

THE WILL OF GOD

WEEK 1: WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this six-week class is to discuss the will of God. We want to take on the subject from as many different angles as possible and discuss what is being taught in the church world today.
- We want you to have a Biblical, theological and personal understanding of how to know and then pursue the will of God in your own life.
- So for the next six weeks, we want to explore with you all what the Bible says about the will of God and how we can apply that to our decision making processes.
- Our schedule will look like this:
 - **Week 1: What is the will of God?**
 - Week 2: What are the wrong methods of interpreting God's will?
 - Week 3: What is the Holy Spirit's role in interpreting God's will?
 - Week 4: How do we reconcile evil in the world when God's in control?
 - Week 5: What can we do to know God's revealed will to us?
 - Week 6: What steps can I put into place for proper Biblical decision making?

INTRODUCTION

- When looking at the will of God, my goal is to help you think Biblically about this because there is so much confusion about this issue.
- On the one hand, there are believers who are paralyzed from making decisions
- Faced with a decision, they are afraid to make the decision because they don't want to be out of God's will.
- They are afraid if they do A, they might miss God's will.
- But they are afraid if they do B, they also might miss God's will.
- So instead of doing anything useful for the kingdom, they suffer from the "paralysis of analysis" – analyzing this option, that option, coming up with pros and cons, getting advice from people.
- They are afraid, not of making a decision, but making a decision that will ultimately lead them out of the will of God and then consequently they are going to suffer for all time.

DEFINE OUR TERMS

- Before we start talking about different “wills,” I think it is helpful to define our terms. Like anything else, if we are using the same language but it means something different to each of us, we are going to be talking over one another.
- When we use the term “will of God” we use it in 3 different ways:
 - We speak of all things happening according to God’s will
 - We talk about being obedient and doing the will of God
 - We talk about finding the will of God
- We might use the following terms to refer to those 3 different uses of the term “will of God”:
 - Sovereign will
 - Moral will
 - Individual will

God’s Sovereign Will

- Also known as His “will of decree” or “decretive will”
- **Definition:** everything that God ordains to happen
- God’s sovereign will is that which God brings to pass according to his sovereign plan
- He sovereignly ordains everything that happens
- He does whatever He pleases
- God’s will of decree is His sovereign control of all that comes to pass
- His sovereign will cannot be thwarted – it’s fixed and will happen

R.C. Sproul: “Because God is sovereign and His will can never be frustrated, we can be sure that nothing happens over which He is not in control” (Essential Truths)

- God’s will of decree is His sovereign governance of all that comes to pass
- There are many passages in the Bible that talk about God’s sovereign control over every event in the universe:
- **Isaiah 46:9-10** ~ Remember the former things long past, For 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 which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’
 - His will of decree is the cause of all things because He determines the end of all things

- **Psalm 115:3** ~ But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.
- **Ephesians 1:11** “...also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will...”
- There are many other passages in the Bible that teach that God’s providence over the universe extends to the smallest details of nature and human decisions
- **Matthew 10:29** ~ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.
- **Proverbs 21:1** ~ The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will
- **Proverbs 16:33** ~ The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord
- **God is providentially in control of every detail of the universe**
- One of the clearest passages that describes “the will of God” as his sovereign control of all that comes to pass is when Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane
- **Matthew 26:39** ~ My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as *you will*.
 - What does the will of God refer to in this verse?
 - It refers to the sovereign plan of God that will happen in the coming hours
 - Remember **Acts 2:23** ~ this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.
 - The “will of God” was that Jesus die – it was God’s predetermined plan
 - This was God’s plan, his decree.
 - There was no changing it, and Jesus bowed and said, “not my will but yours”
 - That’s the sovereign will of God.
- **Deuteronomy 29:29** ~ The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.
- This aspect of God’s will is only for the Lord to know...it’s not for us to know
- *IT IS SECRET (UNTIL IT HAPPENS)*
- No one knows what God is going to do in the future apart from prophecy
 - It’s not a plan to find out ahead of time
 - God’s will of decree is only obvious as you look back on it

Sproul: “The secret counsel of God is His secret. He has not been pleased to make it known to us. Far from being the mark of spirituality, the quest for God’s secret will is an unwarranted invasion of God’s privacy. God’s secret counsel is none of our business”

- This is only known through providence – the secret circumstantial working out of His will of decree
- It's his sovereign orchestrating of all events and people
- We don't know how God is working providentially until we look backward – not known ahead of time
- And we are never out of it – we can't miss the decreed will of God because God is sovereign
- We are never in a situation where God says: Oops, never saw that coming...guess I need a plan B
- We are never outside of God's sovereign will
- You never have to worry if you married the wrong person, or chose the wrong career, or took the wrong job

Sovereign Will
Secret until it happens
Known only through providence
We are never out of it

- That's the first meaning of the will of God: it is God's sovereign control of all things...called his "sovereign will" or his "will of decree"
- It's God's secret plan that determines everything that happens in the universe
- It cannot be broken. It always comes to pass.

