

608 What Is the Will of God?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

I recently talked with a friend, who asked me about the will of God. He wondered if everything that happened was the “will of God”? Does God cause all the hurricanes, fires, tsunamis and floods? Does God decide everything that happens, or do things happen that are not God’s will. He wanted to know how we know the will of God for our lives and how we can be sure we are living according to that will. The will of God is a big subject and we may not be able to say all we want in one program, but we are going to take some time to endeavor to understand what the will of God is and how it touches our lives from day to day.

The Bible uses the phrase “will of God” in a variety of senses. First, there is what God determines to happen. Second, there is what God prescribes or wishes to happen. And third, there is what God permits to happen. God sometimes wills and makes things happen; God sometimes wills, prescribing that certain things should happen; and God sometimes wills by permitting things to happen that He did not cause. While God is sovereign and rules this world, He permits humans to have free will and to act on their own. We must be careful never to blame God for what people do. God doesn’t cause everything that happens in our world.

First, God wills some things or makes them happen. In Acts 2:22-24, the apostle Peter said, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—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. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” The death of Jesus on the cross was according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.

God sent Jesus to this world so that He might die for our sins and be raised from the dead. God’s plan was fulfilled in that death, even though the Romans crucified Him at the insistence of the Jews. God used them to work His will. As for the resurrection, God raised Him up to show to all men that he was indeed the Son of God. Paul said in Romans 1:4 that Jesus “was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.” It was God’s will that Jesus be raised so that we might have hope in Him. Paul gives us hope that if God could raise Jesus from the dead, He can also raise us up at the last day. God has acted intentionally in order to make His will known through the resurrection.

For this reason, Paul said in Philippians 3:20-21, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” I am glad that God has a plan for us all to spend eternity with Him. I am glad that one day I’ll be changed from this fleshly body into a spiritual body that is imperishable. I am glad that Jesus is preparing an eternal home for me in the Father’s house, so that I can dwell with Him forever and ever. I’m thankful that God has predetermined that there will be a resurrection and a heaven.

Now, while the plan of heaven is predetermined, I still have freewill. I can choose to live according to God’s prescribed will or choose to live according to my own desires. The prophet Jeremiah said in Jer. 10:23, “I know, O LORD, that a man’s way is not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.” We need God’s guidance. We need to know His prescriptive will to know how to live not only to please Him but also for our best interests. Knowing His will and living according to His prescribed will affects whether or not I will be able to live with Him eternally in the heavens or be

punished at the last day. Knowing His will and doing it then is very important.

The Lord Jesus said in 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*.” It takes doing the will of the Father to enter heaven not merely talking the talk or merely believing in the Father. We must not think that Christianity is a nice suggestion that we can take or leave. To enter heaven, Christians must do God’s will. This is true of the teaching as a whole and also of individual commands and instructions. We cannot choose to obey some things and ignore others. Selective obedience really isn’t obedience at all. Choosing what when we will serve the will of God is really serving ourselves.

It is selfishness and sin that separate us from God. It is when people do not give themselves to the will of the Lord that they lose far more than they ever imagined. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” When a person lives in sin, he separates himself from God and from His favor. God will not hear his prayer or give him His blessing. Living outside the will of God means living outside of God’s grace and favor. People often want God to bless them but do not want God’s rule.

The reason many fall outside the grace and favor of God is that they do not live within the will of God. God actually has little place in their lives, little say in their behavior or activities, and little influence on their choices. When people rebel against God or ignore God to live life their own way, they find it harder than they imagined. The Lord Himself said in Hosea 4:6, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.” People cannot ignore God’s teachings and expect life to be filled with an abundance of spiritual blessings.

Some people think because they live in a nice house and have a good salary, they are prospering, but life consists of far more than the abundance of our possessions. Perhaps you remember the story Jesus told in Luke 12:16-20, “The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.”’ There are a lot of people just in this situation.

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?’ So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” This man never thought of the needy around him, never thought of making an offering to God, and never thought of anything but himself. From a worldly standpoint, people might look at him and think how he has prospered; but had he really? What we have on this earth, we can only have for a time. Then we will lose it forever. The man of true riches is the man who gives himself to God, heart and soul, and loves his neighbor as himself. That, my friend is the will of God.

In Mark 12:28-31 one of the scribes asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second

is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." This is not a timid or easy commandment; it will demand everything you are and possess. What God wants is you! He wants to live in a covenant relationship with you forever. He has established that covenant through the blood of His Son Jesus, who was willing to give all for you.

