

THE WILL OF GOD

THE WILL OF GOD DEFINED

- “God’s will is his perfect determination and sovereign ordination of all things, pertaining both to himself (including his decrees and actions) and to his creation (including the events of history and the thoughts and actions of people), all unto the magnification of his utmost glory.”¹
- “Viewed from our vantage point, the will of God reflects His character, reveals His design for His creation, and manifests His wisdom and power in ordering all that comes to pass for our good and His glory.”²
- God’s will cannot be separated from God Himself...since God is one in essence, his will is undivided

A Function of Personhood

- God is the supreme example of personhood, having the characteristics that make up personality

Intellect

Psalm 147:5 ~ Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.

Isaiah 40:28 ~ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

Romans 11:33 ~ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

Emotion

Psalm 78:40 ~ How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert!

Jeremiah 31:3 ~ The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.”

John 3:16 ~ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Will

James 1:18 ~ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Revelation 4:11 ~ Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.

Independent of Everything Outside God

- God is never forced to act in a certain way...he always acts according to his pleasure
- No one can prevent God from doing what he pleases

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 185.

² <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2020/01/defining-the-will-of-god/>

Psalm 115:3 ~ But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

Daniel 4:35 ~ 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?’

- He gives an account to no one for what he wills and ordains to happen in his creation
- Mankind has no right to demand that God express his will in a certain way

Matthew 20:13-16 ~ But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 ‘Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 ‘Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’ 16 “So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

Romans 9:19-21 ~ You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

- He shows mercy or hardens people only according to his will

Romans 9:15-18 ~ For He says to Moses, “I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.” 16 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.” 18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

THE WILL OF GOD DESCRIBED

- There are two clear and very different meanings for the term “will of God” in the Bible...and both of them are referred to in Deuteronomy 29:29

Deuteronomy 29:29 ~ 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.

- God’s will is both “secret” and “revealed”
- Knowing the difference between these two meanings of “the will of God” is crucial to understanding one of the biggest and most perplexing things in all the Bible...namely, that God is sovereign over all things and yet disapproves of many things
- This means that God disapproves of some of what he ordains to happen...in other words, he forbids some of the things he brings about
- Paradoxically, God wills some events in one sense that he does not will in another sense
- The contrast between the two wills³:

Secret Will	Revealed Will
Contained in decrees	Expressed in commands and promises
The counsel of God	The command of God
God’s intention	God’s approval
Foreordination and foreknowledge	Faith and practice
God’s rule for what he will do	God’s rule for what we should do
Eternal and internal within God	Temporal and external from God
Unconditional and always fulfilled	Conditional and not always obeyed
Permits the existence of sin	Prohibits the commission of sin

³ Chart adapted from Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, 235.

Sovereign Will

- This aspect of God's will is also known as his decretive will (will of decree) or his hidden/secret will
- It refers to the fact that God sovereignly ordains everything that comes to pass...it is his sovereign governance of all that happens...it is God's sovereign control of all things...it cannot be broken...it always come to pass
- "The secret will of God is his eternal, unchangeable purpose concerning all things which he hath made, to be brought by certain means to their appointed ends."⁴
- "This is God's good pleasure, his eternal, unchangeable counsel or decree in which he has foreordained all things. God's decretive will characterizes all of God's essence, so it is eternal, immutable, independent, and omnipotent...This does not mean that he is the immediate or efficient cause of all things but that all things exist or occur by his eternal sovereign decree. God's decretive will makes everything certain, but he does not coerce his creatures to do anything. He ordains the free choices of men."⁵
- As such, the future is fixed because God has ordained it

- This will of God can never be thwarted...it is fixed and will occur exactly how God has willed it
- "Because God is sovereign and His will can never be frustrated, we can be sure that nothing happens over which He is not in control. He at least must 'permit' whatever happens to happen. Yet even when God passively permits things to happen, He *chooses* to permit them in that He always has the power and right to intervene and prevent actions and events of this world. Insofar as He lets things happen, He has 'willed' them in this certain sense."⁶
- There are many passages in the Bible that talk about God's sovereign control over every event in the universe:

