

THE WILL OF GOD

A Positional Statement by Darrell Crow based upon personal studies, notes and prayer. The purpose of this paper is for personal use; however others are invited to read and comment.

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The Will of God

Whenever I have had discussions concerning ‘God’s will’ in theological circles, two questions seem to invariably rise. The first is, Does man have a free will to choose God? And secondly, How can I know God’s will for me and my life? Those who are earnest in their Christian faith and want to live in obedience to Him desire to know what God wants them to do. And this is good.

But in order to answer these two questions we have to dissect just what is God’s will and what is man’s will.



A quick glance at a dictionary shows hundreds of usage and definition of the word ‘will.’ But the more relevant definitions are listed below.

- *Will* means to want or to choose. If you have free *will*, you are allowed to choose what you want. If you make a *will*, you've written down what you want to have happen to your money and your stuff.
- Will is your ability to make decisions or restraining yourself from doing something or something that a person desires or wants.
- the power of making a reasoned choice or decision or of controlling one's own
- the particular desire, purpose, pleasure, choice, etc. of a certain person or group: what is your *will*?
- to control or influence by the power of the will: to *will* oneself into an action, to *will* others into submission
- to wish, desire, prefer, or choose: to do as one *wills*
- The mental faculty by which one deliberately chooses or decides upon a course of action: *championed freedom of will against a doctrine of predetermination.*
- A desire, purpose, or determination, especially of one in authority: *It is the sovereign's will that the prisoner be spared.*
- To decree, dictate, or order: *believed that the outcome was willed by the gods.*
- One's independent faculty of choice; the ability to be able to exercise one's choice or intention.
- The act of choosing to do something; a person's conscious intent or volition.

Basically, dictionaries define the will as making decisions in the realm of your ability to enforce, carry through to completion, or authority allowed you for execution. Since God Almighty has all power, all authority, and all purpose, whatever He wills, must surely come to pass.

Whenever we find ourselves trying to understand God's will, it is best to first visit *Deuteronomy 29:29*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.*"

According to Dr. RC Sproul, author of *Everybody's a Theologian*, "The location of that verse in Scripture is important. The book of Deuteronomy is the second book of the law; its title means "second law". It contains a recapitulation of the entire law that Moses delivered from God to the people. Near the conclusion of this account of the giving of the law, we find this text that makes a distinction between the hidden will of God and the revealed will of God.

God's Sovereign Will



That which God has hidden
from us.
(Deus absconditus)

That which God has revealed
to us.
(Deus revelatus)

Deuteronomy 29:29

There are limits to our knowledge of God because as finite creatures we do not have the ability or the comprehensive knowledge to understand an infinite God. God has chosen not to reveal to us everything that could possibly be known of Him or His intentions.

The hidden will of God is called the *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus* refers to that part of God that He has revealed.

Within *Deus revelatus* there are two types of revealed wills discussed within Scripture.

We need to know whether it is

- 1) The will of God that is his sovereign will that always comes to pass without fail, or whether it is,
- 2) The will of God which is his command to do what is right, which is often disobeyed and doesn't come to pass. The Bible uses the term "will of God" in both ways.

God's Sovereign Will

Deuteronomy 29:29



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The 'Decreed' will of God. The
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The will of God which is His
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Decretive Will of God

This first will to examine is the will of decree. The more 'reformed' name for this is the Decretive Will of God. This sovereign will is that which will always come to pass — no matter what. What God decrees happens. The decretive will of God refers to the fact God sovereignly brings to pass whatsoever He wills. Sometimes this is called the absolute will of God, fore-counsel of God, the sovereign will of God, or the efficacious will of God.

When God decrees sovereignly that something should come to pass, it must indeed come to pass. All prophecy falls under the Decretive will of God.

Another example is the birth of Christ. It was irresistible, God willed it, it had to happen. Likewise when God called the world into existence, it came into existence.

A few texts that illustrate the decretive will of God. *Matthew 26:39* where Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is crying out to his Father ³⁹ *And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."*

What does that mean? As you will? Your will be done? That means God's sovereign decretive plan, which is going to happen. Jesus is going to die. And Jesus in His human nature is simply saying, "In my human nature, I don't relish the thought of painfully dying. So if the plan could be adjusted, that would please my flesh, because I am just an ordinary person who doesn't like the idea of dying a horrible death." That is not sin to talk like that. But then He says, "Your will be done," meaning, you have got a plan. Do your plan. So this will of God is God's sovereign decretive plan that He always executes.

