

"Our Father ... Your Will Be Done"

In Matthew 6: 9 Jesus said to his disciples, "This is how you should pray". It came as part of that long, solid and authoritative discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had just pointed out that giving to the needy must not be paraded before men in order to attract their praise. Instead it should be done in secret in order that our "Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward" us.

In the same way **our prayers must be directed to God, not to men**. They are not formed primarily as works of art displayed for man's scrutiny but rather they should be the sincere and earnest expression of the creature to his Creator.

"Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our debts
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one." Matthew 6: 9-13 (NIV).

Included in this prayer is the expression, "**Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**".

Are we acknowledging that a state that we cannot change exists, or are we expressing our willingness to participate actively in ensuring that God's will is done?

In order to unravel this we must first find out as much as we could about our Father's will. What does the Bible say?

"Your will be done ... as it is in heaven". Matthew 6: 10.

God's will is done in heaven.

It is clear that heaven is a place where nothing is allowed to hinder the working of whatever the will of God is. It does not seem possible to draw any other conclusion from this statement. Furthermore this statement is uttered by Jesus himself who is the Word of God (John 1: 1).

But was there not "war in heaven"? Revelation 12: 7. Did Satan not lead a revolt in heaven? It is evident from the Bible that this did occur. Was this God's will? Since God's will is done in heaven the logical answer has to be "yes".

How do we explain this?

Angels are not robots

First, we must understand that the **angels are not robots**. It is evident that they have the power to choose. Satan chose to rebel, and many angels chose to join him. It seems therefore that it is God's will that the angels should have the privilege to demonstrate their loyalty.

The only way in which loyalty can be established is by allowing the subject the opportunity to voluntarily give that loyalty. Therefore the power to choose had to be given.

A sure way in which we can be convinced that the facility to "choose to be loyal" exists is by seeing a subject demonstrate disloyalty. Therefore Satan's rebellion constituted clear evidence that the power to choose exists among the angels.

In the same way that God's will permitted the angels the privilege of choice, His will determined that disloyalty shall not be tolerated in heaven. Therefore the rebellion was crushed and the rebellious Satan and his followers were evicted, Revelation 12: 9.

God's will established and adheres to the principle: consequences follow actions.

Choice

God's will is done in heaven. That will, as we have seen, allows choice. But is it merely a choice either to be or not to be loyal? This is evidently not the case.

We who are created "a little lower than the angels" (Psalms 8: 5) can make other choices, therefore it is quite logical to conclude that the angels have the same privilege to choose alternatives on other matters without incurring God's wrath.

One example that demonstrates that the angels can make decisions on their own is the encounter between the two angels and Lot in Genesis 19. The text is very straightforward:

"The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 'My Lord', he said, 'please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning'.

'No', they answered, 'we will spend the night in the square'.

But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house". Genesis 19: 1-3 (NIV).

The angels were able to decide to stay at the house even though the original plan was to spend the night in the square.

God's will includes choice for his created beings, heavenly as well as earthly.

God's Law

Let us look at some other passages on God's will. In Psalms 40: 8 David says: "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

Here we see a connection made between God's will and God's law. David's knowledge of God's law will help him to do God's will. The implication is that **God's law is an expression of God's will for us.**

God's desire is that man should do His will. Therefore God promised Israel:
"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts." Jeremiah 31: 33.

We do not want to begin a discussion on what aspect of God's law is being referred to here. It is a good thing to settle for what Jesus said in Matthew 22: 37-40 (NIV): "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

God, our Father

In Matthew 18: 10-14, Jesus related the parable of the lost sheep. This followed comments made by Jesus on the value to God of a little child and the necessity to adopt the attitude of a child in one's relation to God, the father.

To emphasize further the Father's concern for each one of us, Jesus continued:

"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18: 12-14, NIV).

God's will for us is that no one be lost.

This principle was repeated by Jesus in John 6: 38-40.

"I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

It is God's will that everyone who looks to Jesus and believes in him shall have eternal life

In 2 Peter 3: 9 there is the all-encompassing application of this same principle: God wants no one to perish but that everyone come to repentance.

It is therefore clear from these passages that it is God's will that no one be lost, that is, no one should be eternally separated from the presence of God.

Furthermore in speaking to Christians, Paul points out,
"It is God's will that you should be sanctified; that you should avoid sexual immorality ..." 1 Thessalonians 4: 3; and

"Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" 1 Thessalonians 5: 18.

