

# **THE 7 EXPRESSIONS OF THE WILL OF GOD**

## **Part One**

### **I. Introduction to the Will of God**

#### **A. Defining Our Problem**

1. The Lord has placed it on my heart to tackle a topic that will require the help of the Holy Spirit as well as your commitment to pay attention.

2. The problem revolves around the question that arises every time there is a great tragedy in the world or in the lives of individual Christians. For example...

a. **On October 4, 2016 Hurricane Matthew hit the island of Haiti** with 125 mph winds. It destroyed 200,000 homes and left 1.4 million people in need of humanitarian aid. David Bain, a British journalist seized the occasion to question the idea of God:

#### **David Bain**

**“As for those who believe in an all-good, all-powerful agent-God-we’ve seen that they face a question that remains pressing after all these centuries, and which is now powerfully underscored by the horrors in Haiti. If a deity exists, why didn’t He prevent this?”**

b. The same questions come with every school shooting or personal tragedy.

3. This is not new. The same question was famously framed by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, 300 years before the birth of Christ. It is called “The Epicurean Paradox”:

#### **The Epicurean Paradox**

**“Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then He is not omnipotent.  
Is God able to prevent evil but not willing? Then He is not good.  
So how does evil come? Is he neither able nor willing?  
Then why should we call Him God?”**

**Epicurus  
(341-270 B.C.)**

a. In the 1700's, atheistic Scottish philosopher David Hume was one of the most brilliant minds during the so called "Enlightenment"; He posed the question in much the same way:

**"If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good, why is there evil? If God wills to prevent evil but cannot, then He is not omnipotent. If He can prevent evil and does not, then He is not good. In either case, he is not God."**

**David Hume (1711-1776)**

4. There has always been evil and suffering in the world; we just never knew about it. The advent of the 24/7 news media now brings every evil and tragedy right to the forefront; to the point of overwhelming.

5. Who among us has not seen the images of suffering on the TV and not had this question bubble up inside of them?

### **HOW CAN A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?**

6. Here is the logical syllogism used by those who question God:

#### **Humanistic Logic on God and Suffering**

- 1. A good, all powerful-God would not want people to suffer; and He would be able to prevent them from suffering.**
- 2. But suffering exists.**
- 3. Therefore, God either lacks either goodness, or power, or both. So the good, all-powerful God of the Bible does not exist.**

7. How do you respond to these objections to the character and nature of the God of the Bible? Can you give an answer? Or maybe you're struggling with the same questions, even as a believer. At least you're being honest!

#### **Jon Morrison**

**"Evil is the most difficult problem in the world. It is also the strongest objection to God's existence. If God does exist, it is also the most problematic challenge to His nature and power. As a Christian, it is my greatest temptation for doubt and unbelief."**

- He acknowledges that evil is the most difficult problem in the world
- He says that the existence of evil is the strongest objection to God's existence

- And if God does exist, the existence of evil challenges what the Bible says about His nature and His power
- Finally, he admits that, as a Christian, the existence of evil and tragedy is the greatest test of His own personal faith

8. This may be true for you. So with all this in mind, I would like to begin the New Year by clearing up the confusion many Christians carry surrounding the subject at the heart of the problem here. It's a subject many speak about but very few understand: I am talking about the subject of the will of God. And...

### **B. This is Not a Simple Subject**

1. I'm tackling the topic of the will of God with my eyes wide open: the teaching on the will of God will require you to think; and that can be difficult in a church culture where the superficial sermons of our day require very little use of the mind. The same was true 100 years ago...

**Arthur W. Pink**

**“The craving today is for something light and spicy, and few have the patience or even the desire, to examine carefully (subjects) which would make a demand both upon their hearts as well as their mental powers.”**

2. There is a widespread anti-intellectualism in the church today; few are interested in systematic theology; many people prefer Sunday sermons that make no demand upon their hearts or mental power.

3. But we need to study to know God and His word with at least as much zeal as the world pursues its college courses. (I'm reminded of think of what the professor told his law school students in the 1973 movie his class in “The Paper Chase”),

**John Houseman in “The Paper Chase” (1973)**

**“You come into here with a skull full of mush and you leave thinking like a lawyer.”**

4. So you may come into this teaching on the will of God with a skull full of mush. But you can leave thinking like a Christian! IF you're willing to work at it.

5. My personal testimony is that no one helped me toward a biblical understanding of the will of God more than the late, great theologian R.C. Sproul.

a. He puts his finger on the problem in this statement:

**R.C. Sproul**

**“Few concepts in theology generate more confusion than the will of God; much of it because of the multifaceted ways in which the will of God functions in biblical expressions.**

b. Notice: the confusion about the will of God comes because we do not understand the “multifaceted ways” the will of God works or is expressed. But here is my theme:

**Many of the great questions of life can be resolved if we can learn to distinguish the 7 different ways God’s will is expressed in the Bible.**

6. So we are going to study “The 7 Expressions of the Will of God.” But let me be clear...

**God does not have 7 different “WILLS”; but there are 7 different ways that His will is expressed in the Bible and in this world.**

And unless we can distinguish between the various expressions we will end up in confusion. So I would like to begin with an overview of all 7 expressions and close with a practical example of it works.