Isaiah 46:9-10 ~ 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, 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'

Acts 2:23 ~ 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 4:27-28 ~ 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, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Ephesians 1:11 ~ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

- In some of these instances, God wills to come to pass some things that he hates
- In other words, sin is in God's overall plan...he never condones it, nor is he ever the immediate cause of sin
- But he does ordain it in order to accomplish his ultimate purposes, without being responsible for the sin because all sin is initiated by the volition of the sinner
- There are many other passages in the Bible that teach that God's providential control and will in the universe extends to the smallest details of nature and human decisions
- This proves that God is providentially in control of every detail of the universe

Proverbs 16:33 ~ The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord

Proverbs 21:1 ~ The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will

⁴ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 10:45.

⁵ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 187.

⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, 67 (emphasis original).

Matthew 10:29 ~ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

- It is critical to understand that God’s sovereign will is usually hidden from us until it comes to pass (but not always...i.e. predictive prophecy)
- Only by looking back at what has providentially happened can we know what God’s sovereign will is...it cannot be known ahead of time...it is not for us to know
- “The secret counsel of God is His secret. He has not been pleased to make it known to us. Far from being the mark of spirituality, the quest for God’s secret will is an unwarranted invasion of God’s privacy. God’s secret counsel is none of our business. This is partly why the Bible takes such a negative view of fortune-telling, necromancy, and other forms of prohibited practices. We would be wise to follow the counsel of John Calvin when he said, ‘When God closes His holy mouth, I will desist from inquiry.’”⁷
- “We know God has a plan for our lives. That’s wonderful. The problem is we think He’s going to tell us the wonderful plan before it unfolds. We feel like we can know – and need to know – what God wants every step of the way. But such preoccupation with finding God’s will, as well intentioned as the desire may be, is more folly than freedom.”⁸
- We must not pry into God’s secret will...any quest to find out this component of God’s will is a fool’s errand
- But this has not stopped many people from trying to find out God’s sovereign will for their life
- “Conventional understanding of God’s will defines it as a specific pathway we should follow into the future. God knows what this pathway is, and he has laid it out for us to follow. Our responsibility is to discover this pathway – God’s plan for our lives. We must discover which of the many pathways we could follow is the one we should follow, the one God has planned for us. If and when we make the right choice, we will receive his favor, fulfill our divine destiny and succeed in life...If we choose rightly, we will experience his blessing and achieve success and happiness. If we choose wrongly, we may lose our way, miss God’s will for our lives, and remain lost forever in an incomprehensible maze.”⁹
- This attempt has led to a host of strange methods to discern God’s sovereign will
 1. Misusing the Bible
 2. Circumstances
 3. Open and Closed Doors
 4. Setting Out a Fleece
 5. Inner Peace
 6. Pro vs. Con List
 7. Dreams
 8. Inner Voices, Impressions, Hunches, Feelings

Preceptive Will

- This aspect of God’s will is also known as his moral will, his will of command, his revealed will or his will of desire
- God’s moral will is what he reveals to us about himself and his desire for us
- It is His will that is revealed through direct commands and through precepts and principles in his holy law
- God has told us how he wants us to live so his moral will is revealed in his commands in the Bible that teach us how to think, act, and live
- The Bible reveals 100% of God’s moral will...everything he wants us to know about how to live and act is in the Word

⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁸ Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 26.

⁹ Gerald Sitsser, *The Will of God as a Way of Life*, 17.

- “God reveals his preceptive will by means of Scripture’s commands, prohibitions, warnings, chastenings, and judgments. God’s preceptive will is God’s will only in a prescriptive sense. His decretive will is the perfection that results in actual occurrences. The preceptive will reveals not what God will do but what he demands of people.”¹⁰

- This will of God is the basis for human responsibility

Matthew 26:39 ~ My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as *you will*.

John 4:34 ~ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.

John 6:39 ~ This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

John 7:17 ~ If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.

