

## Topics in Practical Theology – Lesson 2 – God’s Will

### Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

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The topic of God’s will and how it relates to choices/decisions we make in our lives is an important topic. If we misunderstand what the Scriptures teach in this area, our walk could become laborious, stressful, and filled with “buyer’s remorse” for decisions that, from our perspective, do not turn out well. Before we study about making decisions, we must first understand what the Scriptures say concerning God’s will.

#### God’s Sovereign Will

God’s sovereign will can be defined as God’s predetermined, perfect plan in which He is directing all events according to the counsel of His will and for His glory (Eph 1).

- God's sovereign will is certain – nothing nor no one can thwart or resist it. It **will** come to pass.

<sup>1</sup>Then Job answered the LORD and said, <sup>2</sup>"I know that You can do all things, And that **no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.** <sup>3</sup>"Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' "Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

<sup>4</sup>"Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.' <sup>5</sup>"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; <sup>6</sup>"Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:1-6

<sup>9</sup>"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, '**My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure**'; <sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.** Isa 46:9-11

<sup>35</sup>"All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But **He does according to His will** in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And **no one can ward off His hand** Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' Dan 4:35

<sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? **For who resists His will?"** Rom 9:19

- God's sovereign will is detailed – from the smallest plans to whom will be saved.

<sup>4</sup>"I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. <sup>5</sup>"But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! <sup>6</sup>"Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? **Yet not one of them is forgotten before God.** <sup>7</sup>"Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. Luke 12:4-7

<sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having **been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** Eph 1:11

- God's sovereign will is known only to the Godhead except when revealed by prophecy or statements concerning the future in the Scriptures.

<sup>29</sup>"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. Deut 29:29

- God's sovereign will takes into account the sins and free will of people and is always the best for His children.

<sup>21</sup>"But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. <sup>22</sup>"For indeed, the Son of Man is **going as it has been determined**; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" Luke 22:21-22

<sup>23</sup>this Man, **delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. Acts 2:23

<sup>27</sup>"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup>to **do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur**. Acts 4:27-28

<sup>28</sup>And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Rom 8:28

- God's decree (sovereign plan) includes the means to accomplish that decree. God is sovereign in all things, yet uses various means to bring about that sovereign purpose. For example, God has chosen certain individuals for salvation, but He uses the preaching of the gospel to bring them to Himself (Acts 10). Similarly, God has ordained all things that will come to pass and yet He uses prayer as the means to accomplish His plan (Dan 9).

God has decreed that certain events shall come to pass, but He has also decreed that these events shall come to pass through the means He has appointed for their accomplishment. God has elected certain ones to be saved, but He has also decreed that these ones shall be saved through the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel, then, is one of the appointed means for the working out of the eternal counsel of the Lord; and prayer is another. God has decreed the means as well as the end, and among the means is prayer. *The Sovereignty of God* by A. W. Pink

- The proper response to an understanding of God's sovereign will is the praise of His majesty and humble submission.

<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! <sup>34</sup>For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? <sup>35</sup>Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? <sup>36</sup>For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. Rom 11:33-36

<sup>6</sup>But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." <sup>7</sup>Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>**Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord**, and He will exalt you. ... <sup>13</sup>Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." <sup>14</sup>Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup>Instead, you ought to say, "**If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.**" <sup>16</sup>**But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.** James 4:6-10, 13-16

## God's Moral Will

God's moral will can be defined as the precepts (commands) given to us by God in the Scriptures.

- God's moral will is fully revealed in the Bible.

The Bible, composed of the 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books, constitutes God's only written revelation to mankind. It is the inspired, verbal, plenary, infallible, inerrant in the original manuscripts Word of God. The Scriptures are authoritative and constitute the believer's only source of faith and practice (Matt 5:18; 2 Tim 3:15-17; Heb 4:12; 2 Pet 1:20-21). Only Scripture is perfectly adequate for all matters of faith and conduct – for salvation *and* sanctification. It is all-sufficient in regards to the soul of man, in our relationship to God, and in our relationship to others.

- The proper response to God's moral will is to purpose to know and do what it says.

<sup>7</sup>"Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Josh 1:7-8

<sup>21</sup>Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup>But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup>For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup>for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup>But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. James 1:21-25

## God's Individual Will

Many believe that God has an individual will for their lives. God's individual will would be defined as God's detailed plan for each person which they are responsible to find and live "in the center of". According to this belief, God's perfect individual will is discerned through internal and external signs which may include: the Bible, an inner witness, personal desires, circumstances, mature counsel, common sense, etc. Also, according to this belief, if we happen to make a permanent decision (like marriage) that we missed the road signs for and are then out of God's perfect will, God has a backup plan B that is not as perfect as plan A, but still good.

The only problem is that this type of God's will does not seem to exist in the Scriptures. There are several passages that seem to indicate an individual will, but under closer examination refer to God's sovereign or moral will. See for example: Ps 32:8; Prov 3:5-6; 16:9; Isa 30:20-21; John 5:19; 10:3-4, 16, 27; Rom 12:1-2; Eph 2:10; 5:15-17; Col 1:9; 4:12 (see *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* by Garry Friesen).

