

Sermon to the Saints of God which are at Topeka – Sunday, Nov. 13, 2016

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. – Php. 2:13

Beloved – over the years that I and my family have been incredibly blessed by God to sojourn amongst you and to delight in His law with those who take similar delight, and to have His word on my heart, mind, tongue and in my ears, though I be a sinful, undeserving worm, I have been asked by several of you differing iterations of the question surrounding God’s will vs. man’s will in the scripture. In broad strokes, it seems clear enough that the scriptures plainly pronounce the will of God as the only true will, even though it speaks of man’s will in a sense. The awesome concept of the sovereignty of God, most forcefully proclaimed in the scriptures, is expounded upon by many minds that God has enlightened far beyond mine to accomplish such a task. From Jerome Zanchias’ *Absolute Predestination*, to Martin Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*, to Arthur Pink’s *The Sovereignty of God*, we can get help here and there, as God seems to have enlivened their minds for that purpose. And while these books, and others, can be very helpful, I would like to focus primarily on scriptural evidence itself as to evidence of God’s will (and what it means) and man’s will (and what it means) as it is revealed to us in God’s Holy Word. We can know, from the scripture itself, that:

- I. God is sovereign - autonomous, self-governing, self-determining; possessing royal or ultimate power and status - acting independently and without outside interference.

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. – Col. 1:16,17

Thou, even thou, art lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee. – Neh. 9:6

- II. God is omnipotent – (combination of the Latin ‘omni’ – all, and the Latin ‘potent’ – powerful, potent) - having all power to do anything that He wills, and all of His will being accomplished simply by willing it.

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. - De 32:39

And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? - Da 4:35

- III. God is omniscient – (combination of the Latin ‘omni’ – all, and the Latin ‘scient’ - to know or knowing) – having all knowledge of all events and intimate detail and authorship of the inner workings of things both seen and unseen, in the past, the present and the future – no matter how great or small, no matter how seemingly consequential or insignificant.

For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. – 1Jn. 3:20
And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. - Ge 6:5

This could not be said, unless God knew and could see every single imagination of the thoughts of every single man’s heart.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: BUT ALL THINGS ARE NAKED AND OPENED UNTO THE EYES OF HIM WITH WHOM WE HAVE TO DO. – Heb. 4:12,13

We know, from scripture, that our eternal lots are completely determined: that not one man who has been predestinated by God Almighty to a heavenly habitation will miss the boat, so to speak – and that not one man who has been foreordained to spend eternity in hell will ‘crash’ the party in heaven.

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? – Ro. 9:21

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen. – Mt. 22:11-14

We know, from scripture, that we move, draw breath and have our being at the good pleasure of God and would not draw a single extra breath or live one nanosecond longer in this flesh than the determinate counsel of God’s will affords:

Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell

on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; - Acts 17:25,26

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. - De 32:39

If God wants you dead, you will simply no longer live; and if God still has use for you, you couldn't even kill yourself, let alone another man take your life.

We know, from scripture, that without the Holy Spirit of God moving within us, we only do wrong things – sin – and that even when we do right things, we do them for the wrong reason, and therefore, they are still wrong.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? – Jer. 17:9

And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. – 1Jn. 5:19

It is only through being justified by Christ's blood, and by being sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, that we can do anything good – and even then, it is not of ourselves that this good is accomplished. The unmerited favor of God then rests upon us, we are clothed by the imputed righteousness of Christ and we are given the Comforter to quiet and revive our spirits, to learn at the foot of God, and to be provoked to do things that were completely outside of our former natures.

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. – Ro. 3:10-12

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. – Jn. 14:26

We know, from the scripture, that even after being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, and even after being given a new heart by God – a heart to know, fear and love him, that we are prone to sin – that sinful nature is not eradicated in us – but we are given a capacity to overcome it.

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another...This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. – Gal. 5:13, 16, 17

We wouldn't need that exhortation if we were no longer so inclined. But if we be His, we have been given a capacity for spiritual reasoning, and to resist the sinful urges of our flesh.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. – 1Cor. 10:13

If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. – Eph. 4:21-24

That putting on of the new man is a day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute thing – it's certainly not a one-time task. We know, from scripture, that man cannot do ANY THING of his so-called free will to please God.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. - Heb 11:6

So without faith, no matter what a man does, he cannot please God. That doesn't sound like free will to me. That doesn't sound like self-determinism to me. All we have described here, beloved, is an unregenerate man. And no matter how nice, or genteel, or cool, or humble, or skilled, or kind that unregenerate man seems to us (as we witness his manner of life), or to himself, he is completely limited in his will, or in his capacity, because he CANNOT PLEASE GOD. If an unregenerate man said, "Um, I think I wanna please God today." NOPE. YOU CANNOT DO IT. That's Bible. And so, many unregenerate men will deny the existence of God, to both slap a salve on their consciences and to save social face, so to speak. Others will simply look upon the Christian religion as a buffet that they can belly up to – choosing what they like best and leaving the rest behind. Still others will concoct and choose other religions whose tenets are more agreeable with their flesh. But make no mistake - his deeds are evil – because even when he does the right thing (for example, marrying and not divorcing his wife), he does it for the wrong reason (he thinks, in himself, that it's the wrong thing to do to divorce her, or I really dig her – she does what I want) – rather than not divorcing his wife specifically because God commands it.