Another example of this is Acts 4:27-28. ²⁷ *For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy ^[a]servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the ^[b]Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.*

In Acts 4:27-28 the church is praying in wonder to the sovereign God that has just ordained the death of his Son, they pray like this: “Truly in this city, Jerusalem, there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed both Herod, Pontius Pilate, all the Gentiles, the peoples of Israel to do what your hand and plan had predestined to take place.”

So Herod did what God predestined to take place. Pilate did what God predestined to take place. The shouting crowds — *crucify him, crucify him* — did what God predestined to take place and the soldiers, the Gentile soldiers who drove the nails did what God had predestined to take place and the sovereign will of God was accomplished at nine o'clock on Friday morning. And it was all sin. Pilate's expediency, Herod's mockery, the soldiers gambling for his clothes. The hatred of the mobs stirred up by the Pharisees: “Crucify him.” That is all sin. And planned and prophesied by God.

So that is why verses 27-28, is a light on a theological jumble of problems. God's sovereign will that always comes to pass may include sin. Yes. If God could not plan the murder of His Son we could not be saved. It is not like Jesus just jumped up on the cross and died and God said, “Well, I didn't know that was going to happen. But I will use it to save people.” That is heresy. God planned it for you. And it couldn't have happened without sin. You don't kill the Son of God without sin. So when I say that the sovereign will of God means that God ordains all that comes to pass, this includes everything.

Another example. *1 Peter 3:17 says, ¹⁷ For it is better, if ^[a]God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.* So you are at work and something is being discussed about a policy. The policy in your mind is an evil policy. It is a sinful policy. It would involve you and other employees in sinning. You know if you say something you are in big trouble. You could lose your job. You are going to expose this manager as a bad guy. He is making a bad choice. And if you say something he is going to be exposed. He will put you down one way or the other. You choose to do good. You do what is good. You speak truth and you get fired.

Now apply this text to that situation. “It is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will.” Now what does that mean? That means when you spoke, the manager, who now is in trouble, because you just exposed the evil of what was about to happen, he could be hindered by God from firing you or he could look at this and say, “I permit you to fire him.” And he fires you. God could just stop it. He could just stop it and you don't lose your job. And this says it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will. Now if he fires you did he do good? No. He sinned. And that was God's will that he sin. Now you have got to have a category here from the Bible that says: God can ordain that sin come to pass without Himself sinning. God is not a sinner. God is not evil. God is holy, just, true, and good. And in the way He governs and runs the world this text says: It may be God's will that you suffer for doing good — which always involves somebody sinning against you.

Ephesians 1:11 is the most sweeping statement of all in this regard to the sovereign will of God. It says, ¹¹ ^[a] *also we ^[b]have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,*

So “will of God” means “all things God does.” All things. He works all things according to the counsel of His will. This extends to the details of all existence. *Matthew 10:29, ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a ^[a]cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.*

Preceptive Will of God

There is also the perceptive will of God. Whereas the decretive will of God cannot be resisted, we not only can resist the Preceptive will of God, but we resist it all the time. The perceptive will of God refers to God's law, to His commandments. In the New Testament, in the new covenant, the command is to believe in Jesus Christ, to realize we are lost and cannot earn our way to God and spend eternity in Heaven. We are to repent, to confess Jesus as Lord and to ask Him to be our Savior which propitiates Jesus' payment for sin on the cross to us.

An example of the perceptive will of God can be seen in The first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3),. How many people do you know who have made someone, something, some ideology their god rather than God. So people can defy God's will.

Sometimes this will is called the will of command. For example, Jesus said in *Matthew 7:21*, 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.

What does that mean? "Only those who do the will of my Father enter my presence" — which means some do and some don't. Therefore the will of God is done by some and not by others, which means this will of God doesn't have the same meaning as the decretive will of God, because that will is always done without fail and this one is disobeyed and not done. So clearly "the will of God" here isn't the same. Man has a choice regarding God's Preceptive will.

Another example of Preceptive will is found in *1 Thessalonians 4:3* which says, ³ *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from ^[a]sexual immorality;* Have you? No. Some of us have not, which means we broke the will of God. We disobeyed, contradicted, did not fulfill the will of God for our lives.

The will of God for our life is sanctification. Abstain from all sexual immorality. But last week untold number of people broke that will. They contradicted it, cancelled it. The will of God did not happen in their lives, because they looked.

1 John 2:17 says, ¹⁷ *The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.* Some do, some don't.

Therefore, we have three meanings of the will of God in the Bible.

- One that is hidden.
- One is his sovereign (**Decretive**) will and
- One is his (**Preceptive**) moral will.

Now here is the thought for the day. Does God decide who will be saved and who will be lost? Would this fall under the Decretive or Preceptive will of God? The Decretive Will is always done — for He is sovereign. The Preceptive Will allows a choice.

