

DOCTRINE OF GOD
Lesson 4: The God Who Wills
God's Will and his Sovereignty

I. SOME DISTINCTIONS:

- A. God's will: of necessity and free
- a. In relation to his own nature, God wills certain things necessarily. *"He is the ultimate end and the highest good which he cannot but will and love...for he cannot nil his glory nor deny himself."* [Turretin, p.219]
 - b. In relation to his creation, God wills certain things freely. That is, he chooses to will not because he must (he could refrain from doing anything toward us), but out of sheer freedom in the display of his glorious nature. His will is never coerced.
- B. God's will: decretive and prescriptive
- a. Decretive (also known as *sovereign* and *secret*): The Bible presents God as absolutely sovereign over the affairs of men. God as King! (Prov. 16:9: *A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.*)
 - 1.) Even sinful actions. (Gen. 45:8: *"So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."* Acts 4:26-28: *The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ. For truly against your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.*)
 - 2.) No detail, including those that are seemingly minute, escapes God's sovereign control. (Prov.16:33: *The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.* Mt. 10:29,30: *Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*)
 - 3.) God sovereignly elects, draws and preserves a people of His choosing. (Is. 55:11: *So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.* Rom. 9:15,16: *For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will*

have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. James 1:18: Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.)

- b. Prescriptive (also known as moral and revealed): The Bible also gives us revelation as to how we are to conduct ourselves in this life. God as Judge!
- 1.) Man is responsible to believe and is condemned if he doesn't. (Jn. 3:18-21: *"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."* Acts 13:38-41: *"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you."*
 - 2.) Even though God ordains the salvation of the elect, we are entrusted with the gospel and held responsible if we don't proclaim Christ. (1 Cor. 9:16: *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!* Ezek. 3:18,19: *"When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.")*

II. DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN FREEDOM

- A. Biblical Compatibilism: [D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, p.201]
- a. God is absolutely sovereign but his sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is curtailed, minimized or mitigated.
 - b. Human beings are morally responsible creatures. They significantly choose, rebel, obey, believe, defy, make decisions and so forth. They are rightly held responsible for such actions, but this characteristic never functions so as to make God absolutely contingent.
 - c. Three test cases:
 - i. Genesis 50:15-21
 - ii. Acts 2:22-24
 - iii. Acts 27:1-44
- B. On sovereignty and freedom:
- a. God is qualitatively distinct from his creation. This allows each to act freely within the sphere of their existence. “As Paul’s citation of the Greek poet affirms, *we live and move and have our being in God (analogically), not with or alongside God (univocally). It is not shared space but a lush garden of our own creaturely freedom that God has given to us.*” [Horton, pp. 264-265]
 - b. God’s simplicity means that his will acts in perfect coordination with his being. Thus, he will never act “as a divine despot unconditioned by his own nature”. [Horton, p.265]
 - c. In the exercise of his will, God always acts as Father, Son, and Spirit and through other contingent agencies. God’s sovereignty is, therefore, personal and not some impersonal brute force.

III. DIVINE WILL AND HUMAN DECISIONS

- A. Stay in your lane: (Deut. 29:29: *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever; that we may do all the words of this law.*)
- a. Since you cannot know the sovereign will of God, don’t try to discern it. Instead be humble enough to realize that your plans may not come to pass. (Ja. 4:13-15)
 - b. But you can know his revealed will. So give yourself to studying the Bible and make decisions based on it.
- B. How does God’s moral will effect this decision? Ask, “What is right?”
- a. Is there anything about the decision that violates God’s moral will?
 - b. Are there consequences to the decision that might lead to a violation of God’s revealed will for your life?

- C. Assuming that your decision passes this first test, ask “What is - wise?”
- a. There may be more than one “righteous” option before you. You aren’t sinning to choose either.
 - b. But options are not usually equally wise. One choice may be “better” than the other, even though both are perfectly righteous choices.
- D. What do you desire? If your options meet the first criteria – they are good choices - and they both appear to have wise benefits, then you are free to ask, “What do I really want to do?” But, be careful. Always plan with these two initials: DV.