

Non Sola Scriptura: the Blackaby view of God's will — 1

by Dan Phillips

The book. I am currently reading *How Then Should We Choose?*, edited by Douglas S. Huffman (Kregel: 2009), with a view to reviewing it ultimately. This a *pre*-review of one part of it. (Translation: I can't hold this back.)

The book allows advocates of *three* distinct approaches to the will of God to set forth their views, after which each is critiqued by the others. I will focus on the first only, which is called the "**Specific-Will**" view. It is written by **Henry and Richard Blackaby**, who are father and son.

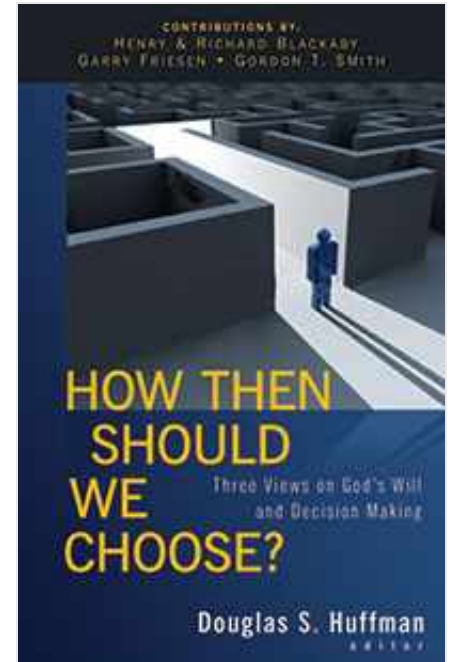
I only barely began reading Garry Friesen's response and, frankly, was sharply provoked at its tepid tone. If the Blackabys' view is un-Biblical (and it is), a lot of people — and the cause of Christ — will be harmed by it. I find it hard to be chatty and blasé about that.

My plan. In this first part, I will set forth the Blackabys' view, offering some critique as we go. In the second part, I plan to delve more thoroughly into the nightmarish practical implications of this position, offer more critique, and a conclusion.

Prefatory

First, many of you have been looking forward to Phil writing on the Blackaby view. This is obviously not that.

Second, what I am about to write **is not about the Blackabys, but** about the **view** they advocate in this book. It is not about anything else they've ever written or done, nor is it about them as Christians or men. I know next to nothing about them.



This post is *just* about **this one chapter**.

Clear enough?

Bottom line

This chapter is just about the single most appalling trainwreck I've read in recent memory, whether viewed exegetically, hermeneutically, theologically, or pastorally. The implications, if taken and followed out seriously by anyone (—God forbid!), are absolutely catastrophic.

I find it impossible to be bland about it. As you will see.



More fully

Continuation with a vengeance. Foundationally, the Blackabys argue that there is a **one-for-one continuation** between *all* Biblical narratives and our lives today; we should expect **no change**. "[...N]owhere in the Bible are readers cautioned that they should not expect their walk with God to be like that of believers in biblical times" (p. 35). " In fact, "*the only way* for us to have a relationship with Christ" is if He directs our everyday lives by telling us specifically what to do in a detailed way, *exactly* as He did with the apostles (pp. 45-46, emphasis added). Because today "the Holy Spirit is to function in us in *the same way* that Jesus led his disciples," which involves very specific instructions *not* provided in the Bible (p. 52, emphasis added).

You may ask, "So, wait — you mean, every aspect of what God did for Abraham, Moses, Isaiah... I should expect all that?" Yes.



So forget [Hebrews 1:1-2](#), with its portrayal of a purposeful revelation that is unfolded in differing portions and differing manners, coming to climactic fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Forget intra-canonical indications of purposeful ebbs and flows in the revelatory activity of God ([1 Corinthians 13:8-10](#) [see [here](#)];

[Ephesians 2:20](#); [Hebrews 2:1-4](#)). Forget the Biblical pattern of miraculous event, divine interpretation, verbal rehearsal of that interpretation (i.e. [Exodus 10:1-2](#); [13:8](#), [14-6](#); [Deuteronomy 6:20-25](#); [Psalm 145:4-7](#), etc.). Forget even the successive covenants ([Jeremiah 31:31-40](#) [*old covenant, new covenant, hel-lo-o?*]; [Romans 9:4](#); [Hebrews 8](#), etc.). All is leveled to make way for their theory.

Though Yahweh repeatedly points His people *back* to the given Word, even *during* the unfolding of revelation, the Blackabys would have believers keep looking for new words. In their hands, redemptive history becomes a block of cheese, with no distinct parts or movements. Each bit of cheese is the same.

Bad? It gets worse.

Non sola Scriptura. The ***insufficiency of Scripture*** is a major pillar to the Blackaby position. About this they are emphatic — in all but the use of that phrase. They do say many nice things about the Bible, allowing (for instance) that it is "the primary way God communicates with His people" (p. 55). "Primary," but not *nearly* the sole way.

Language that the Bible reserves for binding, inerrant, verbal prophetic revelation is *repeatedly* applied indiscriminately to normal Christian living. There is *constant* mention of God "speaking clearly" to people today (p. 33), of "His voice" (p. 39), of His issuing "divine directives" we are obliged to obey (p. 40), of Him having "told" people today to do things, expecting their "obedience" (p. 45), of Him "speaking" to us and our "hearing" Him (p. 53), of our "struggle to hear God's voice" (p. 54), of the Holy Spirit "speaking" to us through prayer (p. 56), of his *sending* us "a message through other people" just as He did through the prophets (p. 58), specifically of Henry Blackaby being "God's mouthpiece to someone desperately seeking a divine word" (p.