So man does have a free will choice when coming to the matters of God's Preceptive will. We are lost because of our disobedience to God throughout our lives. However man does not have free will when it comes to either God's hidden will or His decretive will. It is only through the Preceptive Will of God can we exercise our free will or choice to believe by faith in Jesus Christ.

For by faith we are saved. We are commanded to have faith. We can resist commands and this is an indicator that Salvation falls into the Preceptive Will of God.

God's Sovereign Will



The other question most frequently asked is how can one know the will of God for their lives. So naturally, we have to ask which will are they referencing – The hidden, decretive will of God or the Preceptive will of God.

If they are talking about God's Hidden Will, then they need to realize that it is hidden. *The hidden will of God is none of our business, That is why it is hidden (John Calvin). We will not know it.*

In most cases, those who are asking this question have a choice they're facing and are looking for guidance from God to make the right choice.

None of us can read God's mind, but we do have the Bible, which reveals His Deus revelatus, or revealed Will.

It is indeed a virtue to desire to know what God wants you to do. He has a secret plan for your life that is absolutely none of your business, but He may lead you and direct your paths. So there is nothing wrong with seeking the illumination of the Holy Spirit, or the leading of God, in our lives, and that is usually what people are concerned with when they ask about God's will. However, we tend to have an ungodly desire to know the future. We want to know the end from the beginning, which is indeed none of our business. It is God's business which is why He is so severe in His warnings in Scripture against those who try to find out the future through illicit means such as Ouija boards, fortune tellers, and tarot cards. Those things are off-limits for Christians. (Dr. R.C. Sproul)

Look to the Gospel for direction in making decisions (Dr. Travis Bond)

Determining God's Will For Your Life

Q1. Which Will of God?

It is not
Deus Absconditus.
This is the hidden will
of God and it is hidden

Hidden Will

It is not the Decretive
Will of God since what
is decreed must surely
come to pass.

Prophecy

It is the Preceptive
Will of God

God's Law

God says He wants us to learn the will of God for our lives. *Proverbs 3:5-6* ⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

We do so by focusing our attention on the Preceptive will of God. We cannot resist the decretive will of God, that has been fore-ordained or prophesized, if you will. Therefore if you want to know God's will for your life, the Bible says ... ³For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from ^[d]sexual immorality; *1Thes 4:3*

When people wonder whether to take a job in Cleveland or in San Francisco, or whether to marry Dawn or Adriana, they should study closely the Preceptive will of God. They should study the law of God to learn the principles by when they are to live their lives from day to day. The psalmist writes, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." (Ps1:1-2). The godly man's delight is in the Preceptive will of God and one so focused will be like "a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season (V3). The ungodly, however, are not like that but "are like chaff that the wind drives away" (v4). (Dr. R.C. Sproul, Everyone's A Theologian)

The “Will of God” in Romans 12:2

² *And do not be conformed to this ^[a]world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may ^[b]prove what the will of God is, that which is good and ^[c]acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2.*

God wants you to know His will. Which will is Paul referencing?

It is the Preceptive will of God, not the sovereign will of God. He is not saying: “Get your mind renewed so that you can discern what is going to happen tomorrow.” He is saying: “Get your mind renewed so that you can discern what ought to happen tomorrow through your life.” See the difference?

He is telling us to look for his Preceptive will

According to the Bible God is not bent on bringing you into an increasing awareness of his secret will for tomorrow. Nor does He want you to focus on what is going to happen tomorrow. What you need in order to discern what will happen tomorrow is not a renewed mind, but a crystal ball. There is no virtue in seeing tomorrow’s events in a satanical crystal ball.

To prepare yourself for understanding and discerning God’s will, you will need to do three things:

- Stage number one: Immerse yourself in God’s Word.
- Stage number two: Seek to apply the Scriptures and pray for a renewed mind.
- Stage number three: Having your unconscious life transformed.

The will of command is revealed in the Bible decisively, authoritatively, and infallibly. If you want to discern what is the will of God, you need to first immerse yourself in the Bible. This is the first stage. Know God’s laws. In order to know His will, you must first know God’s laws. So stay in the word.

Step number two is you have got to have a new mind shaped by the reading and applying of Scripture to your life so that when you come to those decisions, there is a readiness to see and do the will of God.

The implication is: we must ingrain the word of God, so that we instinctively live a life consistent with His Word. In other words, we obey God by having His Word second nature to us.