God's Moral Will

- This is also known as the "preceptive will" or "will of command" or "will of desire"
- **Definition:** The commands and principles contained in God's Word for us to follow
- God's moral will is that which is revealed to us in the Word
- It's what He wants us to know
- **Deuteronomy 29:29** ~ The secret things belong to the Lord but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law"
- God's moral will *is* what He reveals to us about Himself and His desire for us
- It is His will that is revealed through direct commands and through precepts and principles
- Where do we find what God's moral is for us? Exclusively in God's Word.
- God tells us what He wants us to know in His Word
- The Bible, the Scriptures, contain for us God's revealed will or His will of command
- God tell us His will in His Word...examples:
- **1 Thessalonians 4:3** ~ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality

- **1 Thessalonians 5:18** ~ in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus
- God’s moral will includes all the other commands in Scripture (do not steal, lie, etc.)
- God has told us how He wants us to live. He does not hide His desire from us.
- His moral will is revealed in His commands in the Bible that teach us how to think, act, and live
- The Bible reveals 100% of God’s moral will – everything He wants us to know about how to live and act is in the Word
- God is a gracious God who has provided everything we need in order to do what He wants us to do
- **2 Peter 1:3** ~ seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17** ~ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
- This aspect of His will is not hidden, it’s not secret...It can be known ahead of time
- It is this will of God that we are commanded to know
- We are to saturate our mind with His Word, and we are responsible for searching out and following His moral will. We are to study His Word so we know His moral will
- **Psalms 1** ~ How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.
- We are to meditate on God’s law, day and night so we know His moral will for us
- It is possible to be in Sovereign will of God, but not in the Moral will of God...that would be sin
- It is possible to be in the Sovereign will of God AND the moral will of God...that is what God desires
- God desires that we be not only in His Sovereign will but also in His Moral will

Sovereign Will	Moral Will
Secret until it happens	Can be known ahead of time
Known only through providence	Known only through Scripture
We are never out of it	We are in it when we obey, out of it when we disobey

- That’s another aspect of God’s will
- What about the 3rd way the term “will of God” is used... individual will?

Individual Will

- This is where things get a little more confusing
- Often today, Christians talk about “finding God’s will” or “discovering God’s will”
- And when they say that they mean they want to know what God wants them to do in a specific situation
- It’s all those questions I referred to before
 - Who do I marry?
 - Should I change jobs?
 - Where should I live?
- We want to know God’s individual, specific plan for our lives...we want to know His direction
- Most Christians believe that God has a specific will for their life that they have to figure out so that they can make a decision
 - This is the traditional understanding of the will of God
- Let me explain this for a moment because most Christians believe that there is an individual will of God that they must discover in order to make decisions
 - Sometimes it’s called God’s perfect will because it is supposedly that perfect life plan that will bring you happiness and spiritual success
 - Sometimes it’s called God’s ideal will because out of all the possibilities, it shows the ideal life plan for each situation
 - It’s usually referred to as “the very center of God’s will”
- Most Christians have this idea that God’s will is like a target and the bullseye represents the very center of His individual will
- Most Christians think that they must find the “dot” in the center so they can make correct decisions and they think that if they don’t find that “dot.... the very center of God’s will” they are going to miss it and then they are going to miss God’s best for them
- They get consumed with being in the very center of God’s will so as not to miss God’s best for their life and because they believe this, they begin to look for signs that help them figure out the center of God’s will
 - This is where some of those faulty methods come in (we will discuss these next week)
- They try to read circumstances – look to circumstances for God to reveal his individual will to them
- They listen to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit (that still small voice, an impression, a hunch)
- They look for that one special verse in the Bible that they believe shows them what decision to make
- They determine if they have peace about it or not
- So, Christians look for all these signs and indications to try to figure out the very center of God’s will so they make the right decisions

- This is the traditional understanding of how God's will operates.
- Let me read a quote that explains this misguided way of looking at God's will:

Conventional understanding of God's will defines it as a specific pathway we should follow into the future. God knows what this pathway is, and he has laid it out for us to follow. Our responsibility is to discover this pathway – God's plan for our lives. We must discover which of the many pathways we could follow is the one we should follow, the one God has planned for us. If and when we make the right choice, we will receive his favor, fulfill our divine destiny and succeed in life...If we choose rightly, we will experience his blessing and achieve success and happiness. If we choose wrongly, we may lose our way, miss God's will for our lives, and remain lost forever in an incomprehensible maze.

Gerald Sitsser, *The Will of God as a Way of Life*, 17.

