

THE WILL OF GOD

What God ordains is always good; His will abideth holy.
As He directs my life for me, I follow meek and lowly.
My God indeed In every need Doth well know how to shield me;
To Him, than, I will yield me.

What God ordains is always good. He never will deceive me;
He leads me in His own right way, And never will He leave me.
I take content What He hath sent; His hand that sends me sadness
Will turn my tears to gladness. TLH 521 st. 1-2

INTRODUCTION

Think of the vast starry sky above and how we cannot comprehend even our vast galaxy of the Milky Way let alone the immensity that is beyond it. Now think of the One who created all this. This is a reminder from the outset that we cannot possibly understand even all that is before us, let alone the Creator's mind and will. We need to maintain in our minds the positive that what He ordains is good and His will is holy.

We are naturally curious and so want to have disclosed to us what is secret and hidden. On the other hand we like to keep secrets and be one up on someone else. This kind of contradictory thinking is in man and not in our God who is good and holy. He discloses to us what we need to know. There is not in Him some desire to keep to Himself some things for ulterior purposes not good for us. He will disclose to us what is good for us and keep from us what is not good for us to know. We are the ones who have the perverse contradictions due to our sinful nature. The holy God knows our nature and works with us, wonder of wonders. We so often ask, "Why God?" "How long Lord...?" The God who is both holy and love lets us see and know what we can handle. We need to realize that even in some things if He told us, we would not understand. It is as if you try to fill a balloon with water. It holds only so much. What if you just kept filling it from a lake of water? It would very soon explode. Our good and holy God knows how much to fill our minds.

When we study the will of God, we are entering into areas beyond our understanding. A paradox is something beyond our understanding and yet is true and a fact. This is something that cannot be found out by the scientific method of investigation and trial and error. Think for instance of 'eternity'. How can you prove it or discover it? You cannot. God has in His Word told us that He has put into man's mind this concept, yet not that man may know everything about it. Ecc. 3:11 Remember the balloon that explodes and God is good to us. We know there is eternity, yet cannot understand it beyond what God has given us in understanding.

To compare our understanding to that of God's is like comparing the flame of a match to the sun in the sky. The match flame is so small compared to the sun's fire. The heat put out by the match is tiny, while that of the sun warms our whole earth. And oh how briefly the match flame burns out, while the sun burns on from creation to judgment day.

Now we know God's will in part. 1 Cor. 13:12 We see in a glass darkly. God reveals to us in His Word what He will and this for our good. May our attitude be, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy law is within my heart." Ps. 40:8 May this joy extend beyond the revealed will of God to that which is hidden from us, rejoicing in God who is good and holy, always knowing best how things should be.

In this study we will be considering:

1. His will be done.
2. The secret and the revealed will of God.
3. My will does not match God's.
4. Further questions on God's will.

What God ordains is always good. His loving thought attends me;
No poison can be in the cup That my Physician sends me.
My God is true; Each morn anew I'll trust his grace unending,
My life to Him commending.

What God ordains is always good. He is my Friend and Father;
He suffers naught to do me harm, Though many storms may gather.
Now I may know Both joy and woe, Some day I shall see clearly
That He hath loved me dearly. TLH 521 st. 3-4

HIS WILL BE DONE

There is an absoluteness to our God. The starting point for that personally for us is the unmistakable, "God is love." 1 Jn. 4:8 There are no qualifiers to this. No if's, and's, or but's. John was clear and He reinforced that concept of our God personifying love over and over again in his Gospel and epistles. The whole Bible is the background to the apostle's presentation. At the same time as knowing our God is perfect love, because of sin in man's heart and abroad in the world around us, things happen that we cannot explain beyond what God has revealed to us. Things can even seem to appear contradictory to "God is love". Remember 'paradox' is simply beyond our understanding. We may at times think we have insights into God's will, yet those insights must be guided by the lamp to our feet and light to our path, the Word. No matter though how convinced we may be in our insights, it is always as they said ultimately when Paul would go from Caesarea to Jerusalem, "The will of the Lord be done." Acts 21:14

In heaven His will is always done, but not so on earth. The devil and his evils angels who opposed God's will were cast out of heaven and down to where we now must contend

against these powers. Our Lord has taught us to rely on Him in all things and to pray, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” Mt. 6:10 This earth has a curvature to it, so that standing in one place even with the most powerful binoculars we can see only so far. So it is with God’s will, we can only see so far as God discloses to us. God on the other hand can see all around the earth, beyond our limited horizon view. Relying on Him and what He knows and sees and ordains is the only way to go.