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. – Ps. 10:4

Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? – Pr. 20:6

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. – Pr. 16:25

In a free translation the last of those preceding verses means: every man thinks he has a handle on right and wrong, and no one is going to tell him otherwise. We see and hear it all the time: that Bible love is construed by the natural man as hatred; and that sin, and the enabling, promoting and condoning of sin are acts of love. But if it's not God's law and a sincere, grace-informed, God-given attempt at fearing God and keeping His commandments, then everyone who thinks that way is gonna end up in hell.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. - Ro 10:3

We know, from scripture, that a man cannot get faith unto himself.

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. – Jn. 6:44

A man cannot bestow salvation upon himself, neither can he bestow salvation upon another man. It's a fool's errand, and these God-forsaken Arminian 'evangelists' and 'missionaries' have been vainly carving notches in their belts and on their lipstick tubes for centuries, thinking that somehow they've done God a favor with their marvelous, syrupy, pied piper leading of sinners to Christ.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: - Eph. 2:8

So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. – Ro. 9:16

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. – Heb. 12:2

And since you cannot please God without faith, and you cannot have faith unless God grants it to you, then you are completely powerless, in your so-called will, to please him. There is no self-determinism going on here. Man, in an unregenerate state, is a slave to sin.

For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. – Ro. 6:20

God gives his elect a capacity to think in terms of how to serve him – a capacity to reason. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? – Deut. 4:5-7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever. - Ps 111:10

Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. - Ps 119:104

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. – 2Tim 1:7

That 'fear' in the last verse does not refer to a proper, reverent fear of God – rather, it refers to a fear of man or faithlessness toward Christ. Just as we know from scripture that it is impossible for an unregenerate, or faithless, man to please God, we also know from scripture that a faithful soul (remember, God bestowed the faith upon that soul) will, as a matter of course in his or her life, do that which is well-pleasing in the sight of God – it is the peaceable fruit of righteousness that happens when a faithful soul is exercised by the chastening of the Lord.

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. – 1Jn. 2:4-5

But we also know from scripture that, when a person who has been given the gift of faith by God, when he or she does those things that are pleasing in the sight of God, it is the Spirit of God moving within that person to do those things:

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. – Php. 2:13

This is the will of God working in a person. We also know that the Spirit of God does not 'keep us from sinning' or cause us to only do that which is righteous 24/7. Otherwise, we would either: (a) never sin, or (b) be forced into an unscriptural position that the Holy Spirit caused us to sin, which we know is as erroneous a doctrine as the day is long. We also know, from scripture, that we will still sin, even after being given the gift of faith and being quickened by the Holy Spirit of God, and that when we sin, it is something inside of us (our lust, or will to sin) which causes the offense. Consider the scripture on both points at once:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. – James 1:13,14

The unregenerate man loves to sin – every single one of them loves to sin. That is a good working definition of lust: ‘the strong desire to sin’. Now the sin will certainly vary from one man to the next, but every man in his natural state will have a strong desire for, and will be overtaken by, sin of some sort. That is why, for example, we have the sign that says ‘Fag Love Equals Lust’ - the strong desire or attraction for that which is against God’s word can never be defined as love.

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. - 1Jo 5:3

Of course, this means as a matter of course in a person’s life, and not without testing, struggle or failure, as we know that while we have been given a capacity to obey the Lord and to reason spiritually, we also know that we still retain that sinful nature while we inhabit these fleshly tabernacles. Nevertheless, we are given a capacity and a desire to please God, our obedience being a manifestation of our thanksgiving for the mercy and love he has shown unto us – we bringing absolutely nothing to the table but sin and our lust for more sin. And in great thanksgiving and awe we stand, being internally persuaded that we have been unburdened of that great debt of sin by our Redeemer – by the precious and efficacious blood of the Lamb. Consider the scripture:

We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. – 1Jn. 4:19-21

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; Col. 2:13-14

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. - 2Pe 1:4

In short, the unregenerate man is both completely enslaved in sin (of one sort or another) and completely powerless to free himself from that burden, not matter what he tries – and everything he tries can be looked upon, in a scriptural light, as man’s will. The man to whom

God imparts faith is still prone to sin, but when he acts out of love and obedience toward God, quickened by the Holy Spirit, this man is doing God's will.

