

Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

Topic 2 - The Doctrine of God

Lesson 38 - The Attributes of God: Will (Part 2)

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God's Will

- God's will is His perfect determination and sovereign ordination of all things, pertaining to both Himself, His decrees, His actions, and to His creation (including the events of history and the thoughts and actions of people), all unto the magnification of His utmost glory. - MacArthur, pg. 185
- God's will is that attribute of God whereby He approves and determines to bring about every action necessary for the existence and activity of Himself and all creation. - Grudem, pg. 211
- God's will is the final or ultimate reason for everything that happens.
- Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him **who works all things according to the counsel of His will**

Are there contradictions in the will of God?

- God wills what man should do, but God also wills what man does. (He wills man to obey yet hardens his heart not to obey).
- God wills for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, then prevents Abraham from offering Isaac.
- God wills for Hezekiah to die then extends his life 15 years.
- God wills for the righteous to not be condemned yet Christ was condemned according to His will.
- God hates sin, yet ordains its existence.
- The key in understanding the difference between God's secret will (or decretive will), and His revealed will (or preceptive will).

Secret Will and Revealed Will

- Deut. 29:29 “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”
- God’s secret will is His good pleasure, His eternal, unchangeable counsel or decree in which He has foreordained all things. This does not mean that He is the immediate cause of all things but that all things exist or occur by His eternal, sovereign decree.
- His will makes things certain, but He does not coerce His creatures to do anything. He ordains even the free choices of men.

Secret Will and Revealed Will

- The decretive will of God is that by which He purposes or decrees whatever shall come to pass, whether He wills to accomplish it effectively (causatively), or to permit it to occur through the unrestrained agency of His rational creatures.
- The preceptive will of God is the rule of life which God has laid down for His moral creatures, indicating the duties which He requires of them.
- The secret will of God pertains to all things which He wills either to effect or to permit, and which are therefore absolutely fixed.
- The revealed will prescribes the duties of man, and represents the way in which he can enjoy the blessings of God.
- - Berkhof, pg. 64-65

Secret Will and Revealed Will

- Sin is therefore in God's overall plan, yet He does not create it or condone it in His creatures. He does not delight in sin, but He ordains it by His decree in order to accomplish the most wise and holy end of bringing ultimate glory to Himself.
- Romans 9:17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Secret Will and Revealed Will

- God's revealed, or preceptive will, consists of His precepts in the law and gospel for man's conduct. Scriptural commands, prohibitions, warnings, chastening, and judgments all reveal this aspect of God's will for us.
- The preceptive will reveals not what God will do, but what He commands that we do.
- 1 Thess. 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. 7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.

Secret Will and Revealed Will

- 1 Thess. 5:12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. 15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies. 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.
- 1 Peter 2:15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

God's Necessary Will and Free Will

- God's necessary will is everything that He must will according to His nature. He wills to be what He is. "I will be what I will be." (Exodus 3:14).
- God cannot chose to be different than He is or to cease to exist.
- God's free will includes all the things that God decided to will but had no necessity to will according to His nature. There is nothing within His nature that required Him to create the universe or to redeem sinful people. However, God did decide to create and to redeem, and these were totally free choices on His part.
- God does have the free will to choose whatever is consistent within His nature (His holiness and goodness).

God's Necessary Will and Free Will

- God determines voluntarily what and whom He will create, and the times, places, and circumstances of their lives. He marks out the path of all His rational creatures, determines their destiny, and uses them for His purposes.
- Although His creation is endowed with freedom, His will controls their actions.
- God has reasons for willing as He does, which induce Him to choose one end rather than another, and one set of means to accomplish one end in preference to others. God decides what to do and how to do it.
- We can seldom discern why God willed one thing rather than another, and it is not possible or even permissible for us to look for some deeper ground of things than the will of God, because all such attempts result in seeking a ground for the creature in the very Being of God, in robbing God of His contingent character.
- - Berkhof, pg. 66

God's Necessary Will and Free Will

- Job 11:10 If He passes by, imprisons, and gathers to judgment, then who can hinder Him?
- Psalm 115:3 But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.
- Isaiah 10:15 Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!
- Isaiah 45:9 Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'?
- 1 Cor. 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

God's Sovereign Power to Execute His Will

- Power in God may be called the effective energy of His nature, or that perfection of His Being by which He is the absolute and highest causality.
- Absolute power is the Divine efficiency, as exercised without the intervention of second causes.
- Ordinate power is the efficiency of God as exercised by the ordered operation of second causes. - Hodge, pg. 410
- Charnock puts it this way: “Absolute, is that power whereby God is able to do that which He will not do, but it possible to be done; ordinate, is that power whereby God doth that which He hath decreed to do, that is, which He hath ordained and appointed to be exercised. If He had not power to do everything that He could will, He might not have the power to do everything that He doth will.” - *The Existence and Attributes of God*, pg. 12

God's Sovereign Power to Execute His Will

- The power of God in actual exercise limits itself to that which is comprehended in His eternal decree.
- The exercise of His power does not represent the limits of His power.
- We cannot say that the things God does not do are not done because he cannot do them.
- If He wanted to, He could do more than that!
- There are things that God cannot do. Sin. Lie. Change. Deny Himself.

God's Sovereign Power to Execute His Will

- Genesis 18:14 Is anything too hard for the Lord?
- Jeremiah 32:27 Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?
- Zechariah 8:6 Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous in My eyes?' says the Lord of hosts.
- Matthew 26:53 Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?
- Luke 1:37 For with God nothing will be impossible.