

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

^{2:8} For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, ^{2:9} not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ^{2:10} For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them – *Ephesians 2:8-10.*

Understanding the Will of God – What follows is an article by R.C. Sproul that may help explain how we should view and understand the Will of God:

THE WILL OF GOD by R. C. SPROUL

Doris Day sang a popular song entitled "*Que Sera, Sera, " "What will be, will be."* At first glance this theme communicates a kind of fatalism that is depressing. Islamic theology frequently says of specific events, "*It is the will of Allah.*"

The Bible is deeply concerned about the will of God – His sovereign authority over His creation and everything in it. When we speak about God's will we do so in at least three different ways.

(1) The broader concept is known as **GOD'S DECRETIVE WILL**, (*i.e., His sovereign or hidden will*). *By this, theologians refer to the will of God by which He sovereignly ordains everything that comes to pass.* 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. He at least must '*permit*' whatever happens to happen. Yet even when God passively permits things to happen, He chooses to permit them in that He always has the power and right to intervene and prevent the actions and events of this world. Insofar as He lets things happen, He has '*willed*' them in this certain sense.

(2) Though God's sovereign will (**HIS DECRETIVE WILL**) often is hidden from us until after it comes to pass, there is one aspect of His will that is plain to us – **HIS PRECEPTIVE WILL**. Here God reveals His will through His Holy Law. For example, it is the will of God that we do not steal; that we love our enemies; that we repent, and that we live holy lives. This aspect of God's will is revealed in His Word as well as in our conscience, by which God has written His moral law upon our heart.

**THE
DECRETIVE
WILL OF GOD**

- God's eternal purposes
- What God brings to pass
- Cannot be thwarted
- Hidden until revealed

**THE
PRECEPTIVE
WILL OF GOD**

- God's moral commands
- What God desires from us
- Can be disobeyed
- Revealed in Scripture

Flow from the same holy,
sovereign, and loving God

His laws, whether they are found in the Scripture or in the heart, **are binding**. *We have no authority to violate this will. We have the power or ability to thwart the Preceptive Will of God, though never the right to do so.* Nor can we excuse ourselves for sinning by saying, '*Que sera, sera.*' It may be God's sovereign or hidden will that we be '*permitted*' to sin, as He brings His sovereign will to pass even through and by means of the sinful acts of people. God ordained that Jesus be betrayed by the instrument of Judas's treachery. Yet this

makes Judas's sin no less evil or treacherous. When God *'permits'* us to break **HIS PRECEPTIVE WILL**, it is not to be understood as permission in the moral sense of His granting us a moral right. *His permission gives us the power, but not the right to sin.*

(3) The third way the Bible speaks of the will of God is with respect to **GOD'S WILL OF DISPOSITION**. This has to do with God's attitude; it defines what is pleasing to Him. For example, God takes no delight in the death of the wicked, yet He most surely wills or decrees the death of the wicked. God's ultimate delight is in His own Holiness and Righteousness. When He judges the world, He delights in the vindication of His own Absolute Righteousness and Perfect Justice, yet He is not gleeful in a vindictive sense toward those who receive His judgment. God is pleased when we find our pleasure in obedience. He is sorely displeased when we are disobedient.

Many Christians become preoccupied or even obsessed with *finding 'the will of God'* for their lives. If the will we are seeking is **HIS SECRET, HIDDEN, or DECRETIVE WILL**, then our quest is a fool's errand. The secret counsel of God is His secret. He has not been pleased to make it known to us. Far from being a 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 partly why the Bible takes such a negative view of fortune telling, necromancy, and other forms of prohibited practices.

We would be wise to follow the counsel of **JOHN CALVIN** when he said, *"When God closes His holy mouth, I will desist from inquiry."* The true mark of spirituality is seen in those seeking to know the will of God that is revealed in **HIS PRECEPTIVE WILL**. It is the godly person who meditates on God's law day and night. While we seek to be *'led by the Holy Spirit,'* it is vital to remember that the Holy Spirit is primarily leading us into righteousness. We are called to live our lives by *"every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* It is **HIS REVEALED WILL** that is our business, indeed, the chief business of our lives.

Summary:

The three meanings of the will of God:

- **SOVEREIGN DECRETIVE WILL**, the will by which God brings to pass whatsoever He decrees. This is hidden to us until it happens.
- **PRECEPTIVE WILL** is God's revealed law or commandments, which we have the power but not the right to break.
- **WILL OF DISPOSITION** describes God's attitude or disposition. It reveals what is pleasing to Him.

God's sovereign 'permission' for humans to violate **GOD'S PRECEPTIVE WILL** (*sin*) does not indicate His moral approval for us to do so.

To sum up these two theological concepts, we can define **THE DECRETIVE WILL OF GOD** as *'ALL THAT GOD FOREORDAINED IN HIS DIVINE DECREE BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD'* – *Ephesians 1:11*. Man has *neither* **THE RIGHT** *nor* **THE ABILITY TO DEFY THE DECRETIVE WILL OF GOD**.

- GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT WITH ISRAEL that promises to THAT ELECT NATION a future based on the promises God made to ABRAHAM is an example of THE DECRETIVE WILL OF GOD. *No man, nation or angel can frustrate GOD'S DECRETIVE WILL REGARDING ISRAEL.*

THE PRECEPTIVE WILL OF GOD is GOD'S REVEALED WILL – that divine revelation that has come to us through the Prophets of Israel, through the Written Word of God (*the Scriptures*) – and in the Person of THE LIVING WORD OF GOD – (*the λόγος – THE WORD ... John 1:1*) – JESUS CHRIST.