MAN'S WILL V. GOD'S WILL

The will of God is of two sorts – his secret will and his revealed will. His revealed will is His word – which gives us all we need to know to get through this life in a way that is pleasing to God. His secret will is all of the rest of God's will which he has not revealed unto us. In his book, *The Sovereignty of God*, Arthur Pink puts the matter squarely before our understanding:

“The secret will of God is His eternal, unchanging purpose concerning all things which He hath made, to be brought about by certain means to their appointed ends: of this God expressly declares ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’ (Isaiah 46:10). This is the absolute, efficacious will of God, always effected, always fulfilled. The revealed will of God contains not His purpose and decree but our duty, - not what He will do according to His eternal counsel, but what we should do if we would please Him, and this is expressed in the precepts and promises of His Word.”

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law. –Deut.29:29

So, a man doing God's (revealed) will is simply a man acting out of a sincere desire to obey God, manifesting his thanksgiving for all the ways that the Lord has blessed that man (in life, health, lot, a fear of the Lord before his eyes, a capacity to reason spiritually, the efficacious blood of the Lamb, etc.). Consider the scripture:

I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. – Ps. 40:8

For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother. – Mk. 3:35

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. – Ro. 12:2

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. – 1Jn. 2:17

We see that, many times throughout scripture, God's will is expressed as His law, His commandments, His statutes, and doing God's will is a matter of a man acting out of obedience to that revealed will – specifically because God said to do a thing or to refrain from doing a thing. This can only be done by the man who has faith – but it doesn't guarantee that behavior every time, as we are now at war with the flesh – the spirit and the flesh are constantly at war. This is

set against the notion of a man exerting his own will, without any sincere thought given to obeying God; he is simply doing what he does out of his sinful motives, which control and dominate every unregenerate man. There is no war going on, here. Full-on, white flag surrender to sin.

On the positive side of things, there is no question that scripture admits of a seemingly 'causal' effort on the part of man, and in fact, commands it in several ways. The very nature of obedience admits of some sort of inner drive to do a thing in awareness – submitting to an authority in a reasoned and non-programmed way that fights against the natural inclinations. Otherwise, there would be no need for the scores of exhortations to obedience and provocations unto love and to good works that run the whole current of scripture. Therefore the hyper-Calvinist cannot sit on his hands, thinking all things are done by God and so therefore he has no personal responsibility. The man who God bestows his grace upon – a man whose name is therefore written in the Lord's book of life, though ever unable to undo salvation wrought upon him, has a much heightened sense of responsibility to act in a purposeful and willing manner:

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. – Ec. 9:10

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. – Col. 3:23,24

Not to RECEIVE the reward, or somehow EARN it, but in heartfelt gratitude for having been promised the reward that no man can bestow upon himself or on any other man, AND that is the only reward really worth receiving, when you take the long view of the matter. So in this sense, man exerts his will, or efforts or 'tries' as far as his personal consciousness makes allowance for, but in reality, he does the will of God, in that he is doing what he is doing out of conscious submission and obedience to his King. The unregenerate man cannot do anything heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. If he doesn't have a fear of the Lord, then he is not even obeying the Lord in the doing of it. He is obeying his own will. And again - without faith, he cannot do anything pleasing unto the Lord. So he can try really hard to do a thing, and we see men giving their 'all' in endeavors every day, but they are certainly not giving their all as though the Lord was standing right there AND that that meant something vital to them.

When a man does a thing in his own pleasure, without regard to obedience to God, this is an expression of the will of man. Remember, an unregenerate man can do nothing with a pure motive of unfeigned love toward God, reverent fear of God, and faith in God – so nothing he does is motivated by a desire to humble himself in obedience to God. He might have natural affections for his children, kin, close friends etc., but he never acts out of love for God. So, in

one sense, there is a very important way in which we can parse out man's will from God's will in scripture by determining if the person doing the thing is properly motivated to do the thing in obedience to God or not. And of course, we know that only a man of faith will truly desire to obey God.

