

### “The Will of God” (Part 3)

This is the third message in this series called “The Will of God”, based on Leslie Weatherhead’s classic book, simply titled, “The Will of God.” As humans, with finite understanding, we can never fully grasp the mystery and *entire* scope of God’s will – but we are not totally in the dark about this. Weatherhead suggests it can help if we think in terms of God’s *intentional* will, God’s *circumstantial* will, and God’s *ultimate* will.

God’s *intentional* will is His *ideal plan* for us, always involving only what’s good. But when this intentional will is spoiled (by human ignorance, mistakes, or evil) then there is God’s *circumstantial* will. God can work out His will within these circumstances that are created – sort of a “will within the will”. And if we cooperate with God and seek His guidance *within these circumstances*, we can find peace and live victoriously. God can even override evil, human ignorance and error and bring good out of bad things. Romans 8:28 expresses this: “We know that *in everything* God works for *good* with those who love Him, who are called according to His purposes.”

Today, I would like us to think about what Leslie Weatherhead calls ***God’s ultimate will***. In speaking of God’s ultimate will, we are saying this: *God does not permit anything to happen that will ultimately defeat His purposes!*

***We are dealing here with what theologians call the omnipotence, or sovereignty of God.*** This is clearly stated in a verse from the Book of Job in the Old Testament: “Then Job replied to the Lord, ‘I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted’” (Job 42:1-2). Remember Job? He lost just about everything: his children, and all of his possessions. After an intense struggle of the soul – where he protests and challenges God – even though there is no evidence that God was in control, Job can affirm that God’s *ultimate* purposes cannot be defeated! “No purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

***This truth is also expressed when the writers of the Bible use the title “King” for God.*** Psalm 10:16 says, “The Lord is King forever and ever.” Notice, God rules not just for a little while, but forever. Look at Daniel 4:34-35: “When that period was over, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me. I blessed the Most High and praised and honored the one who lives forever. For his sovereignty is an everlasting sovereignty, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does what he wills with the host of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What are you doing?’” This Scripture reminds us that “His sovereignty is an everlasting sovereignty”. “He does what He wills.” “There is no one who can stay (hold back) his hand.”

Isaiah 46:9-11 also reveals the sovereignty of God. “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying ‘My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfill my intention’...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass, I have planned, and I will do it.” Here again God’s power to ultimately fulfill His will is eloquently expressed: “My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfill my intention.” “I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass.” “I have planned, and I will do it.”

There is a scene in heaven, depicted in the Book of Revelation: “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns’” (Revelation 19:6). The words of the Hallelujah Chorus, “And He shall reign forever and ever” stem from this verse in the Book of Revelation.

***We need, however, to be very careful and clear when we talk about God’s sovereignty: I am not saying that since God’s will shall ultimately be fulfilled, that everything that happens is God’s will!*** This is a horrible thought! There is a ton of stuff that happens in life that God does *not* want to happen. God gets blamed for lot of stuff that we cause as sinful human beings! So what we are saying is that *in spite of these things*, God’s ultimate will is not defeated.

Now you might say: Well, if nothing can defeat God, then it doesn’t matter how we live or what we do, because God will get what He wants anyway in the end! I hope you realize this is faulty thinking! To casually do careless and stupid things...to cast all moral restraint aside...to ignore God’s laws and commands - these produce hurtful consequences. This reckless type of living produces *unnecessary* pain and suffering. To be this way is a far cry from those who come humbly to God when we’ve done wrong, or when life has hurt us in some way, and say, “Lord, please help me to do Your will within these circumstances. Take the mistakes I’ve made, take the evil I’ve done or the evil done to me, and weave it into your eternal purposes.”

We may also wonder: If God is going to achieve His purposes anyway, why does He allow evil and suffering to delay that – why not just skip over the bad part! The question of why God allows evil and suffering is a profound question of life.

***One reason is that God created an orderly universe with dependable natural laws.*** The laws of physics, the law of gravity, the law of centrifugal force, for example. So when people fall off roofs or take a curve too fast and smash into a tree, they get hurt. But would we want a world where there were no natural laws that we could depend on? Life here on earth would be chaotic. These natural laws work in positive ways to keep us safe when they are respected and obeyed.

***And then, a lot of evil and suffering is a result of the fact that God has allowed us humans an incredible amount of moral freedom.*** It is terrifying, sometimes, how much space God has given us to choose good or evil. Six million Jews exterminated in Germany. Radical suicide bombers blowing up themselves and innocent men, women and children. Someone going to a school or a concert and shooting people at random. But if God chose not to give us the moral freedom to *choose* good or evil, we would be *puppets, automatons* - mechanical and moral robots. There would be no love if we didn’t have the choice *not to love*. There would be no goodness if we were not given the option to choose evil.

