

GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL

by Allan A. MacRae, Ph.D.

Reference is made four times in Ephesians 1:1,5,8, and 11 to the sovereign will of God. Jesus Christ Himself regarded this matter as of greatest importance as may be seen from his statement, "Nevertheless not my will but thine be done" when addressing His Father. He also said, "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). *Certain Things About the Will of God Have Been Made Known.*

In the Bible God has made known the fact that all men are sinners, that sin must be punished, that all are called upon to turn from sin, that Jesus died for our sins and whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but have eternal life. After we are saved, we know it is God's will that we love Christ, study His Word, help others to learn of Christ by leading them to believe on Him. To us also He has made known the responsibility of looking lovingly for the return of Christ from heaven.

These are some facts about the will of God we are to know. It is a thousand times more important that we take these facts, act upon them and make them known than that we try to work out philosophical theories of the origin of the universe or its destiny -- matters that go far beyond what Scripture says. It is important for us to be familiar with that which God has revealed in His Book.

There Are Many Portions of God's Will that Remain a Mystery to Us.

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his

will. . . In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:5,11).

Some say, "If that means God before hand decides you are one of the saved, that's unfair! It must mean He predestinated those He knew would have sense enough to accept Christ -- that makes it fair to everyone!" But does that make it fair to everyone? Millions have lived who have never heard of Jesus Christ, and a comparatively small number have had the gospel presented to them over and over and over again. God does not save people because they have sense enough to believe in Jesus Christ. God chose because He predestinated them according to His purpose and after the counsel of His own will. Everyone of us who has come to know Christ has been blessed in that God has placed us in a situation where the knowledge of Christ would be brought to us. He placed us in a situation where perhaps we would be put in a mood to be interested enough to listen. Perhaps He place us where there is a person zealous and anxious to spread the knowledge of Christ.

We do not understand the counsel of God. We do not know why He predestinates certain ones to salvation, but no one of us can say it is any goodness in us that we are saved. It is entirely God's goodness and grace! But here is the mystery of His will. Why has He done this? Why has He chosen us? It is a mystery.

There are many other mysteries about God's will. He knows whether your life is going to accomplish a great deal, or whether you will seem to accomplish very little.

God knows our situation, our talents and abilities. He knows whether we will be a success or an apparent failure. Some who are comparatively young are stricken with a disease that makes them weak and seemingly unable to accomplish much. Others have marvelous health throughout their lives. God knows why some are born with brains that quickly learn, while others are born have a tremendous struggle to learn a little. Some have quick insight, others slow insight. Some have great physical ability, and some are very languid in physical strength. Some have very attractive personalities, others do not. There are tremendous differences among people and they are part of the mystery of God's will.

All things are predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His will, and yet Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out." God gave His Son that whosoever believes in Him might have eternal life. Both statements are true. Both are taught in Scripture. How do they fit together? We do not know, but God knows perfectly. It is all part of His marvelous plan and will.

In Matthew 11:21-24, Capernaum with its many godly people and of course some who were ungodly, is compared unfavorably with Sodom where they could not find more than one family that was worthy to be delivered from destruction. As you read in Genesis about Lot's daughters, you wonder if anyone was found who was godly in that city. But Jesus says that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. The mystery

of God's will! We do not understand it as we grasp one side of the mystery and put tremendous stress on that and ignore another side. We may present something that sounds very wonderful to people but is not honoring to the Lord. We must get all aspects of the truth He has given us as far as we can, and where we cannot understand His truth, let us admit the fact of the mystery.

You Have a Part in God's Plan

It is important for us to realize that each of us has an important part in God's plan. Why should that be? Why should He need us to have a part in His plan? He could make a machine that would be so programmed that it would do all sorts of things in exact wonderful fashion. He has made a wonderful universe like that. The stars and planets move in their orbits so regularly that we can tell within a few seconds exactly when a planet will pass behind the sun or how long it takes to go around the sun. What marvelous clockwork God has created!

Our bodies are a machine beyond imagination. Its various parts work together so marvelously. Helmholtz, the German optician, said that the lens in the human eye was such a poor optical instrument that for a few cents you could buy a better one in any optical shop! But he could not get a machine any man has ever made that could do what the human eye can do with its marvelous potentialities. Not only does it recognize shape, it recognizes color. Not only does it recognize shapes and colors, it recognizes depth. It can adapt itself to depth. Our two eyes work together to give one picture. The right side of both eyes conveys messages to the left

side of the brain. The left hand side of both eyes conveys messages to the right side of the brain. These four sets of messages are all combined so you think you see one picture, and you see it in depth. It is beyond all comprehension! God created these marvelous eyes and many other remarkable features of the human body. He could have made everything in the universe to work this way.

Why did He need to have us lead souls to know Him? Why did He leave us here on earth after we were saved instead of taking us right away to Himself? He could bring the Word of God in regenerating force to every individual that He chooses to without using us to do it. Why does He chose to use us for this purpose? He could cause people to grow in grace instantaneously.

We are justified immediately and instantaneously, but our sanctification is a slow process. God chose to give us a part in His work. There are individuals He wants us to lead to Christ, and no one else can lead to Christ. There are individuals who will become discouraged and disheartened if you don't bring them the message of how they can grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. God chooses us to lead souls to Christ, and to help them grow in grace. Paul said, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." How many of us say the same thing? Feel the same way? We certainly should. God has given us a part in His work, but what part is most important you and I do not know.

God alone knows what the results of our part will be. Some who work, toil and struggle to advance the Lord's work seem to accomplish little, yet in God's sight they may be doing far more than

some others who step out and accomplish a tremendous amount. Like an army, God puts us into positions when at times we are moving forward rapidly and conquering areas for Him. This is exhilarating. Others troops He puts into an area where the army is just trying to hold on and it becomes very tiresome and difficult. But those soldiers placed in such a position are doing what may be even more important than those who seem to be having great success. We do not know what regiments are tremendously important and what regiments are not. God is interested in our faithfulness, our diligence, our dependability. We cannot see the results yet. That is part of the inscrutable will of God.

You Are a Part of God's Plan

What is God's purpose for the world? Is it solely to punish the wicked? Is it simply to justify the elect? Is it His purpose to establish a perfect world? This He will do, but not by human effort. A perfect world will be established by the return of Christ and not before. He is not establishing a perfect world at present.

God's purpose now is to bring into existence a people for Himself who will show forth His praise (1 Pet. 2:9). His perfect plan has an objective of bringing into existence a people who will be conformed to His will so they may have fellowship with Him throughout all eternity. He established this world in the first place so that He might have a holy people who will have fellowship with Him through all eternity.

Our spiritual development is even more important than our work for Him. ■