And beyond what our Lord taught in the 3rd petition we need to listen to Him pray to reinforce and deepen our understanding of how we ought to pray. In Gethsemane we have our Lord, who is God and man, facing what He knew would be His torture and death. While He prayed that if it were possible that the cup of suffering not be consumed by Him, yet “not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” Mt. 26:39 Jesus as true man knew what He must go through and as man he sought not to face the suffering. Though as true God He knew He must face it, and so He prayed for God’s will to be done. That will of God was decided in eternity that the Son must die for the sins of the world.

My puny will is like the breath I exhale compared to God’s will which is like the mighty wind that courses throughout the world and blows down all obstacles in its path. What is my will compared to His? How much better to rely upon the all powerful force of God than upon my own weakness and limitations. The waves of the ocean that pound upon the shores of land cannot be stopped. Instead of opposing such we should be borne by the waves to the shore. As a matter of fact who can oppose such force for very long? We can say that His will is done as surely as night follows day. The currents of a river run deep though on the surface there may be some choppy water. The river inevitably empties into the ocean. God’s will is like the current that despite all flows unceasingly to its conclusion.

At the top of the list of His will being done is the fact of Christ’s death as punishment for our sins and His resurrection proving that we are declared righteous in God’s eyes. This part of God’s will is throughout the Old and New Testament. Is. 53:10, Gal. 1:4 It then is a reminder that as this part of His will was done, so will it be with all of His will. If the greater is done, the lesser will follow.

What God ordains is always good. Though I the cup am drinking
Which savors now of bitterness, I take it without shrinking.
For after grief God grants relief, My heart with comfort filling
And all my sorrow stilling.

What God ordains is always good. This truth remains unshaken.
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, I shall not be forsaken.
I fear no harm, For with His arm He shall embrace and shield me;
So to my God I yield me. TLH 521 st. 5-6

(The hymn is based on Deut.32:4 “The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He. “)

THE SECRET AND THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD

For our better understanding we should differentiate as the Bible does between the secret will of God and the revealed will of God. Deut. 29:29 differentiates, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." Sometimes the secret will of God is called His hidden will, unknown to us, yet fully known to God. When we consider what God knows compared to what we know, it is a complete and unabridged dictionary compared with one word. And even then we do not really do justice to the immensity of God's knowledge. Rom. 11:33-36, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid?' For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things..."

The revealed will of God is given us in His Word, Deut. 30:11-14 "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it." One wonderful thing about the Word of God is that the Spirit who accompanies it explains it to us according to our understanding. It is like a river that an elephant can swim in and like a stream that a child can wade in. This is so because the Spirit brings into our hearts whoever we are. Paul also reminds the Romans that the Word is near them just as Moses reminded his people, "...The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)" Rom. 10:8

The Lord has given us His Word that we may know the revealed will of God, "I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in chaos.' I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right." Is. 45:19 To know His will means to be instructed by the Word. Rom. 2:18, 12:2 The problem lies with man who does not open the Scriptures. And even when he does open the Book it may not be with a readiness of mind to search to know.

To better understand how to view the will of God as secret and revealed is to think about a man you know standing before you. You know the man, as he is a beloved friend of yours. With him having two hands we think about the secret and revealed will of God. One hand of the man is outstretched to you with something in it for you. This thing in his hand is good naturally because it comes from your beloved friend. This in his outstretched hand you can see clearly. Behind his back he has his other hand with something in it for you. You cannot see what is in the hand, though you know your friend and what he has will not be poison, or a knife to stab you, or a gun to shoot you. It will be good for you because you know him. So it is with the secret will of God. Since we know

our God is love, therefore what He has for us will be good as is that in His outstretched hand. Think about the end of the Apostle's Creed where we look in His outstretched hand and see: the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, life everlasting. His other hand will have things for us no less good, because of who He is.

We do not know what is around the corner, down the road, or over the hill as we go through life. But we know Him. We do not know what tomorrow holds, but we know God and His superabundant love, so we trust His will for us. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain'; whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'" James 4:13-15

Think about a couple examples to differentiate between His secret and His revealed will.