Dr. Weatherhead, in *The Will of God*, suggests that we are all in the position of little children. It is similar to a little child, looking up into the eyes of a father or mother who loves him, and saying, “Why do you permit things to happen to me that hurt me?” He imagined a mass meeting of tiny toddlers, who had the gift of putting into words what they thought. One tiny tot was

chairman, standing before a crowded hall of perplexed toddlers. The little guy adjusted his bib, then said, “I’m sure our parents don’t care about us. Why just look at the bumps on our heads, and the bruises on our legs.” And so, the tiny tots passed a resolution outlawing furniture with sharp edges, all macadam playgrounds and cement walks, all swings and sliding boards.

Now we don’t say, “God, look at the brush burns on my knees.” But we do say, “God, look at all the suffering in the world. Look at some of the things I’ve gone through – the pain, suffering, disappointment. If you really *are a good God who intends good for us*, why do you allow such stuff?”

Then Dr. Weatherhead writes, “Perhaps childhood’s tragedies are to us what our tragedies are to God – not that He is callous any more than the ideal parent is, but that His *perspective* is different. But the thought that comforts the child comforts us. If the child thought about it, I think he would say, ‘There is much I don’t understand, but I know that my father both loves and cares.’ So, for myself, I am quite certain that because God is love there is nothing in His world that can be regarded as meaningless torture. There is much I cannot understand...but because I know (God) through other means, and especially as revealed in Jesus, I know that although I cannot understand the answer to my questions, there *is* an answer, and in that I can rest content.”

*So, it is a matter of faith to be able to say with Job, ‘I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted’ (Job 42:1-2).*

These last 3 weeks we have been looking at a deep and profound subject: the will of God. Hopefully, we are not now at the place where we believe that we have no clue what the will of God is! ***We can understand much about God’s will.*** God has told us in the Bible what His will is. God wants to make known to each of us what His will is for us specifically.

So, in the remainder of this message, and next week, I want to explore the question, How can we know God’s will? Ephesians 5:17 says, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Many people (including some followers of Jesus) stumble through life without any clear notion of what direction God wants our life to take. But here we are instructed to do our best to understand what God’s will is (for the world in general, and for each of us in particular).

Before we look at some specific tools that help us know God’s will, let me just preface it with a few comments: First of all, ***the starting point in understanding God’s will for our life is to believe in Jesus and have a relationship with Him.*** It is only when we surrender our life to Christ that we begin to have the capacity to understand the heart and will of God in ways that we never could before. Dr. Weatherhead accented this, “I am quite sure that the greatest help available in discerning the will of God is reached when we deepen our friendship with Him. Those who know God are the quickest and surest at discerning His will.” We deepen our friendship with God when we believe in Jesus and abide in Him.

***Here’s another thing: When we are trying to figure out what God’s will is in a given situation,***

*there is often an element of uncertainty.* I don't know about you, but this has been my experience. When I ask, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" in a specific situation, often it's not clear cut. But that's ok. Actually, this uncertainty can add a bit of adventure and excitement to our life!

I guess God could have designed things so that at the beginning of each day, He would send us a blueprint of exactly what to do. But if this were the case, how could we grow? It's like in a family where the parents tell a child exactly what to do all the time – they don't encourage the child to make his or her own choices. Consequently, that child's growth and maturity are stunted. It must tickle the heart of our heavenly Father when He sees us! (*And remember, even when we make a mistake, if we surrender ourselves and our situation to Him, He can weave our mistakes into His ultimate purpose!*)

One other preliminary point: ***God doesn't lead us too far ahead!*** I doubt that any of us can be clear about what God's directions for us are for 5, 10, 15, 20 years down the road. Usually it's one step at a time. It's like the hymn, "Lead Kindly Light", where there is this phrase: "I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me."

All right, in the next several minutes, and in next week's message, I want to list some specific tools we can use to understand God's will. ***The first is: The Bible.*** (You are probably thinking: Aw, I knew were going to say that! I thought you were going to offer some new information, and not just point to the Bible!) But the Bible is a great place to start! In Scripture, God has revealed His will and plan and purpose for all humankind – and for you and me. I realize that more and more people in our culture dismiss the Bible as God's Word to us, or say that the Bible was not inspired by God but just the thoughts of human writers. And aren't we seeing the results of this skepticism and rejection of the Bible in our society?

Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." When we are in the dark, and are not sure what God wants us to do, the Bible can shed light on the issue. Take the Ten Commandments, for example. Does God want me to steal something from somebody? *No!* Does God want me to commit adultery with someone else's husband or wife? *No!* If I'm mad at somebody, is it ok for me to kill that person? *No!* In many ways, the Bible is more clear about what God wants us to do than we will admit. Often the problem is, we just don't want to *hear* what Scripture says! ***Of course, the Bible contains the words and example of Jesus.*** Jesus, more than anyone or anything else, showed us what God's will is! The Bible is a reliable guide to show us God's will. And the Bible should be the first place we go to for direction when seeking God's will!

Next week I will finish this four part series on the will of God...and look at some more ways we can discern God's will for our life.

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