

## IS IT GOD'S WILL?

“It was just their time to go.” How many times have you heard this statement at a funeral? Does it trouble you when someone makes this statement following a tragic death? For example, suppose a young person was killed in a car accident because the driver of the other vehicle was intoxicated and driving on the wrong side of the road. If it was your child who died, would this explanation bring comfort to you? Is every tragic event a result of God's will?

The answer to this question lies between two extreme views which are occasionally presented. One extreme teaches that God's role in creation is like that of a watch maker. He did what was necessary to set things in motion and now he is simply a passive observer as time “unwinds.” He has completely removed himself. He has no influence over the course of history. Everything happens by chance. The other extreme teaches that everything happens according to God's predetermined decree. He micromanages everything in the universe he created. Everything that transpires in your life, good or evil, is according to his absolute and unalterable will. The proponents of this view often say that to believe otherwise is to call into question the sovereignty of God.

The sovereignty of God, when accurately explained, involves two basic components. The first component is God's power. The Bible makes it clear that He is the only being with unlimited power (Deut. 4:39; I Kings 8:59-60; Isa. 45:5-6, 18, 22, 46:9-11; Dan. 4:34-35; Mat. 28:18). The second component is God's discretion. Because He is all powerful, He does what He pleases (Ps. 115:3), when He pleases (Gen. 21:2), how He pleases (2 Kings 5:9-14), where He pleases (Mic. 5:2), with whom He pleases (Luke 4:27, Heb. 11:31). It is this second component which is not properly considered when someone begins to associate everything that happens with the will of God. Jesus has power over **all** flesh (John 17:2a). He has adequate power to give eternal life to every human being without exception. However, He only utilizes his infinite power in regeneration (the new birth) to give eternal life to God's elect people (John 17:2b). It is his will to use his power to accomplish that which pleases the Father (John 6:38-39). If Jesus does not give spiritual life to someone, it is because it is not God's will to do so. Because God possesses all power, He can exert that power as it pleases him. This is the essence of what it means to be sovereign.

With his unlimited power, God could have designed man as a robot which operated exactly as programmed without deviation. However, it was God's will to create

man as an intelligent being with the ability to make choices (Gen. 2:16-17). Adam made a rebellious choice (Gen. 3:6). As a result, we all suffer (Rom. 5:12). Consequently, the horrible influence of sin in the world causes bad things to happen. Because of sin, our bodies are cursed with the aging process which brings disease, sickness, and suffering. Cancer does not distinguish between the godly and the ungodly. Because of sin, our environment is cursed (Gen. 3:17-19). The godly farmer, who prays, reads his Bible and loves his neighbor must battle weeds the same as the ungodly farmer who has no thought of God and mistreats his neighbor. Because of sin, other people do things to hurt us. How many godly people are killed each year by drunk drivers? Because of our own sinful conduct, we suffer according to the principle of “sowing and reaping” as taught throughout the scriptures (Isa. 1:19-20, Gal. 6:7, Eph. 6:2-3).

Based on a correct understanding of the sovereignty of God, the ability of man to make choices, and the consequences of sin in the world; we can logically conclude that many things happen which are not a result of God’s will. For example, when the children of Israel burned their children in the fire as a sacrifice to Baal, the Lord said these wicked acts didn’t even come into his mind (Jer. 19:5, 32:35). Abortion is essentially the same sin. Israel caused their sons and their daughters to “pass through the fire” (Lev. 18:21, Deut. 18:10, 2 Kings 17:17). One of the early methods of abortion in this country involved the injection of a saline solution which burned the baby in the womb.

God’s will needs to be understood in terms of his decreed will and his will with regard to what He would have us to do. The eternal salvation of God’s people is an example of his decreed will (Rom. 8:28-31, John 6:38-40, 17:24, Heb. 10:9-10). Before the world began, God loved a great multitude of people in Christ and purposed to save them from their sins (Eph. 1:3-5, 1 Pet. 1:2). Jesus came into the world to accomplish God’s will (Mat. 1:21, Heb. 9:26, 10:14). In accordance with God’s will, all of his elect people will be born of the Spirit (John 3:8, 5:25, Gal. 4:6). Ultimately, all of them will inherit eternal glory (Mat. 25:34). None of God’s people will be eternally lost because their salvation is based on God’s absolute, unalterable will. However, God also has a will which is conditioned upon man’s obedience. The Ten Commandments are God’s will (Exodus 20:3-17). When people disobey the commandments, they are not doing God’s will. Therefore, when someone is murdered, it is not God’s will because God said, “Thou shalt not kill.” (v. 13). When someone is robbed, it is not God’s will because God said, “Thou shalt not steal.” (v.15). When a man is unfaithful to his wife, it is not God’s will because God said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” (v.14).

In the initial stage of Job's trial, he was commended because he "...sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:22). Let us not be guilty of blaming God for the bad things that happen in our lives. Because of the sin nature passed down from Adam, we all live in an aging, dying body. We will all die because of the general curse of sin. Arthritis, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and many other ailments afflict us because we are contaminated with sin. Diet and exercise can greatly improve our health and lengthen our days but ultimately the body will die because it is cursed by sin. However, because of God's unalterable will to save his people, our bodies will ultimately be raised from the dead and changed into an incorruptible, immortal body; fashioned like unto the glorious body of Jesus our Savior (1 Cor. 15:50-57). Furthermore, living according to the wisdom of God's word can deliver us from much danger, evil, trouble, and heartache. A sinful lifestyle brings about many grievous consequences. However, the sinful behavior of others often destroys the life of those who are striving to honor God. Many people are killed each year because of the irresponsible choices and sinful deeds of others.

In the final analysis, let us conclude that man's sin, not God's will, is the cause of much evil and suffering in this world. However, let us also adopt the perspective which Paul had as described in his second epistle to the church at Corinth, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Cor. 4:17-18). After one minute in heaven, we will never again ask, "Why?" We will be eternally delivered from the very presence of sin, never again to be affected by its influence.

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