There are several instances in Scripture where God does appear to have a specific plan for an individual (e.g. the prophets and the apostles). However in each of these cases God spoke to these individuals directly through angels, visions, or an audible voice. There was no need to try to discover what God's will was or any way to misunderstand what God wanted. (e.g. Dan 2:19; 10; Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19; 22; Acts 16:9-12; 22:10; Rev 1:1-2)

## The Principles of Decision Making

We understand that God has a sovereign will which decrees all events that will come to pass. We understand that God has a moral will which is revealed to us in Scripture. We understand that there is NO perfect individual will which we are somehow required to discern and live in. So, how do we make decisions in life (big or small)?

The traditional view holds that the Bible (God's moral will) gives most of the guidance needed to make a decision; but additionally, knowing God's individual will is essential for complete leading to the correct choice. The alternative view put forth in this book is that the Bible is fully sufficient to provide all the guidance needed for a believer to know and do God's will. *Decision Making and the Will of God* by Gary Friesen, p82.

1. Obedience: In moral decisions we must obey the moral will of God.
2. Freedom: In non-moral decisions, we have the freedom to make our own choice and the responsibility to use **wisdom** in making the choice. The choice is based on spiritual expediency.
  - Some decisions have multiple choices any of which are acceptable to God. Yet, some decisions are wiser than others.

<sup>1</sup>Therefore when we could endure it no longer, **we thought it best** to be left behind at Athens alone, <sup>2</sup>and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, 1 Thess 3:1-2

<sup>25</sup>**But I thought it necessary** to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; <sup>26</sup>because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. Phil 2:25-26

<sup>3</sup>When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; <sup>4</sup>and **if it is fitting for me** to go also, they will go with me. 1 Cor 16:3-4

<sup>2</sup>So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "**It is not desirable** for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. <sup>3</sup>"Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. <sup>4</sup>"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Acts 6:2-4

<sup>12</sup>When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for **I have decided** to spend the winter there. Titus 3:12

<sup>2</sup>Then **it seemed good** to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, Acts 15:22

See 1 Corinthians 7:1, 9, 26, 38 for some of Paul's decisions being better than others.

- Wisdom is commanded

<sup>15</sup>Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the most of your time, because the days are evil. Eph 5:15-16

- Wisdom is provided

- By God

<sup>5</sup>But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5

- Through research (Luke 14:28-32)

<sup>28</sup>"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup>"Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup>saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' <sup>31</sup>"Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>"Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. Luke 14:28-32

- Through wise council (Prov 15:22)

<sup>22</sup>Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed. Prov 15:22

3. Trust: If we obey in moral decisions and make wise choices in non-moral decisions, we humbly submit (a heart attitude of 'if the Lord sovereignly wills') ourselves to God's sovereign will to work all things together for our good.

<sup>21</sup>but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again **if God wills**," he set sail from Ephesus. Acts 18:21

<sup>19</sup>But I will come to you soon, **if the Lord wills**, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. 1 Cor 4:19

<sup>5</sup>But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; <sup>6</sup>and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. <sup>7</sup>For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, **if the Lord permits**. 1 Cor 16:5-7

<sup>13</sup>Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." <sup>14</sup>Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup>Instead, you ought to say, "**If the Lord wills**, we will live and also do this or that." <sup>16</sup>But as it is, **you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil**. James 4: 13-16

## The Practice of Decision Making

- Will the decision glorify God?

<sup>31</sup>Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Cor 10:31

- Can I thank God in the decision?

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always; <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing; <sup>18</sup>in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thess 5:16-18

- Will the decision cause a hindrance to the Gospel?

<sup>12</sup>If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 1 Cor 9:12

- Will this decision lead me into sin?

<sup>14</sup>But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts. Rom 13:14

- Can I make the decision with a clear conscience?

<sup>22</sup>The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. <sup>23</sup>But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. Rom 14:22-23

- Is the decision profitable?

<sup>12</sup>All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. 1 Cor 6:12

<sup>23</sup>All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. <sup>24</sup>Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor. 1 Cor 10:23-24

- Will the decision master me?

<sup>12</sup>All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. 1 Cor 6:12

- Will the decision cause my brother or sister to stumble?

<sup>21</sup>It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles. Rom 14:21

<sup>13</sup>Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. 1 Cor 8:13

- Will the decision build up or tear down?

<sup>1</sup>Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves.

<sup>2</sup>Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. Rom 15:1-2

<sup>19</sup>So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Rom 14:19

- Is the decision worth imitating?

<sup>1</sup>Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. 1 Cor 11:1

- Does the decision fit the Phil 4:8 pattern?

<sup>8</sup>Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. Phil 4:8

Examples: Toothpaste, New vehicle, Business partner, Marriage, Career