from Scripture to your decision and know whether it's direct, implied, or creative.

Now I know, and I'm in some ways painfully aware, that I set a pretty high bar for this. But God's bars are always pretty high, aren't they? So, the fourth element, which is mine, I think in a more excellent way. Knowing God's will is a process of applying your worldview and values to the decisions in life that you can draw.

The thing that pains me in American culture today, and other cultures probably have the same problem, is we have an illiterate church when it comes to the Bible. Why do we have an illiterate church? Sure, everybody knows the major moral items. That's a no-brainer.

You catch those without even thinking. But we have an illiterate church, and I'm going to be judgmental here because we have an illiterate clergy. The individuals responsible for mentoring the church in the decisions of life rest on those who are called to preach, teach, and be leaders in the congregation.

Not just leaders of experience, and not just leaders of psalms and endless choruses, and have no theological content other than to make me feel good. We need leaders who dig in and are trained adequately and fully in everything that relates to scripture, languages, theology, and history so that they can bring that wisdom to the congregation and help people manage the challenges of life. Yet, we immortalize the Bible.

We say the same thing out of every passage when we miss the meaning of these individual passages. Some people take months to go through a book, not because we're learning anything about a book, but because we're getting the whole Bible by the word association and suggestion in the words we read in the text. And you go right back to the same subject without asking, what did that writer and what was that writer trying to convey to us? So, we've let subjectivism destroy the kind of

Christianity that was witnessed in early America and has a little better residual nature in England.

But American rugged individualism and our concept of freedom and our concept of it's just okay to go to church, and the rest of it will take care of itself. No, it won't. So, please, take seriously the transformed mind and think about how you are transforming and how that changes your worldview and values, guiding them into appropriate channels, which you can call upon to deal with the decisions that you face.

These lectures are international. I don't know even what language the AI has put this into and that you're listening to. Do everything you can do.

And God knows our limitations. We all live with limitations of one sort or another, some more limitations than others, either in our culture or in ourselves. I have friends who write more books than I can read, and I'm a little bit jealous of that because that hasn't been my forte. I wish it was, but I can't be other than who I am.

And I've worked hard at it. I've done some things, a lot of them, but not nearly what I would long to be able to do. All of us long to understand that.

But those longings are only addressed by studying to show yourself a crew, a workman, that needs not to be ashamed. Paul addressed that to Timothy. Now, Timothy was a vocational Christian worker, as Paul was.

Not everybody is, but you still must take the sentiment of that text and study to show yourself approved to God, make better decisions, and be a better leader than your old Christian. May God assist all of us in that way and give us not just give us the strength to do it but certainly the word of God give us that we might succeed in moving forward in our Christian mission in the world.

God bless you.