

Pastor Ray's Bible School #7

“The Prophetic View of the Will of God”

...our God is in the heavens;
He does whatever He pleases.

Psalm 115:3

I. One of Life's Greatest Questions

A. The Will of God: What is It? How Do I Understand It?

1. The prophetic view of scripture demands a prophetic view of the will of God.
2. Life's questions include: “Why did God do this? Why didn't God stop that? Why does God allow such and such?”
 - a. A minister's teenage daughter recently suffered a seizure and died on the way to the hospital.
 - b. A school bus skidded off an ice-covered road in southern Kentucky and eight children were killed.
 - c. Natural disasters, snipers, inhumanities and atrocities seem to abound today...where is God in all of this?
3. Some of the biggest theological issues deal with trying to understand how God's goodness relates with God's omnipotence.
 - a. “If God is good, then why do so many bad things happen, unless He can't stop it?” If God can't stop it, is He really omnipotent?
 - b. “If God is omnipotent, then why do so many bad things happen unless He's not good?”
4. Theologians refer to these issues as “tensions”.

“Theological tension”=the intellectual stress resulting from holding two or more facts as true when those facts seem, to some degree, contradictory.
5. The Bible contains a number of facts which fit this description.
 - a. The Trinity: God is one God, yet three in person

b. The Son of God, in His incarnation, is wholly God and at the same time, wholly man

c. Paul speaks of the “goodness” and the “severity” of God

d. The Bible reveals God as omniscient (all knowing), and omnipotent (all powerful), yet the Bible tells of God allowing events to occur which He already stated to be outside of His will.

1) Adam sinning in the Garden while God allows it

2) The presence of Satan in God’s world

3) The creation of man in the foreknowledge of man’s rebellion

6. The average Christian can be on the defensive in the face of honest questions like those above.

7. In this session, we shall seek to understand God’s “will” from a prophetic viewpoint.

B. The Will of God: A Huge Subject

1. Most of our difficulties spring from simplistic usage of the term “will of God”.

2. The average Christian uses the term loosely.

3. The will of God is a vast subject; only those willing to wrestle with all the implications of God’s will can hope to understand it.

II. Seven Dimensions of the Will of God:

1. Sovereign/Decretive/Unconditional Will of God

2. Revealed Will of God

3. Secret Will of God

4. Active Will of God

5. Passive Will of God

6. Preceptive Will of God

7. Dispositional Will of God

A. The Sovereign/Decretive/Unconditional Will of God

1. The will of God *expressed by decree*

“decree”=An order (or orders) issued by a person or persons in authority, deciding what is to be done about a matter, or what is to take place.

Webster’s New 20th Century Dictionary, Unabridged

2. Unilateral

3. Determined within Himself; as such is unconditional and immutable, and will inevitably and invariably come to pass. If God has decreed a thing, no prayer can change it, no circumstance can obstruct it, nor can any creature, including the devil, prevent it!

a. Seven times before man is even created, we read of God “speaking” things into being.

“And God said, let there be light.”

Genesis 1:3

b. Cycles in nature

“While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

Genesis 8:22

c. God decreed the flood in Noah’s day.

d. In the midst of spiritual declension by Israel, God declared:

“As surely as I live, the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth.”

Numbers 14:21

4. “Second Causes” or Consequential Events

“God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby God is neither the Author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of His creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather, established.”

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3, Article 1

“Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet that He not done anything because He foreknew it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.”

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3, Article 2

a. These theological axioms are carefully worded, expressing the classical orthodox Christian view of the sovereign nature of our omnipotent God.

1) God has ordained all things that have come and will come.

2) He is not the author (cause) of sin.

3) God does not cause or force His creatures against their will.

4) God doesn't "see and decree"; He decrees and then sees.

5) God's sovereign governance of His creation includes the effects of "second causes"; we are to understand that these, too, are included in God's decree.

b. Since God is sovereign, there is a very real sense in which everything that happens is His will, but only in the sense that nothing that happens could happen if He determined to prevent it.

5. Genuine, biblical faith demands belief in God's sovereignty, for to believe otherwise brings the entire created order under the rulership of "chance", "circumstance" or "renegade molecules"!

6. While this dimension of God's will is foundational and listed first, those clinging to this doctrine without a further revelation fall into fatalism!

a. Hyper-Calvinism, (fatalism), is extremism at one end of the theological seesaw.

b. "Open theology" or "process theology" represent extremism at the other.

B. The Revealed Will of God

1. The Bible is the foremost expression of the will of God made universally available to man.

2. Everything we need to know to live joyful, successful lives is revealed in scripture.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be perfectly, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

2 Timothy 3:16

"(Through the knowledge of Christ) God has given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness."

- a. It is God's will that we prosper. (Deuteronomy 8:18; Psalms 35:27; Malachi 3:16; Luke 6:38; 3 John 2)
- b. It is God's will that we marry within the faith. (2 Corinthians 6:14)
- c. God's will regarding hundreds of issues are clearly revealed.

C. The Secret Will of God

1. God has not chosen to reveal all of His will to human beings.

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us
and our children forever.”
Deuteronomy 29:29

- a. Why did Aunt Susie die?
- b. Why did God allow Hitler such power?
- c. Why does God allow a sniper to kill innocent people?
- d. Will all my loved ones be saved?
- e. What did Joe do wrong that brought about such calamity?
- f. Why did God make termites?
- g. What caused that friend to turn on me?

