

God's Will and Christian Liberty – February 27, 2012

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Last week, Steve talked about the Whole Counsel of God which he defined as “the whole compass of Christian doctrine--the entire system of revealed truth.”

In the past couple of weeks I've shared about our freedom as Christians, God's intervention in the miraculous, and the secret things of God.

I'd like to pull all of these topics together over the next two weeks, giving some clarity on God's will and the liberty we have as the Lord's redeemed people in decision making and “working out our own salvation” as Paul discusses in Philippians:

*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:9-13 ESV)*

It's interesting that these verses make it clear that Jesus is Lord, the master of the universe to which every knee will bow. **God is willing and working in us for his good pleasure (again, he is in charge), and yet we are told to work out our own salvation! Who is in charge?**

A few weeks ago, Pastor Steve made an interesting comment, saying “*too often, God's sovereign will is underrated, and human free will is overrated.*” I thought this was an interesting comment, and I certainly agree with his statement. There is no doubt, when considering the current condition of our culture (and even the current state of the church!) that God's will is being ignored by many people. Yet, there is a balance implied by scripture. I've explored this topic, and I'd like to share what I've found. Romans 12:1-2 states:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
(Romans 12:1-2 ESV)

- ♣ If you offer your bodies (your thoughts, attitudes, actions, emotions – your entire being) to God as a sacrifice, you will not be engaged in idol worship. You are making God the Lord of all you are and all you have.
- ♣ Instead of conforming to the world we will be changed, and our minds will be renewed:
 - Unrenewed people worship created things. By nature, our minds are self-worshipping minds. Transformed people worship their creator (Romans 1:25).
- ♣ By doing this, we will be able, **by testing,** to discern the will of God.
 - This is a curious statement...**by testing we will be able to discern the will of God.** This echoes the phrase Paul used in the verse from Philippians “work out your own salvation.” It sounds like some sort of a *process*. Let's talk about it.

What is meant by the term “God's will?” A few scriptures will give us some insight.

*In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...
(Ephesians 1:11 ESV)*

- ♣ the most important thing to know is that God works **all things** according to the counsel of his will. In other words, **if He wills it, he makes it happen**. This concept needs to remain as the bedrock of our understanding.
- ♣ God is sovereign. He is in control. There is certainly such a thing as human will, but the bottom line is this...in spite of everything we see happening in history, and happening now, God's will *will* be done, as we were taught to pray in the Lord's prayer.

*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
(Deuteronomy 29:29 ESV)*

- ♣ This verse in Deuteronomy describes two aspects or facets of God's will:

1. **things revealed** – this is God's moral will revealed in scripture, ex: the 10 commandments and the commands of Jesus and the apostles recorded in the New Testament:

*His divine power has granted to us **all things** that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.
(2 Peter 1:3-4 ESV)*

***All Scripture** is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV)*

- ♣ There should be no doubt, according to the **all inclusive wording** of these two verses, that God has made his will for us regarding “life and godliness” known so that we will be “equipped for every good work.”

2. **secret things** – God's secret will which is not for us to know. Only God knows all the reasons why he does things, and only God knows the future. It is forbidden for us to try to find out, through the occult or through unscriptural practices, the secret things of God.

And the LORD said to me: “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name although I did not send them, and who say, ‘Sword and famine shall not come upon this land’: By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword, with none to bury them—they, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their evil upon them.

(Jeremiah 14:14-16 ESV)

3. Once God's predetermined will is actualized, once it takes place, once the future becomes the past, it is revealed as **God's providential will**. The definition of God's providential will is very simple – it's everything that happens. History is the story of God's providential will. That is why we call it His-story. :)

✧ Even evil acts done by the enemies of God are and have been in accordance with God's providential will. Consider the following examples:

Jesus – murdered by evil lawless men. Murder is against God's will, and yet he allowed it. *...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.*
(Acts 2:23-24 ESV)

Joseph – because of jealousy, he was sold by his brothers into slavery. Is that any way to treat your brother?
As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.
(Genesis 50:20 ESV)

Paul – condemned to a miserable prison because of his relentless preaching of the gospel.
I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.
(Philippians 1:12-14 ESV)

✧ When we fail, or when difficult things happen, we must accept them as aligning to God's providential will. We must believe he allowed these things to happen. He will ultimately use difficulties and failures according to his promise:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
(Romans 8:28 ESV)

“ If you are a believer, then you will not respond to this message and to the truth of Romans 8:28 with passivity toward the devil and resignation toward evil and a casual attitude toward American consumerism and materialism. What you will hear in Romans 8:28 is a battle cry. If all things work together for my good, then I cannot be ultimately defeated in the cause of Christ. This is a call to take risks to spread a passion for God's supremacy in all things for the joy of all peoples. This is a call to go to a hard place or do a hard thing in the cause of love. This is call to spend yourself for Christ and his kingdom. This is a call to do something radical and crazy in the eyes of the world...let your heart dream how you might invest your life to move toward need and not comfort. Romans 8:28 is a trumpet call to follow Jesus in the risks of love no matter what it costs. Because whatever it costs will work for your good.” ~ John Piper

Links for further study:

God's Will and Christian Liberty (article) – Bob DeWaay

<http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue75.htm>

God's Will and Christian Liberty (2 part radio broadcast) – Bob DeWaay

http://cicministry.org/radio_series.php?series=godswill

What is Good and Acceptable and Perfect? - John Piper

<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/what-is-good-and-acceptable-and-perfect>

What Is the Will of God and How Do We Know It? - John Piper

<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/what-is-the-will-of-god-and-how-do-we-know-it>

Articles about the dangers of the Word of Faith Movement:

<http://www.equip.org/articles/what-s-wrong-with-the-word-faith-movement-part-one->

<http://www.equip.org/articles/what-s-wrong-with-the-word-faith-movement-part-two->

<http://www.equip.org/articles/christianity-still-in-crisis->

<http://www.equip.org/articles/positive-confession>