- It is critical to understand that this aspect of his will is not hidden, nor is it secret
- It can be known ahead of time...it is this will of God that we are commanded to know and obey from his Word
- We are responsible for searching out and following His moral will
- The emphasis in Scripture is never on discovering or finding God’s will...rather, it is always on understanding, knowing, and doing God’s will

Psalms 143:10 ~ Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

Matthew 7:21 ~ Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

Romans 12:2 ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Hebrews 13:20-21 ~ Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 John 2:15-17 ~ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

Colossians 1:9 ~ For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

- “The focus of our search for God’s will ought to be on Scripture, rather than on seeking guidance through prayer for changed circumstances or altered feelings or direct guidance from the Holy Spirit apart from Scripture...The discovery of this great truth could bring tremendous joy and peace to the lives of thousands of Christians who, spending countless hours seeking God’s will outside of Scripture, are often uncertain about whether they have found it. In fact, many Christians today have very little confidence in their ability to discover God’s will with any degree of certainty. Thus, there is little striving to do God’s will (for who can know it?) and little growth in holiness before God. The opposite ought to be true. Christians who are convinced of the sufficiency of Scripture should begin eagerly to seek and find God’s will in Scripture.”¹¹
- “The true mark of spirituality is seen in those seeking to know the will of God that is revealed in His preceptive will. It is the godly person who meditates on God’s law day and night. While we seek to be led by the Holy Spirit, it is vital to remember that the Holy Spirit is primarily leading us into righteousness. We are called to

¹⁰ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 187.

¹¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 133.

live our lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. It His revealed will that is our business, indeed, the chief business of our lives.”¹²

- To put it another way, we must not attempt to try to figure out the *secret* will of God that he *plans* to do, but rather to discern the *revealed* will of God that we *ought* to do.
- Thus, it is possible to be in the sovereign will of God but not in the moral will of God → where he doesn't want us (sin)
- And it is possible to be in the sovereign will of God and the moral will of God → where he does want us (obedience)
- These two wills of God provide precious comfort to us as believers that enable us to make sense of many troubles in this life
- On the one hand, this provides us the assurance that God is in control and is able to work all of our sorrow together for our good and his glory (corresponding to the will of decree)
- On the other hand, this provides us with the confidence that God empathizes with us and does not delight in sin or pain (corresponding to the will of command)
- For example, a person who was abused as a child can find comfort in the fact that: 1) It was contrary to the revealed will of God and God empathizes in the consequences of the violation of his moral will; 2) It was allowed in God's sovereign will for reasons the person may not fully comprehend this side of heaven

THE WILL OF GOD DELINEATED

- Scripture tells us exactly what God's will for our lives as believers is

Be Saved from Your Sin

1 Timothy 2:4 ~ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 ~ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

- God's will first and foremost is that people believe the Gospel and embrace Christ as Lord and Savior
- God desires that sinners be saved from their sin through Jesus Christ

Be Filled with the Spirit

Ephesians 5:17-18 ~ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

- God's will is that we would be controlled by and characterized by the Holy Spirit
- God doesn't want us controlled by our flesh...rather, he wants the Holy Spirit who is living in us to have full reign in our minds, hearts, words, and actions

Be Holy in Your Lifestyle

1 Thessalonians 4:3 ~ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

¹² Sproul, *Essential Truths*, 68.

- God's will for every believer is to live a godly life, particularly in the sexual arena
- He wants us to pursue sanctification at every level

Be Thankful in Your Praying

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

- God's will is that we would be content, prayerful, and thankful in all we do as believers

Be Submissive to Your Authority

1 Peter 2:13-15 ~ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

- God has ordained an authority structure and he desires believers to humbly place themselves under that authority
- To buck the authority that God has instituted is to be outside of God's will