2. Some things are only temporarily secret and God later reveals them or permits us to search them out.

“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings is to search out a matter.”
Proverbs 25:2

3. Some things will never be known; they are “secret things”.

- a. When will Christ return?
- b. Who will be the last person to be saved?
- c. Will all my family make it in?

4. There's nothing wrong with asking God about secret things. As long as we understand He has no obligation to reveal everything to us. IS THAT OK WITH YOU? (See Isaiah 45:1-10 and Romans 9:18-21)

D. The Active Will of God

1. God's *action* reveals His will.
2. When God acts, we recognize His will immediately.
 - a. Creation
 - b. Sending the flood, saving Noah
 - c. Confusing the Babylonians (Genesis 11)
 - d. Parting the Red Sea- getting Israel out of Egypt, drowning the Egyptians
 - e. Sending His Son to die for us

E. The Passive Will of God

1. The passive will of God is when God expresses His will by not acting or not intervening.
2. The Bible reveals any number of occasions where God does not act, where He remains passive:
 - a. The garden temptation
 - b. Cain's murder of his brother Abel
 - c. Abraham's presumption in fathering Ishmael
 - d. The betrayal of Joseph by his brethren

F. The Preceptive Will of God

1. This term describes how we know the will of God through His precepts or His commandments:
 - a. Positive: "Honor thy father and mother."

b. Negative: “Thou shalt not kill.”

c. Permissive: “Of all the trees of the garden thou mayest freely eat...”

d. Prohibitive: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it...”

2. This dimension of God’s will differs from the others in that, while God reveals His will to us in His commandments and precepts, He allows men to disobey His *preceptive* will. (This is not the case with His *decretive* will.)

3. God speaks His will to us in commandments, but does not force us to obey or provoke us to disobey. He is *active* in giving the precepts/commandments, but *passive* in the sense that He does not force us to do them.

(Note: God works in His redeemed people to empower and enable them to do righteousness and live godly lives; But He does not work in the same way (actively) in the unrighteous. This “double predestination” view is an error. God is active toward the Elect, but passive toward all others.)

G. The Dispositional Will of God

1. In this dimension, we understand God’s will by understanding His nature or disposition.

2. God makes Himself known to us by His desires, delights and attitudes.

a. God is holy.

b. God is merciful.

c. God is just and righteous.

d. God loves humility and hates pride.

3. God is personal. We get to know Him in the same way we get to know any other person; by learning their disposition, likes, dislikes, we come to an understanding of their “will” or what they “want”; we learn what pleases and displeases them.

III. Conclusion: Examples of the Prophetic View of the Will of God

A. The Fall of Man (Genesis 3)

God's Preceptive and Revealed Will:	"Don't eat of the wrong tree"
God's Passive Will:	Allowing him to eat
God's Decretive Will:	To send Christ (the seed of the woman) to redeem man
God's Active Will:	Providing "skins" to cover their sin and driving them out of the garden, graciously granting man "probation" instead of instantly killing him
God's Secret Will:	To do more for us in Christ than the devil could do to us in Adam

The prophetic view "sees" that God allowed Adam to sin, (PASSIVE WILL), to violate His will, (PRECEPTIVE OR REVEALED) so that His (SECRET) will of becoming sending our Savior (DECRETIVE WILL) would ultimately demonstrate His (DISPOSITIONAL) will as a Father!

B. The Murder of Abel

God's Preceptive Will:	Thou shalt not kill
God's Passive Will:	God did not stop the murder
God's Sovereign Will:	God foreknew the murder would take place
God's Secret Will	Abel would become a type of Christ, whose innocent blood would cry "mercy" out of the ground cursed by sin
God's Active Will:	Branding Cain forever, judging him to be a wanderer

C. The Crucifixion of Christ

God's Sovereign/Decretive Will:	Christ, the Lamb "slain" before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8)
God's Revealed Will:	Blood must be shed that sin be remitted
God's Active Will:	He sent His Son to die for our sins
God's Passive Will:	He allowed His Son to be crucified
God's Secret Will:	That the princes of this world be overthrown at the cross
God's Dispositional Will:	To hold accountable in judgment everyone who had a hand in crucifying Christ!

1. God decreed the crucifixion, revealed it to the prophets, and was active in bringing it to pass; nevertheless, He was passive (to the natural eye) because His disposition was compelling Him to find a way to show mercy to fallen sinners. Nevertheless, His disposition (as righteous Judge) held men accountable for their part in the murder.

2. At no time was God out of control.

"Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?"

“Jesus answered, *Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.*
John 19:10-11 KJV

3. God did not release from responsibility those who actually sinned in accomplishing His decretive will of crucifying Christ!

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

“Him, *being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*

“Let all the house of Israel *know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*”

Acts 2: 22, 23, 36 KJV

D. Knowing the REVEALED will of God produces pursuit of God’s PRECEPTIVE will for our lives. Sometimes God’s SECRET will is eventually revealed to us, sometimes not. Yet we praise Him when He ACTS, trust Him when He is PASSIVE, and ultimately rest in our faith in Him as the SOVEREIGN God Who has DECREED all things that come to pass, knowing it will all turn out as it should...Guaranteed!