

Intentionality

The Enlightenment defrauded us. It falsely claimed that Reason (ie, our speculations and imaginings) replaces Revelation (ie, the Scriptures). And it didn't merely claim that but forcibly made Reason the sole criterion for all Western thought. Scripture was for those "superstitious people who populate the fringes of society [believers], who persist in being ignoramuses and reactionary." It was all a fraud, one so massive and so pervasive that no one even to today realizes how false the premise really is. A century ago, a German philosopher who was Catholic and may have been a believer (he certainly believed in God), Franz Brentano, showed that the essence of human consciousness is intentionality. In other words, the will is central to thought and action. Not the intellect, but the will. He was right. The very claim that Reason replaces Revelation is an act of the will. But there's another aspect to our psyche we don't normally recognize: What we *want*.

Our intellect only serves to justify the decisions and acts of the will. And our emotions add vibrancy to the whole process. We are exceedingly complex beings. Our desires and beliefs and our values and priorities are all inter-related. Thus we believe what we first *want* to believe, and so we will (or desire) to believe. Something else, all willfulness, all intentionality, has an external object. We will, we make choices, always with respect to something or someone outside of ourselves. Thus, Herodias willed to kill John the Baptist. Rachel did not will to receive comfort. The blind man willed that Jesus would heal him. God wills that all people be saved. In these examples, the will expresses a *want*.

Theologians refer to the Trinity's works and being as either *ad intra* or *ad extra*. The *ad intra* refers to the interactions and relationships among the Persons of the Godhead. Although there are three distinct Persons, they co-exist in mutual love, joy and peace, for example. And they share a common will. The *ad extra* refers to the works and relationship and operations of the Persons of the Godhead toward creatures, toward the creation. Let's understand that all that God does, as we realize it, is intentional. It's the outworking or expression of His will. Willfulness is necessarily directed at others.

And so God made human creatures in His image. We too have intentionality, and that is the core aspect of our thinking and acting. We are willful. Freely willful, in the sense that God gave us a certain degree or measure of moral decision-making by which we exercise our will. We will to act with respect to things or people outside of us. (Darwinism, by the way, rejects this. According to evolutionary theory and its naturalistic presupposition, no creature, including humans, can have free will; everything we do must be nothing more than the workings of intrinsic laws of nature acting on matter. This is another, although less-well accepted, fraud.) We will according to what we want.

What happened in the Garden illustrates nicely my thesis. God gave explicit instructions to His human creature. There was a certain fruit tree in the garden from which he was not to eat. That man was given the freedom to obey God or, not. We need to understand that this was a test. The man chose to eat its fruit. That was an act of the will. He surely justified what he did in his mind, but he did that after – or as a consequence of – what he had decided he was going to do, viz., take that fruit to eat. And so, having failed the test, having dishonored God by disobeying Him, God confirmed him and all his offspring as sinners. The man's willful decision was directed at God. He repudiated the relationship that God had intended for humans.

We must grasp this: We all – *all* – are likewise being tested. God has given us His Word, the written Scriptures, and we are free to use our will to decide whether to honor Him by obeying Him, or not. We use our intellect, our minds to justify our decision. We use reason only to justify or to excuse our willful and deliberate intention to ignore God. And this holds even for believers.

God has given us more than just a revelation of Himself. And more than concepts regarding theology. And more than promises and more than statements regarding the otherwise unknowable future. He's made explicit what's moral and right behavior. And what's wrong behavior. He's also clearly told us what we're to be like in our persons and what we're to be doing in our lives. The test for everyone including us in the churches is, how do we respond to all this revelation? Our will decides! Not our mind, but our will. Our mind serves to make the revelation known and understandable, and our emotions powerfully affect our decision. But it's our will that determines the decision. What we *want* controls the will. That's how God made us psychologically.

So God, thru the Word, appeals to our will. He holds us personally accountable for the choices we make precisely because our choices are what we *want*. Thus, "Whosoever will, may come!" God invites those who *want* to be in fellowship with Him to draw near to Him, and He enables it (see John 6:44). But this too: "I live in a high and holy place,

but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit” (Isaiah 57:15). Humility is willed!! (Thus pride is also willed.) Our will is always in relation to something outside of us; in the instance of these Scriptures, it is God. Selfishness refuses to exercise our will toward God. Do we get it? Obedience is an act of the will directed to God to honor Him for who He is. Refusal to obey is likewise our choice and whether we realize it or not, it dishonors Him. Indeed, it holds Him in contempt. We have no excuses for failure to obey God, it’s always a willed, a deliberate decision. My argument here is, that’s exactly what we want to do.

