

## CHAPTER XX

### THE WILL OF GOD

In all intelligent beings there is a will, men and angels and God have wills. In men the will is the faculty of the mind by which choice is made of a future action determined upon. In willing a man has the purpose of action in view. And his will is the cause of the action, else he would be a mere machine or automation. If I take a gun and shoot another man, the will worked before the hand did; the purpose was before the act. But if I am held by another man, and a gun is placed in my hand, and another hand moves my finger to pull the trigger, that is not my act because I did not will or choose to do it. In that act I was not a responsible being, but a mere machine or tool of another.

In God the will is the attribute by which He determines and executes future events. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39). His will includes "whatsoever comes to pass," hence everything that comes to pass is providential and not accidental so far as God is concerned. *"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will"* (Eph. 1:11). The sparrow does not fall without the will of God.

Webster defines Providence as an event divinely ordained. Now it is well known that events happen in sequence, that is, they are related in order of time and one event is the cause of another event. So it seems evident, that if some events are ordained then all events are ordained. It is usual for men to distinguish events as providential and accidental. Even Christians are prone to classify their experiences either as providential or accidental. They associate providence with good things, and accident with evil things; therefore, they speak of having an accident. The Rickenbacker party regarded their rescue at sea as providential, but the writer regards the whole of their experiences as providential. The fall of their plane into the sea was as much providential as was their rescue. We need to see God's will in our afflictions as well as in our blessings. Job was speaking of both *"And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"* (Job 1:21). And when his wife pleaded with him to curse God and die, *"But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips"* (Job 2:10). And when he had lost all earthly comforts; seeing God's hand in it all he said, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will*

*maintain mine own ways before him" (Job 13:15).*

The will of God includes the wicked actions of sinful men, but does not take away their blame worthiness. We may not see how this can be, but the Scriptures declare it and we should believe it. The Scriptures were not written to confirm our reasoning but rather to correct it. On the day of Pentecost Peter said, concerning Jesus, *"Him being delivered by the determinate counsel (will) and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain"* (Acts 2:23). And on a later occasion he said that *"For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel (will) determined before to be done"* (Acts 4:27, 28). We may not be able to see how God can will or determine a sin without becoming the author of sin, but the fact remains that the greatest of all sins, the slaying of the Son of God, was divinely ordained.

### **Distinctions in the Will of God**

Theologians have made many distinctions in the will of God; some of them are false, others are vain and useless, but there is one distinction that is necessary, and which will prove helpful in rightly dividing the word of truth. This is that which distinguishes between God's **decretive** will and His **preceptive** will, or His will of purpose and His will of **command**. God's will of **purpose** is always done; His will of **command** is often left undone. God's will of purpose cannot be thwarted, for this would mean His dethronement; His will of command is often violated, for men are in rebellion against Him. If the human will is greater in power than the Divine will then, of course, this human rebellion will succeed and God will be dethroned. If human rebellion can overthrow the government of God, we have no supreme Being at all. To further amplify the distinction between God's decretive and preceptive wills we will consider each separately.

### **God's Will of Purpose**

**1. It is eternal.** God is not forming any new purposes, for His counsels are of old: *"O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth"* (Isa. 25:1). His purpose in Christ is said to be eternal: *"According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:"* (Eph. 3:11). What is to be will be, therefore, *"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world"* (Acts 15:18).

**2. It is effectual.** God's will of purpose is always accomplished. God is not man that He should engage in wishful thinking. There are no mere wishes with Him which He cannot perform. *"The*

*LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"* (Isa. 14:24-27). For example, back in eternity God willed or determined the death of His Son, and centuries after time began we see Him controlling and directing the free actions of sinful men to bring this event to pass. Moreover, He predestinated and predicted the detail when, where, and how His Son should die. And so in the four gospels we are told that this and that was done to Him that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

**3. It is immutable.** God never changes His will of purpose. There are only two possible reasons for anybody changing his will; it must be either because he sees that what he purposed was not wise, or that he sees it cannot be accomplished. But neither of these reasons can apply to God. He was All wise in planning and is All powerful in performing.