- That's what most Christians think
- The presupposition that God has a unique plan for each life that must be discovered as the basis for making decisions has been adopted by many Christians
- But does Scripture teach that there is an individual will of God, His ideal, detailed life plan that He has uniquely designed for each person, that they need to figure out in order to make a decision?
- Does God have a secret will that He expects us to figure out before we do anything?
- Listen very carefully...The answer is NO!!
- Clearly Scripture teaches God's sovereign will...Clearly Scripture teaches God's moral will
- But nowhere does Scripture teach an individual will of God that needs to be figured out.
- ***I'm not saying that God doesn't have a specific plan for our lives...He does***
- We can be assured that God is working things out in our lives for His glory and our good and often looking back we can see God's hand working all those details out
- So I'm not saying God doesn't care about us individually and I'm not saying that God is not direct your path and is in control of your life.
 - He is providentially working out everything in our life
- I'm not saying that God doesn't have a specific plan for our lives...He does
- The point is this, God does not have a secret individual will, center of His will, that He expects us to figure out so that we can make a decision
- ***The idea of an individual will for every detail of a person's life is not found in Scripture***

- This is the sad part about many Christian's lives...they are investing a great deal of time and energy searching for something that is nonexistent

We know God has a plan for our lives. That's wonderful. The problem is we think He's going to tell us the wonderful plan before it unfolds. We feel like we can know – and need to know – what God wants every step of the way. But such preoccupation with finding God's will, as well intentioned as the desire may be, is more folly than freedom

Kevin DeYoung, Just Do Something, 26.

- The emphasis in Scripture is never on discovering or finding God's will
- The emphasis is always on understanding, knowing, and doing God's will
- **Let me show that to you:**
- **Psalm 143:10** ~ Teach me to **do Your will**, For You are my God; Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.
- **Matthew 7:21** ~ Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does the will of My Father** who is in heaven will enter.
- **Romans 12:2** ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may **prove what the will of God** is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
- **Hebrews 13:20-21** ~ Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing **to do His will**, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
- **1 John 2:15-17** ~ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who **does the will of God** lives forever.
- **Colossians 1:9** ~ For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be **filled with the knowledge of His will** in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
 - God desires that we fully understand the knowledge of His will
 - He wants our knowledge of His will to be complete; it is not a game of hide and seek.
 - It's not something He hides from us seeing if we are smart enough to figure it out

- Remember that hot and cold game you used to play with your brother or sister?
- You would hide an object...They would try to find it
- You would tell them:
- Cold, cold, cold
- Getting warmer, getting warmer
- Hot, hot, hot
- Scalding hot, you are burning up

- God is not like that – He is not sneaky
- He's not hiding his from us such that we need to discover it before we make a decision
- But that's what this traditional understanding of the will of God assumes

The traditional approach to God's will makes God into a tricky little deity who plays hide and seek with us
Kevin DeYoung, Just Do Something, 46.

- It would be like a son who says to his father, "Dad I want to please you today...I'm going to do what you want me to do"
- But the father won't tell him what he wants him to do
- So the son tries to figure it out
- So he goes out and cuts the grass and comes back to his father and his father says, "Thanks son...that was really nice of you but that's not what I wanted"
- So the son goes and picks up his bedroom and comes back to his father and his father says, "Thanks son...that was really nice of you but that's not I wanted"

- That's really what this traditional understanding of the will of God is like...God will hold us accountable if we don't follow his will, but He won't show us what that will is
- ***That's not how God works***
- He's wants us to be fully filled with the knowledge of His will so that we can do His will
- That's found in His Word

Conclusion

- Does God have a sovereign will?
 - Yes, but it's hidden and we can't know it until after it happens
- Does God have a moral will?
 - Yes, it's found in His Word...Everything God wants us to know about His will is revealed in His Word...As we read His Word, He fills us with the knowledge of His will
- Does God have an individual will that has to be discovered in order to make decisions?
 - No, he does not.
- How do we make decisions then? Who to marry? What job to have? Where to live? Scripture doesn't say.
- These are the questions that we are going to take on over the next 5 weeks. We want to put together a Biblical plan for decision making.

For Next Week

- The emphasis in the NT is not on discovering God's will ***but on knowing, understanding, and doing it!!***
- Christians who think they need to discover God's will (individual will), usually end up pursuing all kinds of unreliable ways and find themselves in a place that they did not want to be.
- That's where we are going to spend our time next week. We are going to go over some examples of wrong, unreliable, or at least insufficient ways of knowing God's will
- I want to go through some of the unreliable methods people use to figure this out
- These are tools that have been developed over the years for discerning God's will
- For full disclosure...Some of these unreliable, insufficient and wrong ways of discerning God's will I go over next week, *you and I have used.*