

God's Will

Matthew 6:10

Knowing God's will. That seems to be a perpetual struggle for some people. A perplexing struggle for some. "How can I know God's will?" For some, the fearfulness of the question rises to the surface, as they ask, "Why if I make a decision that is out of God's will?"

For others, it becomes an almost unanswerable question, a paralyzing question, "What is God's will for my life?" That becomes a question of great uncertainty, and great confusion. An occasion for great anxiety, and perhaps many sleepless nights.

So how do you know? How do you know whom to marry? What job to take. What college to attend. What investments to make. What house to buy. What car to purchase. How to care for your children, or your parents. When to move. What to eat. How to treat a disease. The list could go on and on. How can I know God's will?

Well, I'm preaching on the petitions of the Lord's prayer, so I guess you would expect my answer to be, "Pray." And it is. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And our Shorter Catechism explains that petition very succinctly, "we pray that God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven." So there's our starting point. Pray that God would make you able and willing to know his will. But still, I need to start with how God's makes you able to know his will. And to do that, I need to make a very important distinction. It is a distinction well established and clearly defined by,

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."

I. KNOWING GOD'S WILL.

So when it comes to knowing God's will, you have to know that God's will can refer to "the secret things" as well as to "those things which are revealed." That's the distinction. And it means this, that there is a "secret" will of God known only to him. This "secret" will is often identified as God's decree. Or, God's eternal purpose. Our Shorter Catechism defines this "secret will" very clearly, "The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."

That definition is nothing less than an exposition of what Paul writes in,

Eph. 1:1 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, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory."

Did you catch all those words. "Predestined according to the purpose..." He "works all things according to the counsel of his will." That's God's secret will. It is the determination which God made in his own mind, before he ever created the world. That's what Paul writes.

Eph. 1:4 "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will..."

So here is the idea. Before the foundation of the world, God predestined those who would be saved "according to the purpose of his will." It is an eternal will. And, unchangeable.

Ps. 33:10 "The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. 11 The counsel of

the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.”

God’s eternal will is unchangeable. He brings everything to pass “according to the counsel of his will.” That’s what the Bible says. And that is our great encouragement!

Heb. 6:16 “For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. 17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

It is impossible for God to lie. And God convincingly shows us, “the immutability of His counsel,” “the unchangeable character of his purpose.” God’s secret will.

A. God’s eternal and unchangeable will is known only to himself.

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God.”

I say all of that to emphasize that when you pray for the Lord’s will to be done, when you seek to come to know the Lord’s will yourself, there really is no reference to this secret will. In other words, our goal is not to know God’s eternal decree. We come to know what God has decreed only when it comes to pass. We know God’s secret will when it happens. God “works all things according to the counsel of his will.” His secret will. But our responsibility is his revealed will, and now we can talk about that, “the things revealed.” And the point is this,

B. God’s revealed will is given to us in his word.

So how do you know God’s will? The reference point is his own revelation. Look how Deuteronomy continues,

Deut. 30:11 “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ 13 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?’ 14 But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.”

In other words, it’s not a mystery. Knowing God’s will doesn’t require some sort of special knowledge. No mention of any “deeper knowledge” or “higher knowledge.” There is nothing mystical here, no transcendental meditation, no contemplative prayer. There is no yoga-induced meditation. And no special revelation in which God gives “a word” to you personally. No beloved, when it comes to God’s will, God’s revealed will for you and for your life, “the word is very near you.” It is the revealed word of God! That’s God’s revealed will. And as Moses puts it, “It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.”

People of God, God’s will is right here. “The things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” Deuteronomy 30 continues,

Deut. 30:15 “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, 16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. 17 But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not

prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; 20 that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

So what is God’s will for your life? Actually, that is an easy question. Obedience to his commands. This is God’s will for your life, “to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments.”

Or I could put it this way,

1 Thes. 4:1 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; 2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification”

“Your holiness.” And then Paul goes on to address commandments of the law. So this is the will of God for your life,

Mat. 22:37 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

And how do you know what love is?

1 John 5:3 “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.”

Deut. 30:11 “For this commandment that I command you

today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ 13 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?’ 14 But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.”

But what are the,

II. OBSTACLES TO GOD’S WILL.

And that is an easy question to answer, too. Ultimately, there is only one obstacle. Sin. The reason we have to pray, “Thy will be done...” is because our human hearts are averse to God’s will. Our fallen, human hearts are opposed to God’s will.

