



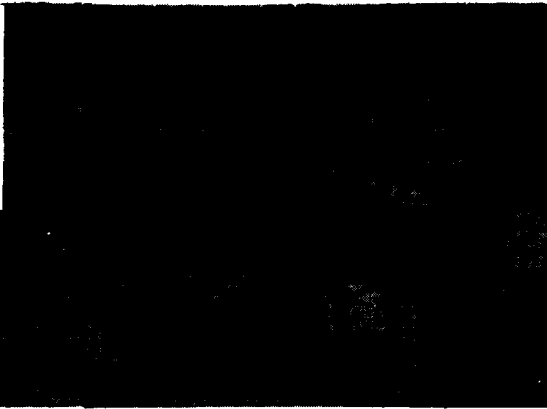
THE WILL OF GOD

In all intelligent beings there is a will--men and angels and God have wills. The will is the faculty of the mind by which choice is made or an action is determined. If man did not have a will he would be irresponsible--he would be no more than a machine or automation.

It is the will that makes an action bad or good. If I take a gun and shoot my neighbor, the will worked before the hand did; the purpose was before the act. In human courts there is a distinction between crimes premeditated and one done suddenly, but in either case the will preceded the act. First degree murder is when the act is premeditated and planned ahead of time, but where the deed is a sudden explosion of temper--something done in sudden heat and passion--it is called manslaughter, and the penalty is not so severe as when the will worked and planned in advance.

In God the will is the attribute by which He determines and executes future events. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). The sparrow does not fall without His will.

God's will explains all our experiences and this makes everything providential. In His afflictions Job saw this truth and exclaimed: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." When his wife begged him to curse God and die, he replied, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" And when he had lost all earthly comforts



Location: 3.3 miles out Bryan Station Road. Right on Briar Hill Road.

- Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
- Worship Service 11:00 a.m.
- Evening Service 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting 7:30 p.m.

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he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him" (Job 13:15).

The will of God includes the sinful actions of bad men, but it does not take away their blameworthiness. We may not see how this can be, but the scriptures declare it and we must believe it. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

We may not be able to see how God can determine a sinful deed without becoming the author of it, but the fact stares us in the face that the greatest of all sins--the crucifixion of Christ was divinely ordained. The death of Christ was not accidental, but providential. It did not originate with the will of man but with God.

DISTINCTIONS IN THE WILL OF GOD

Theologians have made many distinctions in the will of God; some false, others are vain and useless. But there is one distinction that seems necessary and helpful in rightly dividing the word of God. This is the distinction between the decretive will of God and the preceptive will of God, or His will of purpose and His will of command. God's will of purpose determines what shall be; his will of command determines what ought to be. His will of purpose is always done; His will of command is often ignored and left undone. God's will of purpose cannot be thwarted for this would mean His dethronement. His will of command is often violated, for men are in rebellion against Him. The carnal mind is not subject to His law, nor can it be.

When God's will of purpose and man's will of purpose clash, it is God's will of purpose that stands; else He would not be supreme. To further amplify these distinctions we will think of them separately:

GOD'S WILL OF PURPOSE: What can we say about it?

1. It is eternal. God is not forming any new purposes, for His counsels are of old. His purpose in Christ is said to be eternal. "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18).

2. It is effectual. God's will of purpose is always accomplished. There is no wishful thinking with God as with men. God never tries to do anything, for what his soul desireth even that he doeth. (Isa. 14:25-27).

Back in eternity God willed the coming of His Son into the earth to be clothed in human flesh. He announced His coming when He said the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. And by the prophets God announced where He would be born and how He would be born. He was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea of a virgin. And so we read in the Gospels that in the fulness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, made under the law.

Back in eternity God willed the death of His Son, and centuries later we see God controlling and directing the free actions of sinful men to bring His death to pass. God purposed and predicted all the details of His death--when, where and how His Son should die. And so in the Gospels we read again and again that such and such was done that the scriptures might be fulfilled.

3. It is immutable. God never changes His will of purpose. Only two possible reasons for anyone changing his will; it must either be because he sees what he willed was not wise, or because he sees he is unable to accomplish what he has willed. But neither of these reasons can apply to God. He was all-wise in willing and all-powerful in performing.

4. God's will of purpose explains my conversion. I am a converted or saved man. I have been born again. What is the explanation of this tremendous change? Back of every performance or action there must be a will. Did I will myself into a new creature? Did some other man accomplish my new birth? "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

GOD'S WILL OF COMMAND: What can we say about it?

1. God's preceptive will--His will of command refers to what He has prescribed as our rule of thought and conduct. The will of God is the law for our lives. Back in Eden it was God's will that determined what kind of a law would be given to Adam and Eve. It seems there was only one commandment, but it was God who determined whether there should be one or ten. The perfect man was tested by only one commandment--he was told not to partake of fruit of a certain tree.

At Sinai God did not consult Moses or the children of Israel about what laws they would be under. It was His sovereign will that determined that. In a democracy people make their own laws through chosen representatives who serve in legislative halls. This gives rise to pressure groups and class legislation because men are selfish and want laws to benefit their particular group; they do not love their neighbors as themselves. But in our relation to God we are dealing with a Theocracy and not a democracy. In God's will of command we have the sovereignty of authority; in His will of purpose we have His sovereignty of power.

2. It is God's will of command and not His will of purpose that men are responsible to perform. His will of command determines our duty. It was His will of purpose that Christ should be crucified, but it was not His will of command. Those who put Him to death were fulfilling the divine purpose but not obeying a divine command. There can be no sin in doing what God commands--obedience is not sin; it is disobedience that is sin. Peter tells us that they put Christ to death with wicked hands; therefore, they were not obeying a command of God. What God purposes is the determining factor; what He commands is our duty.

It seems easy for men to see this distinction in everything but religion. A man who can see only one side of the truth will say, "If it is God's will or purpose to save me, He will save me; therefore, I will sit down and do nothing about it." Now this same man would not dare reason this way about other things. It is God's will of purpose that determines the kind of weather we have, but no man would let this keep him from plowing and planting and cultivating. It is God's will of purpose that determines whether I will live out the rest of the year, but that does not keep me from eating and drinking, and obeying the laws of health. It is God's will of purpose that determines whether I am saved or not, but it is His will of command that I am responsible to do, and it is His will of command to repent and believe.

The man who takes no interest in his soul and has no concern for salvation; if he persists in this attitude will surely land in the lake of fire, for he that believeth not shall be damned.

By the late C. D. Cole