Calvinists disagree. They argue theologically, not biblically. Their arguments make sense, and they may be right in some way not fully clear to me (or anyone). But Scripture everywhere appeals to us in the tacit assumption that we have the freedom – *and the ability* – to choose to respond, if we so will. I don’t deny election. I don’t deny such Scriptures as “God has mercy on whom He wills to have mercy.” But Jesus declared, “If anyone chooses to do God’s will . . .” (John 7:17). So we’re not robots or sovereignly controlled by God. And we’re to pray that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven; this only makes sense if we assume that people may or may not do God’s will, as they choose, and that God may (somehow) influence that choice. Let’s nail this down close to home: A commitment, undeniably, is an act of the will. Obedience is also willed, as is faithfulness. So is love! We think that love is an emotion. Not so, although emotions certainly may (and probably should) be associated. Love is first of all willed. It’s a choice. It’s how we act and then make further choices. God’s command to love Him with all our being means we can do it, if we want to. And if we want, the Spirit who indwells believers empowers us to live out or express that love in a totally biblical way. God is sovereign, yet He respects our freedom to will. “God works in us to will and to act according to His purposes” (Philippians 2:13).

Jesus “overcame” and, in Revelation 2 and 3, requires that we too “overcome.” He overcame or had victory over the power of Satan, the power of sin, and the wicked influences of the world. How did Jesus (named in Hebrew after Joshua, the successor to Moses, who led the Israelite people to conquer evil) overcome? By being submissive to the will of God. “Not my will but Thine” was the basis of His teaching and His atoning work. His consuming desire was to do God’s will, all of which had been revealed in Scripture. He came to reveal God by expressing God’s lovely, perfect character, and to serve God by preparing people for God’s Kingdom, and all was done in the power of God. That’s what, in love, He supremely wanted to do. So He commands us to be like Him and thus be an “overcomer.” That’s how we enjoy the blessings of salvation. We’re not victorious over anything by being passive or indifferent, or supposing that we receive Jesus’ victory by imputation. (If the latter were true, why would Jesus *repeatedly* command it?)

Why all this discussion? Because Jesus said that those who do God’s will are his brother, sister, etc; in other words, related to Him for salvation. (Mark 3:35). We today foolishly reduce this verse to mean nothing more than that it’s God’s will to believe in Jesus, period. No! It’s God’s will that we believe in Jesus *and* do all that we find in Scripture that God has willed for us to be and to do. Our entire lives must conform to God’s will, to Scripture (Romans 12:1,2). We’re to be like slaves to Christ, willfully doing the will of God (Ephesians 6:6). *We have to want it.*

We express our union with Christ, our intimate relationship with God, by being godly and by sharing a common will. His character must become our character, and His wise, good and perfect will must become our will. Thus we become “partakers of the divine nature.” This doesn’t happen automatically (an implicit lesson of the New Testament); we have to work at it. We have to want it. Or it doesn’t happen.

A refusal to serve Christ, to obey His teachings and instructions as He’s revealed we’re to do that, means either (a) we’re deliberately, willfully disobedient; (b) we don’t really honor and love Him after all; or (c) we deceive ourselves into supposing we’re obedient and spiritually secure. Many of us don’t even want to know what Jesus has taught or instructed; we avoid the Word altogether. That is worse than holding Him in dishonor, it shows contempt for Him. We’re wrapped up in ourselves, in our own petty lives, and evidently we want it that way.

The bluntness of this conclusion is regrettably necessary. The prophet Isaiah had to confront Judah with God’s will, even though God knew that they didn’t want to be confronted; they (incredibly) actually wanted to be deceived (see 30:10-11). The Israelites were “hard-hearted” (Ezekiel 3:7), i.e., they had obstinate wills. “Hard-hearted” is God’s way of saying they didn’t want His will, for they had no intention of obeying it. So it is, I fear, with us today. We desperately need to be confronted, now, because the end of the era is imminent. Israel suffered horribly for their contempt of God. This present confrontation, therefore, hopefully will avoid future suffering, if we willfully respond in the way that God desires. We have the God-given ability, called intentionality, to repent, to humble ourselves, to know and then submit to God’s revealed will, AND we have the gift of the Spirit to empower us to do it. And it’s imperative that we actually do it. But we have to want it.