A. The heart of fallen man is rebellious toward God’s will.

After all, that rebellion against the revealed will of God is the very essence of sin, right from the beginning when Adam and Eve came to know evil as well as good. Do you remember the details of the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden? God had revealed his will very clearly, very explicitly. The word was very near them. It is in their mouth and in their heart.

Gen. 2:15 “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Surely, they understood the revealed will of God! But the story, of course, goes on.

Gen. 3:1 “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the

woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” 2 And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. ’” 4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

So they would decide for themselves. And in that rebellion against God’s authority, they fell into sin. And that rebellion is passed on to every one of their descendants born by ordinary generation. to see the results, consider,

Rom. 8:6 “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

That’s what sin is all about. The essence of sin is in the mind, a mind that will not submit to God’s law. That sin is called rebellion. It is a rebellion against God’s will, God’s revealed will. And, further,

B. The heart of fallen man is enslaved to its own will.

That’s what sin does, it makes you a slave. So even as a Christian, Paul wrestles with the continuing effects of that fallen nature, what he calls the flesh.

Rom. 7:14 “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not

understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

That’s why you need to pray to God, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Pray that God, by his grace, would make you able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things. And pray that prayer earnestly because you know that, left to your own temptations, you will be enslaved to the rebellion of your own sin.

Beloved, learn to identify the remnants of this rebellion in your own heart, this rebelliousness against the authority of God. Learn to identify when you are rebelling against God’s authority by refusing to obey his revealed will. And repent of your sin.

So it is that Jesus teaches us all to pray, “thy will be done...” Let me conclude by applying that prayer first to others and then to yourself.

III. PRAYING FOR GOD’S WILL.

It is helpful to see this prayer in terms of others, because we are joined together as Christians. We do, indeed, bear one another’s burdens. And we are to pray for one another.

A. Praying for others.

Surely such prayer is at the heart of the relationships of our mutual fellowship. James writes this,

James 4:7 “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

I would use that description as a very appropriate prayer. As you read those exhortations in the Bible, pray for one another. Pray that others would submit themselves to God. Pray that others would resist the devil. Pray that others would draw near to God. Pray for one another, for others to follow the will of God in their own lives, and in that way, “let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”

James 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

But also, as you pray for others, also be,

B. Praying for yourself.

So what does this mean, as you apply this petition of the Lord’s prayer to yourself? The prayer is this, “Lord, make me able and willing to know, obey, and submit to your will in all things.”

In other words, this is the prayer,

Ps. 119:33 “Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.”

To pray “thy will be done,” is to pray,

Ps. 119:34 “Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. 35 Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. 36 Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! 37 Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways. 38 Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared. 39 Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good. 40 Behold, I long for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.”

Over and over again in that Psalm is that refrain, “teach me your statutes.” “Teach me your law.” “Teach me your commandments.” And so we pray, “Thy will be done...”

The danger today is that people are eager to know God’s secret will ahead of time, but they are unwilling to submit to the loving obedience of obeying his revealed will all of the time. People want to know the future, and so often they want more special revelation. They want a word of prophecy, they want a new revelation. They want God to speak to them, over and above what he has already spoken in the word which he had written down for us and for our children. People want more revelation. They want more words from God. While, at the same time, their hearts are often hardened or not listening to the words he has already revealed.

Beloved, people of God, the Scriptures are sufficient! The Bible is sufficient. We have enough, and that written revelation is complete. As Peter puts it,

2 Peter 1:3 “...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.”

2 Tim. 3:16 “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

It is the Scripture that makes you complete. It is the Scripture that equips you for every good work. It is the Scripture that is sufficient to teach you what you need to know, to correct you where you go wrong, and to train you in the fullness of righteousness.

So do you want to know the will of God? Pray, as Jesus teaches you to pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Do you want to know the will of God? Pray, as the Psalmist teaches you to pray, “Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes.”

As we sing, “Teach me, O Lord, thy holy way, and give me an obedient mind; that in thy service I may find my soul’s delight from day to day.”

“Teach me, O Lord, your way of truth, and from it I will not depart; that I may steadfastly obey, give me an understanding heart.” “In your commandments make me walk, for in your law my joy shall be; give me a heart that loves your will, from discontent and envy free.”