Prayer does not change God's will, but it does change things. Changes wrought by prayer are all within the circle of God's purposing will. *"And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God"* (Rom. 8:27). Answered prayer is made in the energy of the Holy Spirit. A man may pray without the Spirit and get what he asks for, but it would not be in answer to prayer. Two generals on opposing sides may pray for victory in the coming battle, but both could not be praying in the Holy Spirit, and it is possible that neither of them are. In all true prayer this thought is implied or expressed: Not my will but Thine be done.

"Thy way, not mine, O Lord, However dark it be;

O lead me by Thine own right hand,

Choose out the path for me.

"I dare not choose my lot;

I would not if I might;

But choose Thou for me, O my God,

So shall I walk aright.

"Take thou my cup, and it With joy or sorrow fill; As ever best to Thee may seem,

Choose Thou my good and ill.

"Not mine, not mine the choice, In things of great or small;

<http://www.timeforchrist.ca>

Be Thou my guide, my guard, my strength,  
My wisdom, and my all."

**4. God's will of purpose was the cause of our conversion.** I am a converted or saved man. I have been born again. What is the explanation of this tremendous change? Back of every performance or action there must be a will. Did I will myself into a new man? Did some other man effectually will my second birth? *"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* (John 1:12,13). Saving faith does not originate with our parents, nor with ourselves, nor with some other man; it is the gift and work of God. *"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures"* (James 1:18).

### God's Will of Command

**1. God's preceptive will refers to what He has prescribed as our rule of thought and conduct.** The will of God is expressed in all Divine law. In Eden it was God's will that determined what kind of law would be given to Adam and Eve. At Sinai God did not consult Moses or the children of Israel about what laws they would be under. In a democracy the people make their own laws through chosen representatives who serve in legislative halls. This gives rise to pressure groups and class legislation because men are selfish; they do not love their neighbors as themselves. But in our relation to God we are not dealing with a democracy but with a Theocracy. In God's will of command we have the sovereignty of authority; in God's will of purpose we have the sovereignty of power.

**2.** It is God's will of command and not His will of purpose that men are responsible to perform. It was His will of purpose that Christ should be crucified, but it was not His will of command. In putting Jesus Christ to death men were fulfilling the purpose of God, but they were not obeying any command of God. There can be no sin in doing what God has commanded. Peter tells us that they put Christ to death with wicked hands; *"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain"* (Acts 2:23); therefore, they were not obeying a command of God. What God purposes is the determining factor; what He commands is our duty. It seems easy for men to see this distinction in everything except religion. A man who can see only one side of the truth will say, "If it is God's will or purpose to save me, He will save me; therefore, I will sit down and do nothing about it." Now this same man would not dare reason this way about other things. Concerning this year's crop, God's will of purpose determines the harvest, but His command is to plow and plant, cultivate and reap. God's

will of purpose determines whether we live or die: "*For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*" (Jas. 4:15), but it is His will of command that we regard the laws of health. Nobody quits eating because he believes God's will of purpose determines whether he lives or dies. God's will of purpose will determine the outcome of this war, but it would be foolish to sit down and say: "If it is God's will we will win, if not we will lose; therefore, let us strike and stop mining coal and producing steel." God's will of purpose determines the result of our witnessing for Christ. "*In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good*" (Eccl. 11:6). "*For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*" (Isa. 55:10,11). It is God's will of command that we sow beside all waters, to preach the Gospel to every creature, and His will of purpose will take care of the results and make it accomplish what He pleases.

It is God's will of purpose that determines whether I am saved or not, but it is folly to sit down and say that if I am one of the elect I will be saved; therefore, I need not take any interest in the matter. God's will of command is to repent and believe, and this is every man's responsibility. We are commanded "*Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:*" (II Peter 1:10). We are commanded to "*Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*" (Luke 13:24). The man who takes no interest in his soul and has no concern for his salvation; if he persists in this attitude will surely land in the lake of fire; for he that believeth not shall be damned. Much of God's will of purpose belongs to His secret will, "*The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law*" (Deut. 29:29).