God's will is that we be a joyful people separated onto Him.

God gives gifts to His people according to His will, Hebrews 2: 4; 1 Corinthians 12: 11. His will is that our lives have a positive effect on the world around us: "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men". 1 Peter 2: 15.

Direct relationship

What we have seen thus far are aspects of God's will with which we interact directly.

We are given the privilege of choice. When Joshua (24: 15) told the children of Israel "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve", he was implicitly emphasizing a right that we all have within God's will for us.

God's law expresses another portion of God's will for us. The fulfillment of God's will pertaining to His law is dependent on our keeping His law.

It is God's will that everyone should always be in communion with Him, living a joyful, gifted and holy life that impacts constructively on our communities. But many people are not experiencing this. Therefore several aspects of God's will are not being done because we are not doing our part.

In Psalms 143: 10 David, recognizing this solemn responsibility to see God's will fulfilled, prays: "**Teach me to do your will**, for you are my God, may your good Spirit lead me on level ground".

The Apostle Paul urges us to completely dedicate ourselves to the fulfillment of God's will. He instructs "Do not conform any longer to the powers of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to **test and approve what God's will is** - His good, pleasing and perfect will". Romans 12: 2.

God's will is approved and done in our lives as a result of our choosing so to do. We choose to do God's will when we refuse to be influenced by the powers of this world. The "powers of this world" is a reference to Satan and his host. In Ephesians 6: 10-12 these powers are described as "rulers, ... authorities, powers of this dark world ... spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms".

Among the things that we will do as we resist the "powers of this world" is the giving of thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus, 1 Thessalonians 5: 18. As we fail to do this the spiritual forces of evil maintain and extend their territory.

We must be consistent and persistent in doing God's will. In Hebrews 10: 36 we are told: "So do not throw away your confidence it will be richly rewarded. **You need to persevere** so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised".

God has allowed us the privilege to voluntarily participate in several aspects of His will. There are many blessings that we will derive as we do God's will. Indeed spiritual insight follows consistent doing of God's will. Jesus underlined this principle when he said:

"If any one chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own," John 7: 17.

Experience has shown that we choose against doing God's will on many occasions. Can you imagine the gains that are made by the enemy as a result of our inconsistency?

Jesus did His Father's Will

Happily some aspects of God's will are not dependent on us. It was God's will that His judgement should be meted out toward us because of our sin; but at the same time, that His love and mercy should be made available to us. Jesus played the key role in this. He said, "Here I am ... I have come to do your will, O God", Hebrews 10: 7, 9.

When the pressure of this extremely tough assignment had built up to an almost unbearable level Jesus prayed: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. **Yet not as I will, but as You will**". Matthew 26: 39 (Luke 22: 42).

We must follow the example of Jesus and pray, "Our Father ... Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven", even when the pressure is so severe that we are tempted to do otherwise.

We must do God's Will

Since we have therefore committed ourselves to doing God's will we must dedicate ourselves to first knowing that will. "Therefore do not be foolish, but **understand what the Lord's will is**", Ephesians 5: 17. It is foolishness not to know and understand the Lord's will.

We need to pray as the Apostle Paul did that God would "**fill us with the knowledge of His will** through all spiritual wisdom and understanding", Colossians 1: 9.

This of course extends to specifics of His will that are not detailed in the Scriptures. For example it is God's will that we be active in sharing our faith (Philemon 6), but we are not told specifically the form that this should take in every situation.

Furthermore we are told that we should "not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" 2 Corinthians 6: 14. But we are not told specifically with which one of the righteous we should be linked.

Hence Paul prayed that our love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that we may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ (Philippians 1: 9, 10).

When we know God's will our responsibility is to do it as much as it lies in our power so to do.

In this way we set up a close kinship and fellowship relationship with Jesus. **"For whosoever does the will of my Father in heaven, is my brother and sister and mother."** Matthew 12: 50 (Mark 3: 35).

We should become so committed to doing God's will that the only way in which we can be described is as slaves: "like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart", Ephesians 6: 6.

What is especially encouraging and comforting is that God has a special package of blessings for those who do His will. Indeed the ultimate blessing is to live forever. "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever". 1 John 2:17. In several areas we can play key roles in having God's will done here on earth. When we do that we will receive the blessings with which that will is associated, if not here on earth then in the life to come.

Jesus is our prime example. He is our Savior and Lord. It cannot be emphasized enough that we need to follow him. He came to do the Father's will (Hebrews 10: 7).