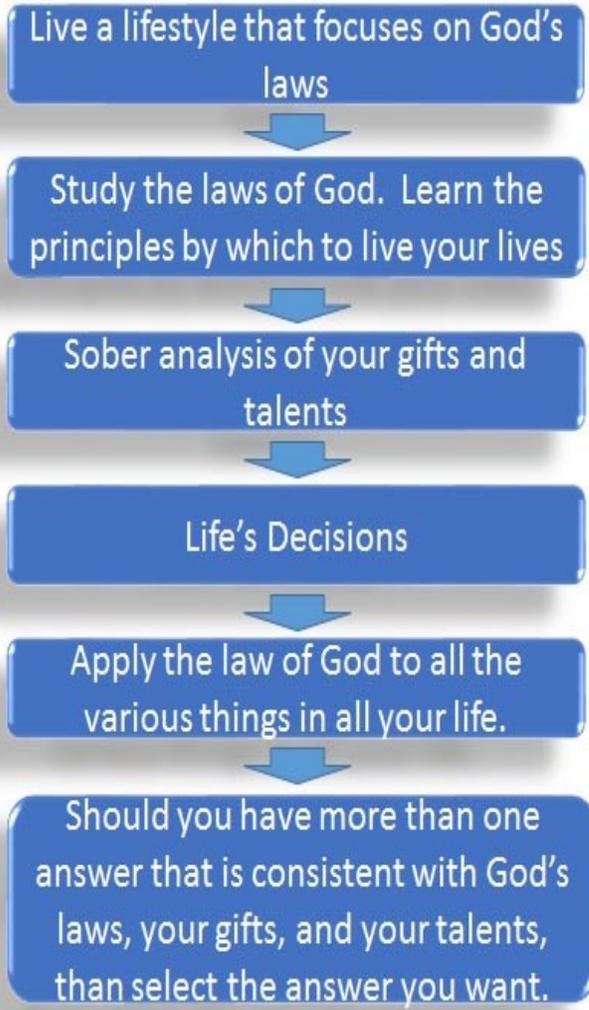
As a young artist I focused a lot on learning the techniques of painting. I would study how to make a mountain, a tree, rocks, a cabin, etc... When I tackled a painting, I thought about how to paint each of these elements. As the years went by and I painted over and over, these techniques became second nature to me.

When I paint now, I’m focused not on the techniques, rather on the scene. The passion, the story, the message, the composition. The techniques are now second nature to me. In the same way, the Bible should be so ingrained to us that we have a renewed mind.

To know the Law of God, you must know the Bible. That means spending time each day reading and meditating on his words. What does He approve of? What does He delight in? What is good, acceptable and perfect in His view for you to do this afternoon?

So start there and ask the Lord for a renewed mind that is a mind that when it reads the Bible can see and understand what it means. Pray for a renewed mind that knows how to discern how all of the things that are revealed here will produce a godly decision.

Q2. How To Determine The Will of God?



1 Thess 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from [a]sexual immorality;
Psalm 1:1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the [a]path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night

As for which job to accept, you will have to master God's principles for living. It is God's will that you make a sober analysis of your gifts and talents. Will either job continue to keep you with your gifts? If not, decline the offer. It will then be God's will that you continue looking at more job opportunities. The will of God is that you match your vocation – your calling – with the right job opportunity. We do this by applying the law of God to all the various things in life.

When it comes to deciding whom to marry, Dr. RC Sproul makes an excellent analysis

Scripture says we must look at everything with respect to God's blessing on marriage. Having done that, you might discover that there are several prospects who meet the biblical requirements. So which one do you marry? The answer to that is easy: whichever one you want to marry. As long as the one you choose falls within the parameters of the preceptive will of God, you have complete liberty to act according to whatever pleases you, and you do not need to lose sleep wondering whether you're outside the hidden or decreative will of God. First, you cannot be outside the decreative will of God. Second, the only way you are going to know the hidden will of God for you today is to wait until tomorrow, and tomorrow will make it clear to you because you can look back on the past and know that whatever happened in the past is the outworking of the hidden will of God. In other words, we only know God's hidden will after the fact. We usually want to know the will of God in terms of the future, whereas the emphasis in Scripture is on the will of God for us in the present, and that has to do with His commands. (Dr. RC Sproul, Everyone's a Theologian)

It is interesting to note (and many Christian writers have observed this peculiarity as well) that whereas many have asked how they can ascertain God's will for their lives, no one asks how they can know the law of God.

The answer is clear and they already know they can find God's laws in the Bible. They can study the law of God in order to know it, then they will need to do it. Most who inquire about the will of God are seeking knowledge of the future. If we want to know God's will in terms of what God authorizes, or what pleases Him, and what will receive blessings from God, then study God's law. One of the values of the Old Testament law for today's Christian is it reveals the character of God and what is pleasing to Him.

That's our job. Study, know, do.