God doesn't want lipservice. He doesn't want pre-tenders. He doesn't want show-offs. And He doesn't want quitters. He wants people who are real and genuine, who will commit themselves for eternity. Paul said in Romans 12:1-2, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. 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." God wants His people to live out His will to show the world that His will is perfect, acceptable, and good.

It is unfortunate that the only Christians some people see live far below the will of God. Like the Pharisees of old, they are white-washed tombs that appear beautiful on the outside but are filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness. My friend, don't let someone else's moral failure keep you from living as you ought to live. We must determine to live according to God's will whether anyone else does or not. The world will always be worldly, but we don't have to live like the world lives, think like they think, or follow their lead. In Christ we have a life that is so much richer and fuller, one that satisfies the soul. There is no life better than loving and being loved by the God who made us.

The third use of the phrase "will of God" is the permissive will of God. That is, God permits us to have freewill in this life. Because of the sins of Adam and Eve, mankind is not only free to do as they please, they must also live with the consequences of their actions. Because of this, there is a lot of hurt in the world. Cain killed Abel, Noah got drunk, Abraham lied about his wife Sarah, David committed adultery, and Saul of Tarsus persecuted the church. Sin leaves ruin and destruction wherever it goes. We must be careful never to blame God for what people do. If we say God shouldn't let him do that, then we have to realize God shouldn't let us do things either. God did not make us puppets or robots.

God sends his sun and rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45). He has given His love to all, but this world also has its disasters, as we have seen. Perhaps one reason we have these is to wake us up, to remind us that there is a higher power who is in control. Mankind has a tendency to go its own way without a thought toward God until they need Him. Many people live with great blessings from God and rarely give thanks, but they are ready to question God if anything goes wrong. God hasn't quit loving us, simply because there is a hurricane or a fire or a flood. These events are natural occurrences that God permits in this world to make us stop and think about life and our accountability.

Should we suppose that the stories of the ancient flood or Sodom and Gomorrah have no meaning to us today? Many folks scoff at such stories and would suggest that God go away. Take God out of school, never pray in a public place, teach the theory of evolution and neglect telling people that God created the earth, keep allowing women to abort more than million unborn babies every year. Make taking God's name in vain as a common practice. Allow

filth and pornography on television and the internet. Show Christians on television as hypocrites and mean, and sinful people as virtuous. Glorify illicit sex, tell people that truth is relative, and depict Jesus as a sinner. Make good evil, and evil good.

In the midst of all this is Jesus Christ, who came into this world and lived a sinless life, who loved everyone and died on the cruel cross for the sins of the whole world. The same God who permits evil today, also permitted evil men to crucify His only begotten Son. They beat Him, cursed Him, spat on Him, mocked Him, scourged Him, and nailed Him to a tree. He kept saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). God has suffered so greatly at our hands and yet has still sent His Son to die for us. He simply wants us to love Him the way that He loves us. Sometimes it takes the harsh things of life to wake us up to our need for God. His will for us is to go to heaven (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

If we go there, God is going to have to have our serious attention. We are going to have to listen to Him and follow His will. We can't go on living as if He didn't matter or didn't give us commands in His Word, the Bible. We are destroying ourselves by failing to listen to His will, just as other nations have hurt themselves by rejecting Him. Friend, the best thing you can do is to come to God in faith and love and repentance, confessing His name and being baptized to wash away your sins. This is His will for you. Then live faithfully to God as a member of the church, the body of Christ. Won't you do that? Put God first in your life today.

Making decisions in life is not always easy. It seems there are a thousand things pulling us in every direction. Solomon in Proverbs 3:1-8 gives this advice: "My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones." When things happen we can't understand or explain, the best thing is to trust that God will use that event in our lives for good and to bless us or someone around us. We find great peace by living according to the will of God. It is when we struggle against Him that we find the turmoil and the heartaches of life. It's when we become wise in our own eyes and forget His benefits that we find life hard burdensome. Trust in the Lord. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Put God in your heart and life, and He will bless you for it.

If you would like to more about God's will for your life, write and ask for the free series, "Upon the Rock" Bible study. It has six informative lessons about God and His plan for you. They allow you to use your own Bible to discover what God's teaching is for you and for all. The gospel really is good news, and you can find the joy you are seeking by a serious study of God's word, and these studies will help you. Don't let anything keep you from getting to know God and having a close personal relationship with Him. There is nothing in this life that is more important than a relationship with God. Many people don't know what they are missing by living a life without His loving care and blessing.

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