

ALREADY IN PLACE

“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles...” —GALATIANS 1:15-16

The fact that God has a plan for our lives is one of the most reassuring aspects of the Christian life. The idea of our short lives on earth fulfilling an eternal purpose gives a deep sense of significance and security. On the other hand, it is also troubling, because it seems so notoriously difficult to find and enjoy God’s plan with confidence.

The Apostle Paul certainly held the belief that his life and vocation were preordained. He was not set apart from the time of his dramatic encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road, nor his ensuing transformation in Damascus, but was set apart by God from birth. Paul’s life was not a haphazard affair, but one steered and directed in fulfillment of the will of God. He lived with a sense of divine coordination and purpose as a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle.

With the antiquity of history and the brevity of records available, we are in danger of compressing Paul’s lifetime into a few paragraphs with all the pieces of the jigsaw falling neatly into place, much as we would like our own lives to be. But this would be to read Paul with one eye closed. The personal will of God is always clearer in retrospect than in prospect. The pattern is always easier to discern

and explain looking back over past events than in anticipation of prospective events.

Paul taught that what we see and discern is so unreliable that the Christian life is “lived by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Our confidence lies more in the hidden and unseen than in the seen and obvious. We may feel a handicap in the assumption that men of Paul’s stature probably enjoyed a more immediate sense of God’s divine will than we ever will. But this would not be a fair conclusion. We may have recently submitted our lives to Christ or are on the verge of doing so, but this does not come as a news flash to God. He knows the path we will choose and, as He did with Paul, already has His plans in place for us.

We may learn broad principles of God’s will from Paul’s writings, but feel there is little of the down-to-earth practical calibre that helps us confidently find and do God’s will in the nitty-gritty of contemporary life. But Paul knew very well the struggles and uncertainties, yet was confident, as we must be, of a fundamental issue from which the personal will of God derives. And that is obedience to God’s general will for all people is what makes possible the discovery of His specific will for each of us.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live by faith and not by sight, and to step fully into your specific will for my life. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Looking back on past events, do I see the hand of God at work in my life?