Be Content in Your Suffering

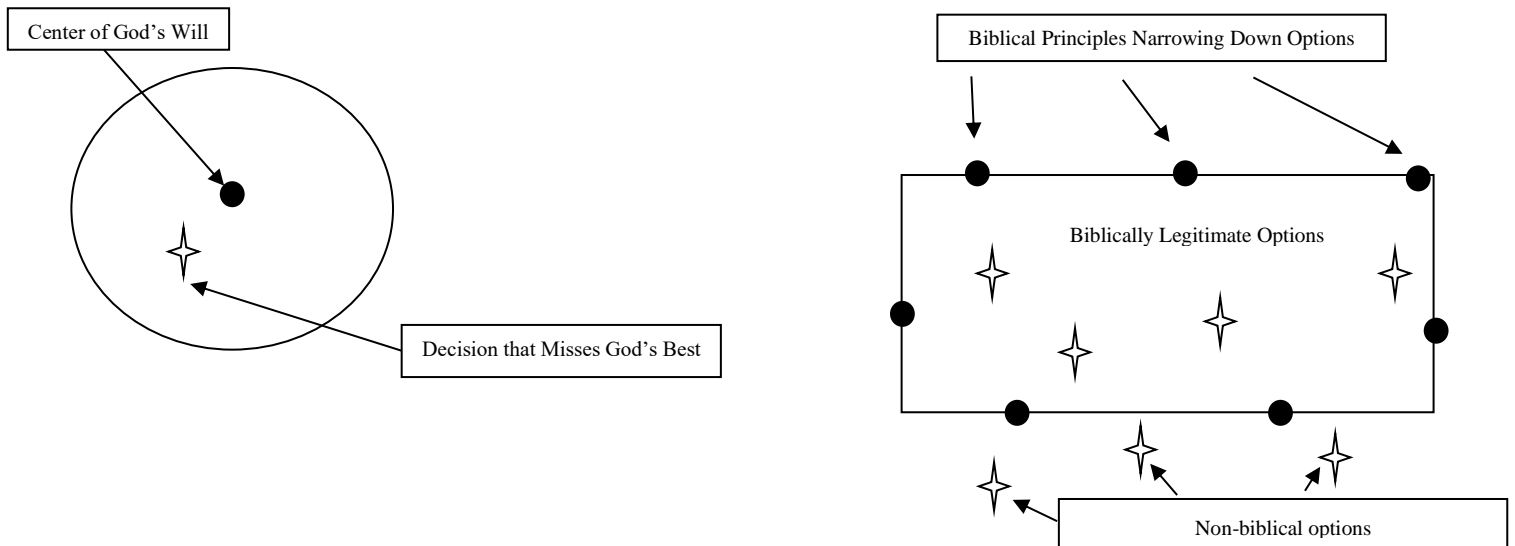
1 Peter 3:17 ~ For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

1 Peter 4:19 ~ Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

- God's will is that we suffer trials and rejoice in the sanctifying power that comes from them
- To resist the trials God allows in our life is to put us outside of God's will
- These principles constitute the revealed will of God for every believer
- If you are living within the revealed will of God, then there is freedom to do what you want
- "If all those objective aspects of God's will are realities in your life, you needn't fret over the other decisions you must make. As long as the options you face do not involve issues directly forbidden or commanded in Scripture, you are free to do whatever you choose...We needn't be paralyzed with fear that a wrong decision might ruin our lives forever."¹³
- "So go marry someone, provided you're equally yoked and you actually like being with each other. Go get a job, provided it's not wicked. Go live somewhere in something with somebody or nobody. But put aside the passivity and the quest for complete fulfillment and the perfectionism and the preoccupation with the future, and for God's sake start making some decisions in your life. Don't wait for the liver shiver. If you are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, you will be in God's will, so just go out and do something."¹⁴

¹³ John MacArthur, *Reckless Faith*

¹⁴ DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 61.



THE WILL OF GOD DETERMINED

- Often the question comes up, “How should I make major decisions in my life?”
 1. Examine the Word for Direct Commands
 2. Study the Word for Indirect Principles
 3. Pray for Wisdom
 4. Get Wise Counsel
 5. Consider Your Desires
 6. Make a Decision and Trust God’s Sovereignty