59; cf. [Exodus 4:14-16](#); [7:1](#), to see what a reckless expression this is) — and on and on.

Note well: *every one of these* is in reference to **revelation** that is **not in the Bible, yet is crucial for us obeying, knowing, and having a relationship with God.**

Whatever nice things the Blackabys say about the Bible, then, it is clearly *not nearly sufficient* for Christian living — no matter what passages such as [2 Timothy 3:15-17](#) say.

Bible in 2D. In order to get here, a fundamental, grave and pervasive hermeneutical error is essential to the Blackabys' position. There must be a **great and violent flattening** of revealed, redemptive history. Pivotal moments in the Bible are pounded down, mashed and flattened into illustrations of daily Christian living. Direct, binding, inerrant prophetic revelations are radically down-sized into illustrations of God nudging us today towards a particular spouse or church ministry or university course major. Prophets who speak for God are shriveled into everyday Christians listening for that still, small murmur that the Bible *never* calls us to seek.



So **Moses** — a prophet *without parallel* until the coming of Christ ([Numbers 12:6-8](#); [Deuteronomy 18:15](#); [34:10](#); [Acts 3:22ff.](#)) — becomes merely another illustration for how we should expect God to speak to us (pp. 46, 64).

Having made a chaotic and hermeneutically irresponsible mish-mash of Scripture and its claims for itself, the Blackabys bear down on individual Christians. And what their theory does is terrible to behold.

How to divine the Divine? Say you are convinced that you must hear God's voice, must receive this flow of extra-canonical revelation that the Blackabys say is essential for a relationship with God. How do you do it? How do you hear God's voice?

I won't attempt to reproduce the Byzantine, convoluted — with *less* legitimate Biblical support than a Gummi Bear has hair — series of tests and checks and methods they lay out. I'll just say this: they are very much like Charismatics "explaining" to Christians how to get the gift of tongues, or how to speak prophecy, or why prophecy may be fallible.



Similar in what way? In that they have **cast aside Scripture** in all but the eggshells — sometimes not even *attempting* a Biblical grounding (cf. much of pp. 57-59) — and so they have to *make up* what goes inside the shells.

Was it a "struggle"? For instance, recall their phrase, the "struggle to hear God's voice" (p. 54). But if we are to expect our experience to line up *exactly* with that of Biblical characters, we must ask: *what*

"struggle"? God's voice in the Bible was always absolutely loud, clear, unmistakable, binding, arresting, and quotable.

"What about Samuel?" someone might ask. "Didn't he fail to recognize God's voice at first?" But note: (A) the voice Samuel heard was so audible, loud, clear, and quotably verbal that the lad thought it was Eli calling to him; and (B) the text does *specifically* say that Samuel did not yet know Yahweh ([1 Samuel 3:7](#)). Not that Samuel was a believer who just hadn't yet read the Blackabys' book on picking out God's whispery, shadowy, well-nigh indecipherable voice.

Hence the parallel with **tongues**. If you had to have someone explain how to get them, and if they aren't supernaturally-acquired human languages, they weren't Bible tongues. And if the voice wasn't unmistakable, (usually) unsought, audible, quotable, and absolutely binding, it wasn't God's voice.

And so I ask: does Scripture ever use the Blackabys' expressions — God's *voice*, God *speaking*, God *talking to* someone — in a sense other than revelatory, verbal, quotable, and utterly binding to believers? Is there an instance of "God speaking" in a manner that is 45% inspired, 62% inerrant, or only 39% binding? Are the Blackabys sending us off in

search of 100% inspired, inerrant, binding *extra-Biblical* revelation from God? If not, if they're sending us after lower-octane revelation, whence do they invent this category? Not from Scripture.

Prophet-schmopphet? Next I ask: if we're to hear God's voice constantly, then how is the office of *prophet* distinct?

Biblically, what marks a prophet is that he receives direct revelation, and speaks it inerrantly (cf. [Exodus 4:15-16](#); [7:1-2](#);

[Deuteronomy 18:15-22](#)). If *every* believer hears God's voice and words, and receives individual non-Biblical guidance,

what distinguishes each from a prophet? Is it the *inerrant speaking* of the message? But *why*, if "*the only way* for us to

have a relationship with Christ" is to be directed by Christ

exactly as He did with the apostles (pp. 45-46), and if we are to

assume a one-for-one correspondence between their experience and ours?



Do you suspect I am caricaturing their view? But it is the Blackabys themselves who again and again indiscriminately cite the experience of prophets, seers and apostles as the patterns for our experience (cf. pp. 39, 45, 46, 52, 53, 54, 58). *Are* they our pattern, or *aren't* they? If they are, there is no "struggle" to ferret out God's voice, nor need of confirmation to follow a labyrinthine, slapdash path.

I'm with Peter, who says that



we have something more sure [than the loftiest experience], the prophetic word, to which you

will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no

prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

(2 Peter 1:19-21)

Amen, Peter. *That* is the voice of God, speaking to us. And it is enough.