- By means of THE DIVINE INSTITUTION OF VOLITION¹ *God has given to man THE ABILITY BUT NOT THE RIGHT TO DEFY HIS PRECEPTIVE WILL. SIN is the willful defiance of THE PRECEPTIVE WILL OF GOD.*

So far in our ROMANS SERIES we have covered THE FIRST ELEVEN CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS, in which PAUL has emphasized THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION by GRACE-ALONE, by FAITH-ALONE in CHRIST-ALONE; *then last Sunday ...*

JEFF explained to us in the opening verses of CHAPTER 12 how God expects the ABSOLUTE RIGHT-EOUSNESS OF CHRIST that positionally has been imputed to all believers, should be lived-out before God, the Church, and the world.

ROMANS follows a pattern that typifies PAUL'S LETTERS:

- Almost without exception, in the first-half of ANY PAULINE EPISTLE, he lays out THE UNDERLYING THEOLOGY that, *once understood*, leads to THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION of 'what we believe' to the challenges we face in everyday life.
- ROMANS follows this pattern and in the first ELEVEN CHAPTERS we learned that a relationship with God is not something that is deserved or earned; it is A GIFT OF GRACE that began in ETERNITY PAST when GOD CHOSE US BY NAME before He created the world in which we now live —

... and just as he placed ADAM in THE GARDEN OF EDEN with a purpose in mind, so He also placed each of us in this world with a purpose in mind.

In other words, what PAUL has expounded theoretically in Chapters 1-11, he now presents concretely in Chapters 12-16.

Our OPENING SCRIPTURE this morning, if you think about it, is a three-verse outline of THE BOOK OF ROMANS.

- EPHESIANS 2:8-9 speak of our ELECTION as a GIFT OF GOD that comes to us by GRACE - ALONE by FAITH-ALONE in CHRIST-ALONE ... corresponding to ROMANS CHAPTERS 1-11, *while...*
- EPHESIANS 2:10 corresponds to THE PRACTICAL SECTION OF ROMANS ... to ROMANS CHAPTERS 12-16.

Since we have moved into THE PRACTICAL SECTION OF ROMANS (*CHAPTERS 12-16*), our emphasis to-day will be on the detailed content of what is written in general terms in EPHESIANS 2:10 ...

When considered in this manner, we learn that God saved us for a reason:

For we are His workmanship, created in CHRIST JESUS for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them – Ephesians 2:10.

This means, just as JUSTIFICATION is a GRACE through FAITH proposition, SANCTIFICATION also is a GRACE through FAITH proposition.

¹ A Divine Institution is an operative principle God has put in place to protect the human race during the time of the Angelic Conflict. There are four divine institutions: (1) Volition, (2) Marriage, (3) Family, and (4) Nationalism.

SUMMARY OF ROMANS 12:9-13

Romans 12:9–13 – Offers practical guidance for Christian living, emphasizing sincere love and active care for others. Here's a summary:

- Love must be genuine—hate evil and cling to good.
- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love and honor others above yourself.
- Serve the Lord with spiritual fervor, not laziness.
- Rejoice in hope, be patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.
- Share with those in need and practice hospitality.

This section of Romans 12 encourages a life marked by sincerity, humility, perseverance, and generosity within the community of faith.

SUMMARY OF ROMANS 12:14-21

Romans 12:14–21 – Teaches believers how to respond to hostility and evil with grace and goodness. Here's a summary:

- Bless those who persecute you—do not curse them.
- Empathize with others—rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn.
- Live in harmony, avoiding pride and associating with the humble.
- Do not repay evil with evil but aim to do what is right in everyone's eyes.
- Live at peace with others, as much as it depends on you.
- Leave vengeance to God; instead, respond to enemies with kindness.
- Overcome evil not by retaliation, but by doing good.

This section of Romans 12 emphasizes humility, empathy, and peacemaking as the Christian response to conflict and wrongdoing.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

ROMANS 12 is not '*a moral checklist*' or '*a list of rules*' to follow in order to be 'GOOD CHRISTIANS' ... this would miss the point entirely ... ROMANS 12 is an introduction to a way of living that reflects the Gospel that under the guidance of THE HOLY SPIRIT leads to a transformed life.

Under the guidance of THE HOLY SPIRIT and THE WORD OF GOD, we are called to a life characterized by a SINCERE LOVE that rejects EVIL and pursues what is GOOD. As a general way of understanding this way of life, we are challenged to honor others above ourselves, and to serve God in whatever ways God makes available to us.

God does not promise us this new, transformed life will be easy; in fact, it will involve difficulties and possibly even persecution. Our mission is to stand for THE GOSPEL and THE WORD OF GOD in A FALLEN WORLD that by nature will be antagonistic toward Biblical Truth. This responsibility is not a task to be taken lightly, and it is a ministry that only can be accomplished through divine enablement. Everything we are asked to do or endure – *and more* – already has been faced by JESUS. He knows our weaknesses and He knows the difficulties we will face. Though it may sound like an over-used *cliché*, the key to success in THE CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR is keeping our spiritual eyes focused on JESUS CHRIST – not on the challenges of life.