

Finding God's perfect will

Last Sunday we looked at one of the ways by which we can obtain God's full support. Namely, when God is working on our behalf (2 Chronicles 16:19). Today we will examine another means of securing His assistance and cooperation in matters of life. Over the years, many people have asked me, *"What's the difference between God's sovereign will, His permissive will and God's perfect will?"* I have found that most Christians over simplify the process of "knowing" the **will of God**.

When seeking God's **will**, many of us see three main aspects of it, but in fact there are many more. The primary one is referred to as God's 'sovereign' or 'hidden will'. This is God's "ultimate" will and it's a facet of His will, which stems from the recognition of God's **sovereignty** (His supremacy). It is an expression of God's will that focuses on the fact that God sovereignly ordains everything that comes to pass. In other words, there is nothing that happens that is outside of God's sovereign will. This aspect of God's will is seen in verses like; **Ephesians 1:11**; where it tells us that God is the one ***"who works all things according to the counsel of His will"*** and Job 42:2, ***"I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You."*** Therefore, God's **will** is based on the fact that because God is sovereign (supreme), nothing happens that is beyond His control.

But note this understanding of His **sovereign will** does not imply that God causes everything to happen. Rather, it clearly acknowledges that because His rule is supreme, He must at least permit or allow whatever happens to happen. This aspect of God's will acknowledges the fact that even when God passively permits things to happen, He must choose to permit (or allow) them to happen. Why? Because He always has the power and authority to intervene. God can always decide to either permit or stop the actions and events of this world. That being the case, He allows things to happen, and in a sense, He has "willed" them to happen.

While God's **sovereign will** is often hidden from us until after it comes to pass, there is another facet of His will that is plain to see. This is what's known as His **revealed will**. And as the name implies, this facet of God's will simply acknowledges that God has chosen to reveal much of what His will is in His Word. The **revealed** will of God is God's "declared" will dealing with what we should or should not do. For example, because of the **revealed** will of God, we know that it is God's will that we should not steal, that we ought to love our enemies, that we must repent of our sins, etc. This expression of God's will is established both in His Word as well as in man's conscience (because God has written His moral law upon the hearts of all men). The laws of God, whether found in Scripture or written on our hearts, are binding upon us. We are held accountable when we disobey them.

The third aspect of God's **will** is His **permissive** will. This facet of God's will describes his attitude and defines what is pleasing to Him. This expression of God's will is revealed in the many verses of Scripture which indicate what God does and does not take pleasure in. For example, in 1 Timothy 2:4 we see that God desires *"all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* This gives Him greatest pleasure!

But if we are not careful, we can easily become preoccupied or even obsessed with finding the "will" of God for our lives. Yet, if the **will** you are seeking is His hidden or sovereign will – you are on a foolish quest. God has not chosen to reveal that aspect of His will to any of us. What you should seek to know is the 'revealed' will of God. The true mark of spirituality is when you desire to know and live according to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Our responsibility, therefore, is to obey the **revealed** will of God and not to speculate on what His "hidden" will for us may or may not be.

Living according to His **revealed** will should be the chief aim of your life. Romans 2:1-2 clarifies this truth, as you are told, ***"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*** To know the will of God you should immerse yourself in the written Word of God, saturating your mind with it, and praying that the Holy Spirit will transform you "through the renewing of your mind", so that you may demonstrate what is the *'good', 'acceptable' and 'perfect' will of God*.

Other than the "sovereign", "revealed" and "permissive" will of God, the Bible speaks of the "will of God" in several different ways - here are three of them:

(1) **The "decreed" will of God**. Like His sovereign will, this is God's eternal, foreordained plan and purpose, which will not change and cannot be thwarted. God expresses His supreme authority by making His commands known to man. The command not to murder lets us know it is God's will for us not to murder others. The command not to steal makes it clear that God's will for us is not to steal. If I say, *"I have discerned that it is God's will for me to rob banks, and to kill those who get in my way"*, we can confidently say that is not God's will. His written Word is the expression of His will. In this sense, many people are

seeking God's will when it is already obvious. You don't have to pray about living with your boyfriend or girl friend; God has already spoken on the subject (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20). Furthermore, God's covenant purposes and promises are a part of His **decree**, and He will not and cannot "change His mind" about these things. God's decrees (or laws) will lead us to the fulfilment of His covenant promises. This is why He put them in place and why He watches over His word. Both are signposts that help us down the path of our destiny.

(2) **The "ordered" will of God.** This is God's personal instruction and guidance in our lives. It does not violate any of the "wills" mentioned. There are times when God wants us to be at a certain place, doing a certain thing. The Bible most often will not provide us with this direct instruction or personal **revelation** of His will. I can think of God's directive will being revealed in Paul's "Macedonian call" (Acts 16:6-10). I can see it in the direct guidance of Philip (Acts 8:26) and of Peter and Ananias (Acts 10:1-23). God does guide us personally and directly, but it seems that this is not as common as some would like. This seems to be required at certain points of our lives, when specific guidance is needed (1 Timothy 4:14).

(3) **The "discerned" will of God.** This is my own perception of God's will for my life, which comes through wisdom. Many Christians seek divine guidance in terms of some simplistic formula, but the Christian life is a life of faith, lived in accordance with the Word of God, applied by means of the wisdom, which God gives (James 1:5). In the introduction to the Book of Proverbs the author assures the reader that this book will provide valuable insight into the will of God: ***"The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young - let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning set guidance*** (Prov. 1:1-5, NIV). I am convinced that no other Old Testament book, and perhaps no book of the New Testament, gives us greater insight into the will of God than does the Book of Proverbs. It helps us discern God's will.