- Death – Revealed Will – You will die. And you know that when you die you will go to be with Christ. Phil. 1:21-23
 - Secret Will – You do not know the day and hour of your death.
- Christ's Second Coming – Revealed Will – Jesus will come visibly just as He ascended visibly. Acts 1:11
 - Secret Will – You do not know the day when He will come. Mk. 13:32

Part of what was hidden, the mystery for long ages, has been revealed. This coming of salvation in Jesus is disclosed in the unfolding revelation of Scripture. Believers always knew that salvation was in our God from Gen. 3:15 by the seed of woman. Scripture as unfolding revelation in the fullness of the time reveals to us more details of this salvation. Gal. 4:4-5 Believers have known that the Messiah would be God Himself saving man. In the Old Testament over and over in the Angel of the Lord the Christ was seen. Is. 7:14 was added to give us the exact method by which He would come into the world. In Lk. 131-32, 35 it was disclosed that His conception would be by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our wonderful Lord gave believers what they needed to know of His will as He saw fit.

I leave all things to God's direction, He loveth me in weal and woe;
His will is good, true His affection, With tender love His heart doth glow.
My fortress and my Rock is He: What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me.

My God hath all things in His keeping, He is the ever faithful Friend;
He grants me laughter after weeping, And all His ways in blessings end.
His love endures eternally: What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me. TLH 529 st. 1-2

MY WILL DOES NOT MATCH GOD'S WILL

There is no question that conformity of my will with God's will brings understanding. Jn. 7:17 This is a great comfort to me. Tragically, my will does not always conform to His will. I am a sinner. And so I swim upstream against the current of God's will. This is a

tiring thing and bound to end in frustration and defeat. I can boldly spit into the wind. My spittle only comes back in my own face. To oppose God's will is just as silly. I can begin to roll a heavy stone up a steep hill. Before long my muscles ache and quiver and I lose ground. Ultimately, I find myself at the bottom of the hill worse off than when I had started. So is it when my will is not in conformity with God's.

The promise is there – do the will of God and live, otherwise perish. “And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” 1 Jn. 2:17 God be praised that Christ came and did God's will perfectly for me!

Peter encourages us, “...to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions but by the will of God.” 1 Pet. 4:2 My life's path sad to say veers off to the right and then comes back again on His path. Then I find myself sliding off to the left and coming back. My actions so often are at variance with His Word, as are my aims, desires and goals. The innate sinful flesh distracts me again and again. But His Spirit continues to work with my spirit through the Word to keep me as a homing pigeon returning to my roost.

His will is holy; mine is at best mixed. I have within me competing visions of my will and His will. We seek to follow our Lord who said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work.” Jn. 4:34 Of course we often fall flat on our face and that is exactly why Jesus had to come and do what we could never do in a million years. Our motto should be, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy law is within my heart.” Ps. 40:8 This looks great in a framed reading on the wall. But my life's carrying it out looks quite different. In Romans seven Paul reminds us of the Christian's struggle within himself to do God's will. Positively speaking because there is a struggle, it is a sign that we do hold to the motto, even though carrying it out demonstrates our failures that Christ made up for. Only on the last day in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye in the great change will there be complete conformity with God's will in me.

The will of God shall be my pleasure While here on earth is mine abode;
My will is wrong beyond all measure, It doth not will what pleaseth God.
The Christian's motto ever must be: What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me.

God knows what must be done to save me, His love for me will never cease;
Upon His hands He did engrave me With purest gold of loving grace.
His will supreme must ever be: What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me. TLH 529 st. 3-4
(This hymn is based on Rom. 8:28 that tells us in clear and certain terms, that whether sooner or later God will bring forth GOOD.)

FURTHER QUESTIONS ON GOD'S WILL

In Mt. 18:14 we learn it is not God's will that the little ones perish. But some do perish. This points up that God's will can be opposed. God's will is resistable and beyond this our understanding fails us. God would have all to be saved. 1 Tim. 2:4 Yet not all are

saved. God does not want any to perish. 2 Pet. 3:9 Yet there will be some who perish, even many. In these passages we are seeing that the will of God is used in a different sense than the absolute sense of Christ dying for man, the resurrection coming, forgiveness being won and given out.

