

The Will of God

Definition

The Will of God is found as a concept in both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. The Greek and Hebrew words translated "Will" in this sense convey the idea of a desire, wish, or want. Therefore, the basic concept of God's Will is that which God wants. When we ask, what is the Will of God?, we are asking what does God want.

Aspects of God's Will

The Bible addresses God's will in three manners. These aspects of God's will all follow from what God wants, but demonstrate some distinction with the level of the desire, or level of participation that God is prepared to express. These three aspects are:

1. That which God wants to the extent that he will determine and assure it.
2. That which God wants to the extent that he will command it and judge obedience.
3. That which God is willing to allow.

These three aspects are found throughout the scriptures but are represented in the following verses.

God's Determined Will - Eph. 1:9-12 - God, out of his desire (will), has purposed (determined) certain things to happen. This is often referred to in theology as God's Eternal Purpose.

God's Commanded Will - I Thess. 4:1-8 - God's desire for how we are to live is expressed in His commandments. Therefore, a doer of the Word is a doer of God's Will.

What God is willing to allow - James 4:15 - To presumptuously act without keeping in mind that nothing can happen unless the Lord allows it is a critical part of understanding God's Will.

The Dynamics of God's Will

Understanding the dynamics of each of these aspects of God's Will can help us to more fully understand His Will.

God's Determined Will is that which God, before creation determined would happen. This includes the general plan of salvation, Abraham's calling, the ministry of Moses, and Israel becoming a nation in the Promised Land. It also includes the birth, ministry, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and the establishment of disciples from all nations. It is completed in the end time events related to the return of Christ. I understand this to include our election and calling from God into the Church as part of His eternal purpose. Nothing can change this aspect of God's Will because God has determined it from eternity. It is revealed to us in His Word, in part, so that we can know about Him and trust that he will do what he has promised. When God uses a human (believer or unbeliever) as part of His determined will, they may or may not understand, but there is no alteration in what he determines resulting from their own will. A clear example is Moses and Pharaoh as expressed in Romans 9:15-24.

God's Commanded Will is found in the commandments of the Bible. These commandments are both general and specific and address our relationship with God and others (both believers and non-believers). The commandments do not address who you marry but what kind of person you marry, and how you treat them. None of the commandments tell you what job to have or which company to work at, but how to conduct yourself and perform your contracted duties. None of the commandments tell you what congregation to attend, but tell you how to act, one toward another, in congregation. The reason the Commanded Will of God is not "detail exhaustive" is because it allows (this is related to the third aspect) for our obedience and stewardship to operate within the commands of God. God will reward and punish

(both temporal and eternal) on the basis of His commands. This judgment results from our obedience and stewardship in response to the commands of God and requires that we have some choice in the matter.

What God allows is that which either doesn't interfere with what He has determined in His Eternal Purpose, or is within the latitude of choice at the various levels of obedience and stewardship performance related to His commands. In other words, God allows man to engage in obedience or disobedience related to the Biblical commandments and stewardship issues within certain limits, including those limitations resulting from what God has pre-determined. And in this area we experience both freedom and responsibility under the promise and certainty of reward or correction by God. While some of these rewards and punishments are issued temporally, many await the judgment seat of Christ. This non-interference aspect of God's Will is limited in that it provides that nothing can happen to a believer that will ultimately prevent anything that God has determined. God will keep His purpose even if it requires resurrection or some other direct action on His part. On the other hand, many things can happen, both good and evil to the believer if these events do not interfere with His Eternal Purpose. This is why Paul can proclaim that nothing can separate us from the Love of God because in all these things (pre-determined, commanded, or allowed) God is working good to those who are the Called according to His Eternal Purpose.

God's Permissive Will

Many pastors have taught that God has a permissive will. This appears to be a secondary will that is available when the perfect will of God is missed. This is an unfortunate misunderstanding of Romans 12:2. The King James Bible translates this verse as ...*that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.* This grammatical structure has led many to assume that there are three wills of God - His Perfect Will, His Good Will, and His Acceptable Will. The Acceptable Will is understood as that which is God permits, making it His Permissive Will. But this is a false understanding. God's Will, what He desires is Good, Acceptable, and Perfect (Complete). These three adjectives describe the one Will of God. "Acceptable" is a term used to convey the idea of appropriate based on the commandments of God, as in an acceptable sacrifice. This is the meaning of the previous verse that commands that we are to be living sacrifices that are holy and acceptable to God. This is not related to a permissive or secondary will. What God permits is disobedience and poor stewardship which also allows for obedience and good stewardship. But even in these things, *God is working good for those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose.* (Rom. 8:28 NASB)

Knowing the Will of God

Consistent with this understanding of God's Will is the Biblical teaching regarding knowing the Will of God.