When we, as regenerated souls, sow to the flesh, we are doing exactly what the unregenerate man does – we are chasing after our lust. But we are also sinning against light, because we know, that on the great majority of occasions, we know that God has plainly shown us that the sinful activity we engage in when we are not thinking and doing right IS SINFUL. So our responsibility is enhanced, even though we know that, at the end of the day, there is no meaningful way to express the 'free will' of man other than to say:

1. That all men, in their unregenerate state, will love their sin, will forge 'right and wrong' from their own sensibilities and desires, and under no circumstance can they PLEASE GOD WHATSOEVER.
2. That no unregenerate man can bestow faith or salvation upon himself, and no person at all (whether unregenerate or regenerate) can bestow faith or salvation upon another man. The scripture is clear, that no man can come to Christ of his own volition. And if that is the case, there is really no meaningful version of 'free will' that a man can take away from this discussion, as his eternal lot has been determined by God, and therefore no man has any meaningful measure of 'self-determinism' (or free will).

One question that might creep into the edges of one's understanding at some point during this sermon is: if we can't truly exert our will to do anything good, then why doesn't God just 'program' us to do right all the time? That is the big question. There is no way for me, or anyone else, to say that all of our actions are or are not guided in that way. It may be a meaningless question (or a question put into the basket of 'foolish and unlearned questions'), as some men who have studied the matter long, have suggested – here's an example:

"Not only are there meaningless questions, but many of the problems with which the human intellect has tortured itself turn out to be only 'pseudo problems,' because they can be formulated only in terms of questions which are meaningless. Many of the traditional problems of philosophy, of religion, or of ethics, are of this character. Consider, for example, the problem of the freedom of the will. You maintain that you are free to take either the right- or the left-hand fork in the road. I defy you to set up a single objective criterion by which you can prove after you have made the turn that you might have made the other. The problem has no meaning in the sphere of objective activity; it only relates to my personal subjective feelings while making the decision." Percy Williams Bridgman, *The Nature of Physical Theory*

There are many instances in scripture where God glorifies and magnifies his Holy name through the sin of both his people and the sin of unregenerate men. Consider the scripture:

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. – Gen. 50:20

Does it glorify God's Holy name more for Joseph to merely be borne and ascend in a predictable path, fully supported by his brothers, to the governorship of Egypt? Or is this not infinitely more amazing?

1. That Joseph was hated by his brothers for both the seeming arrogance and high-mindedness of his talk toward them AND the doting nature of his father's attention
2. That his brothers, in their envy and hatred for Joseph, first thought to kill him, then thought to merely toss him into a pit – and finally landed on selling him into slavery.
3. That Joseph dealt faithfully in all his ways (Christ), tending to all of an Egyptian military leader's affairs, but was thrown into a dungeon after being falsely accused (Christ) of rape by the military leader's wife.
4. After a time in the dungeon (Christ), he ascended from that depth to save his brothers from their famine – those same brothers who wanted to kill him and sold him into slavery. And all this setting the stage for Israel to end up in Egypt.

Is that not praiseworthy to the Nth degree? It always blows me away.

Beloved, it is precisely because men love their evil deeds, or sin, and hate to be reprov'd of them, that they hate our preaching. Their consciences are tortured by the idea that what is right, in the eyes of the one true moral legislator and judge, completely eludes their grasp – AND that they are completely unable, in themselves, to do that which is pleasing in the eyes of God. And so, they try, in vain, to silence that moral voice of authority – or shut the voice of God up! Let us silence anyone who acts as an accurate, legitimate, sincere voice of God in this earth.

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. - Ps. 2:1-3

This is not a new thing, beloved. Think Cain and Abel – the first man we have record of being born into this world killed the second man born into it – specifically for speaking of God's standards and provoking his brother unto love and to good works. But we know where that ends:

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. – Ps. 2:4

What is God laughing at? Is he laughing at the proposition that some of his creation think that they can resist God's will by exerting their own? That word derision there means contemptuous ridicule or mockery. This little cluster of verses here at Psalm 2, to me, puts the last nails in the coffin, so to speak, of ANY version of 'free-willism' or 'self-determinism'.

Alternatively, man attempts to redefine morality in a way that comports to his own desires (this is also man's will – and God also laughs at this). Let us make a morality, says man, such that, whatever it is that I like to do, it is right! And we can either get God out of the moral equation (by first getting Him out of the physical, or creative, equation), or we can co-opt the use of the word 'God' and 'Jesus' and say untrue things enough times that they seem true. Consider the scripture:

Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment? – Mal. 2:17

We live in what is fundamentally moral universe – sure, there are physical bodies and physical processes, chemical, mechanical and electrical, happening all around, above and beneath us. But there are also countless supernatural happenings occurring all around us as well, and both all flesh and this earth will fail – and what remains is what is enduring. What ultimately is and should be important to any soul are those matters that pertain to his never dying soul. Matters of right and wrong, good and evil, heaven and hell. Matters pertaining to our long home – our eternal habitation. In a moral universe, there can only be one will – and that will is God's.

I love you all. Amen.