We are always seeking to understand His will. In Eph. 5:17 after this is stated then we are given how we should live according to His will. This is explicit and clear, the revealed will of God. Whether we are concerned about the secret or the revealed will of God we should pray that we can be fully assured of His will. Col. 4:12 The will of God for us as individuals is to follow His holy will. 1 Thess. 4:3 That we do not shows that His will in this area can be resisted. We should live confidently though like a high wire artist stepping forth knowing that there is a net beneath to catch him if he falls. God is with us. God will catch us. We should not live with the “Woe is me” attitude or depressed with “What is the use?!” God is at work within to will and to do of His good pleasure. Phil. 2:13

There are some who are fatalistic, thinking that it will turn out bad no matter what. That is not the Christian way. As we go with the flow, according to His will, He blesses us. If we are caught in an eddy for a while swirling about that will end. Seeking God’s will from His Word causes us to have a dynamic journey of discovery.

There are situations that arise when a Christian seems to face the same disaster as an unrepentant unbeliever. These may be financial losses and medical problems among others. And we may wonder what is God’s will in this. We need to rely on the absolute Word of God which is clear that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord, who are called by Him. Rom. 8:28 Clinging to this clear Word we await what God’s will is for the Christian. It may even be that God’s will is for us to suffer for a time. 1 Pet. 3:17 So be it. I leave all things to God’s direction...

There are situations where we may think God’s will was done, yet we don’t have a clear Word on that. In this case we wait to see results of something that happened to better know.

There are a number of passages where some English translations say God ‘repented’ of some action: 1 Sam. 15:11,35, 2 Sam. 24:16, Jer. 26:13, 19, Jonah 3:9, Amos 7:3 In these references a word is used in the Hebrew which means to sigh or breath out, there is an implied sorrow, pity, or remorse. Of course it cannot be that God repents of sin, for He is holy. Then the question arises – Did God make a mistake? Did He change His mind?

We are the ones who change our minds. God is not like a man. Num. 23:19 We are like the willow and God is like the oak. We bend and change, while God remains as He is. “I the Lord do not change...” Mal. 3:6 With Him there is no variation or shadow due to change. James 1:17 So when God sighs it is that He shows Himself to be sad about how man has gone about his activity. He does regret that when He was gracious man did not

appreciate. This does not mean that God did not know everything. But in the passages we see a Lord who feels for His people and who is sad to see them do what they do. We know how Jesus wept over Jerusalem. In this area we are again coming upon hidden things of God. God is definitely not like man to repent of sin. 1 Sam. 15:29 He does though try to be one with His people and the expression of His sighing gives this truth.

The will of God is always best And shall be done forever;
And they who trust in Him are blest, He will forsake them never.
He helps in deed In time of Need, He chastens with forbearing;
They who depend on God, their Friend, Shall not be left despairing.

God is my Comfort and my Trust, My Hope and Life abiding;
And to His counsel, wise and just, I yield, in Him confiding.
The very hairs, His Word declares, Upon my head He numbers.
By night and day God is my Stay, He never sleeps nor slumbers. TLH 517 st. 1-2

CONCLUSION

We conclude this study of the will of God by remembering how we should pray. Some might think that since His will will be done, why pray? The answer is, He tells us to. And when that question is posed it reminds us of the secret will of God. We are to go by His will revealed in Scripture and that includes that we pray with all our heart. We pray as if it depends on us, yet He will accomplish His will regardless. This is again a paradox, beyond our understanding. We just must go by the simple, clear Word.

We pray with full faith in whatever the outcome will be that He will accomplish His will. Of course depending on His will is so superior to depending on my weak, human will that bends like the willow. The last hymn reminds us that whatever God's will is it is always best.

How should we pray then? Truly, knock, seek and ask in no wise doubting. And remember the Lord Himself in Gethsemane showing us, "Not my will be done, but Thine."

Lord Jesus, this I ask of Thee, Deny me not this favor:
When satan sorely troubles me, Then do not let me waver.
Keep watch and ward, O gracious Lord, Fulfil Thy faithful saying:
Who doth believe He shall receive An answer to His praying.

When life's brief course on earth is run And I this world am leaving,
Grant me to say: "Thy will be done," By faith to Thee still cleaving.
My heavenly Friend, I now commend My soul into Thy keeping,
O'er sin and hell, And death as well, Through Thee the victory reaping. TLH 517 st. 3-4
(This hymn is based on Mt. 6:10...Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.)