This is an area where Christians make serious mistakes. The Bible does not teach the exhaustive detail of what is called God's Will for your life. This notion places the focus on us, not God, and gives God, in effect, many Wills. But knowing and doing God's will places the focus on God's desire, and causes us to be in His Will. God has revealed His Will in His Word, as inspired by His Spirit. Both His Eternal Purpose and His Commanded Will are presented in a clear and consistent manner. No Biblical passages teach the idea of using circumstances or emotions (often called the leading of the Spirit) to find the Will of God. The passages express that God has given us His will and we are to do it. There is no playing hide and seek with God. He is not requiring us to connect the dots in our life to figure out what He wants. He is not micro-managing our lives. He allows us some room to demonstrate obedience and stewardship. But he intends for us to know and to do His Will, that is, His commanded Will.

Consider this example. A father has a young daughter. He has given her some money and told her that he will meet her outside the store after she makes a purchase. She is given two commandments. "You may buy candy". "You may not buy make-up". She asks him what candy she should buy. He does not respond because it doesn't matter. But she has spent time with her father and knows that he values sharing because she has seen him share with others. She meets him outside with a candy bar that comes in two pieces. She gives one to her brother. She has done the will of her father. She obeyed his commands, and expressed in

her choice, a stewardship in accordance with her father's values. Had she bought make-up he would correct her. If she had bought a single piece of candy, she would have done her father's will, and had her reward. When she shared with her brother she showed her understanding of her father's nature. She knows she will be rewarded because her father is pleased when she acts like him. In all her time in the store, she does not worry that her father will not be outside to meet her. He is faithful in all that he says and promises. She doesn't need to help him accomplish this.

Knowing the Word lets us know the Father, His purpose, His attributes, and His commands. We are given choice, time, gifts and relationships to struggle with obedience and stewardship in accordance with His commanded will and who He is. He rewards and corrects, and, as a loving father, is pleased when we grow up to be just like Him.

Ignorance of the Word creates an ignorance of the knowledge of the Father and His Will. We then are at the mercy of secondary and fruitless sources such as opinions, emotions, circumstances and traditions. They are a poor substitute for a relationship with God based on His Word.

Doing the Will of God

We, as believers, are to know and do the Will of God. This must involve, first of all, a willingness to hear God's voice. His voice is in His Word. Should he speak to us apart from His Word, we can only be sure it is Him because we have become familiar with his voice in the Bible. Too many Christians claim that God has spoken to them. What they claim he has spoken is, more often than not, inconsistent with the sound, tenor, and quality of His voice in the Word. In addition, they often have little or no knowledge of his Word, meaning they are not familiar with His voice. This must be rejected. To know the Word is to know the voice of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit. This must be our first and primary place of listening to Him.

Doing the Word brings about an experience where the voice of the Father is understood in the context of life. By doing the commandments, we grow in understanding justice, mercy, love and forgiveness. Obedience to the commandments brings with it an experience of the wisdom and presence of God. As we obey, we become more and more familiar with expressing this wisdom in new contexts. Thus we grow in grace and knowledge, and toward maturity in the image of God, our Father, and His Son, Jesus.

How do we do the Will of God? There is no way to do the Eternal Purpose of God. He controls and does that himself, both in us and in His creation. When He uses people in that context, God controls them in that situation and there is no need for us to prepare for that.

But there is something related to the Eternal purpose of God, which we must do. We are to trust Him. To know the promises of God, allows us to know what He will do. We can trust that what He promises, He will accomplish. He is faithful so we can trust Him. Faith, then, is trusting God to Keep His Word. Obedience is the key to the commanded Will of God. As we trust the One who keeps His Word, we know that we can obey fully without fear. Thus we end up doing the words of the old hymn - "Trust and Obey". We trust who He is and what he promises because He has determined good for us and has called us according to His Eternal Purpose. We obey His commands because in them we express Holiness and Goodness which makes us act like Him and in that He is Glorified, and we are blessed and rewarded.

We don't need to become anxious about knowing and doing the will of God. We need not listen to our emotions or interpret the circumstances of our lives. He is not playing hide and seek with us. He has given us His Word and His Spirit to teach us His commands and to urge us to obey Him. For *He is at work in you, both to will and to work, for His good pleasure.* (Phil.2:13) All we need to do is read His Word and do His commands. We can Pray for wisdom as stewards of all that He has given to us. If we are obedient to His commands, good stewards of His provision to us, and trust in Him, we are in the Will of God.