

Personal Choice within God's Sovereignty
Lesson 3– Will of God
February 8 & 15, 2015

A. Introduction and Main Theological Points to Consider:

Does God always get His way? When someone suffers, it is God's will? If God has a plan for my life, am I forced to conform or can it be His plan for me to refuse? It may be impossible to know answers to such questions, yet we are called to meditate on Him day and night, to grow in the strength of our convictions. Knowledge of the will of God is the pivotal building block to the very way we see our lives. It should be explored and pondered.

Scripture never says that we can know all the answers, but promises us that if we seek God's will and plan for our lives, we will find it:

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

- We are limited creatures. There are things we are incapable of understanding. Jesus Himself said as much when speaking to Nicodemus:

Daniel 12:8-9

I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.

- There are things that God hides from our understanding. When Daniel asked an angel about the meaning of a vision, it could not yet be revealed:

Jeremiah 29:11-14

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

- God has a plan for you that is within His Will and Plan. We must seek to find and God promises that we can find and understand.

B. Scripture and Lesson

To more fully understand God's will for us, we must try to understand the components that comprise the larger will of God:

1. **There is His sovereign will**. This is His overall plan for the world. It will be done.

Isaiah 46:9-11

I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

There is an element of timing in understanding His sovereign will. Although we know that will cannot be altered, some of it is *secret* and cannot be known yet.

Revelation 10:4

And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."

2. **There is His moral will.** This is clearly spelled out in the Bible and in nature. It can be displayed in our love for others, our worship habits, and what we establish as priorities for our lives. It is His will for our behavior, even if we do not obey.

Romans 7:15

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

The salvation of true believers is not lost when they fail, but consequences follow actions – and they may linger even after repentance. (*Example: We may truly repent of alcoholism, but even after repentance we may suffer from cirrhosis of the liver!*)

1 Corinthians 11:31-32

But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

3. **There is His personal will for all people.** This is God's desire for how we may serve Him.

Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

God's personal will for our lives is not the same for all people. Each person must discover this will by God's revelation, and that comes only when the first two components have been fully subscribed to. His will for each person will be revealed in a clear and consistent manner.

Discerning His Will

Personal choice at some level affects our daily decisions, discerning that level requires an intimate relationship with Him.

At another level, sometimes known only to God in His wisdom for how our lives will be lived, He will definitely have an influence/direction/presence upon our everyday walk with Him. Paul thought he was on the pathway to greatness as a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin – but he had no way to know that God had chosen him and prepared him for another role entirely.

God's will is not always hidden from those who follow Him closely. He wants us to know of His presence, and for true believers, this is the desire of their hearts.

The Great Mystery

So how is His sovereign will accomplished when people disobey? His moral will and ignore His personal will for their lives? This mystery has lingered for thousands of years. Although we do not know the clear answer,

we know that God can somehow use our poor choices to accomplish His plan even if we do not know how this happens.

An example of this is what seems to be Mark's failure on the first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas. His weakness (if we might call it that) caused a split between Paul and Barnabas. Yet, what they saw as his failure and their difficulty with each other in time resolved itself as Barnabas went to evangelize Crete, Mark joined Peter and wrote the first gospel, and Paul launched the greatest missionary trip ever known. Furthermore, in the end, all seemed to be fully reconciled to each other. In retrospect, it seems to have been God's plan for their well-intended efforts to fail so they might individually contribute more to the kingdom.

How do you start to put this all together?

- First, we must accept the truth in God's own words telling of our inability to understand such things because heaven's ways are higher than our ways. (*Isaiah 55:9 As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts*)
- Second, we must recognize we have no ability to change His sovereign plan by either our successes or our failures. He is neither greater because someone believes and worships Him, nor is He any less because they reject Him completely. (*Dan 4:35 - All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"*)

We must learn to be comfortable with The Great Mystery:

- Everything that occurs works to fulfill His plan. (*Romans 11:29*) If this were not true, He would not be God.
- Everything that God does or allows done has a purpose: He can use evil deeds to accomplish His ends. He allowed the crucifixion of Jesus, the greatest sin that mankind ever committed – but to achieve a greater good. It is He who creates “the ravager” to use for His purposes. (*Isaiah 54:16 - See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to wreak havoc; 17 no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me,*”)
- God's plan includes us. (*Jeremiah 29:11, Philippians 2:13*)

Proverbs 16:9

9 In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.

C. Questions for Small Group Discussion

1. Do you believe that each person has a plan in the “Will from God”?
2. How do you find God's plan for your life? Does it take a lifetime of decisions and praying to ascertain?
3. Discuss the different components of God Will: Sovereign, Moral and Personal. Does this logically make sense in helping to understand?
4. How does the Sovereign Will of God affect you and God using your decisions?
5. It is correct theology to say that people have found the “Will of God” for their lives? Does this play out at that high a level or does the “Will of God” manifest itself in daily decisions?
6. Can your personal decisions through choice overrule God's Will? Think through the 3 levels of Gods will discussed above?
7. How do we typically judge or rate whether our actions were “within” God's will?
8. Discuss how our “sinful actions” can be made within “God's Will”?