### **C. Overview**

Here are the 7 distinct expressions of the will of God that we will cover;

#### **The 7 Expressions of God’s Will**

- **Sovereign/Decretive will**
  - **Preceptive will**
  - **Secret will**
  - **Revealed will**
  - **Active will**
- **Passive/Permissive will**
- **Dispositional will**

1. The first and most important expression of God’s will is His “sovereign”

will, sometimes known as His “decretive” will because it refers to God expressing His will by *decree*.

### **“decree”**

**An order issued by a person in authority, determining what is to be done or what is to take place.**

- a. Obviously, an earthly king or person in authority can make a decree.
- b. But when we speak of God’s sovereign will expressed in a decree, it is absolutely sure to come to pass.
- c. An earthly person in authority can make a decree but it can be ignored or disobeyed.
- d. But when God decrees a thing, no one or no “thing” can stop it from happening.
- e. Here are 3 examples of God’s decretive will:

### **Genesis 1:1-3**

**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.**

- It was God’s will to “turn the lights on”; He expressed His will by a spoken decree and it was done.

### **Genesis 8:22**

**"While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease."**

- It was God’s sovereign will that the earth have seasons and cycles: day and night, summer and winter, sowing and reaping; so He spoke it by decree!

### **Hebrews 9:27**

**...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment...**

- Here is half a verse is the reason everyone dies; God has “appointed” or decreed it. Also the judgment that follows.

**IN ALL 3 CASES, THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD IS IRRESISTIBLE.**

2. **The 2<sup>nd</sup> expression is God’s “preceptive” will**; God making His will know to us through His precepts or His commandments. Example: from the 10 commandments:

**Exodus 20:12-15**

**Honor your father and mother.  
You shall not murder.  
You shall not commit adultery.  
You shall not steal.**

a. These are examples of God making His will known to us in the form of precepts or commandments.

**b. Now stop right here and notice a distinction...**

There is a fundamental difference between the Sovereign will of God and the Preceptive will of God: God’s will, when expressed as a decree, cannot be broken, resisted or obstructed. God’s will, when expressed as a precept, can be resisted, disobeyed or even ignored. Both are spoken; but only one can be broken.

- God’s will decreed day and night; you may be a night person or a day person but both will come.
- God decreed the seasons; you may like summer and hate winter; you can pray winter won’t come; but it will.
- And we will die. God’s sovereign will cannot be resisted.
- *On the other hand*, God’s will expressed in precept gives us commandments; which we can ignore or choose to break!

**3 and 4.** We’ll take the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> expressions together: the secret will of God and the revealed will of God.

**Deuteronomy 29:29**

**The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.**

a. First notice that there *are* “secret things” related to God’s will; things He will not tell us; things will happen that He will not explain that belong only to Him.

b. On the other hand, there are many things He has revealed to us; revealed things that belong to us and to our children; primarily the “words of His

law"...meaning the Bible!!!

c. God speaks of His secret will and revealed will to the prophet  
Isaiah:

**Isaiah 55:8-9**

**"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,"  
says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways  
higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.**

d. We can never fully know all God's thoughts and ways! He is  
infinite; we are not! But He has given us His thoughts and His ways in His word!

**Isaiah 55:10-11**

**"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return  
there without watering the earth and make it bring forth and bud, that it may  
give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so will My word be that goes out  
of my mouth; It shall not return to Me void, (useless, without result) but it  
shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I  
sent it.**

e. His thoughts are higher-His ways are higher-secret/beyond  
comprehension; but He has sent us His word!

**"God's will is in God's word."**

**Pastor John Hagee**

f. So many people pierce themselves through with many sorrows  
trying to figure out the "secret things" of God but spend almost no time studying  
the things that *are* revealed in God's word!

**5 & 6. The Active and Passive expressions of the will of God.**

a. This simply means that sometimes God reveals His will to us by  
acting in a situation; sometimes by not acting!

b. The great theologian Garth Brooks (smile) wrote a song thanking  
God for unanswered Prayers; the girl he prayed for left him; and later he was glad!

**Garth Brooks**

**Thank God for Unanswered Prayers**

**"Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers,**

**Remember when you're talking to the man upstairs.  
That just because He doesn't answer don't mean He doesn't care.  
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers."**

c. Sometimes God acts-sometimes He does not. Both are expressions of His will.

**R.C. Sproul**

**"God may allow wicked things to transpire, even though he is by no means pleased by them."**

d. We will have much more to say on this in upcoming studies!

## **7. The Dispositional Will of God**

a. God is a Person-and the more we know any person the more we understand their disposition and how they think.

**R.C. Sproul**

**"The dispositional aspect of the will of God refers to what is pleasing and agreeable to God. Some things please Him while other things grieve Him."**

b. The more we know Him the more we know which is which.

c. I've been married to Elizabeth for over 50 years-I know her disposition; I know it so well that I can pretty well know how she will feel about certain situations.

c. We know God is love; His primary disposition is to show mercy and forgive. *But He is also holy*; so He punishes those who refuse to repent.

d. We will say more on each of these but for now let's pause and review the 7 different ways God's will is expressed in the Bible and in our lives:

### **The 7 Expressions of God's Will**

- **Sovereign/Decretive will**
  - **Preceptive will**
  - **Secret will**
  - **Revealed will**
  - **Active will**
  - **Permissive will**

## II. Why Must We Be Able to Distinguish Between the Expressions?

### A. To Avoid Extreme Error

#### 2 Peter 3:9

**The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

1. One of the great doctrinal errors that keeps recurring in church history is “universalism”; the belief that all will eventually be saved. And these false teachers will use this verse as a proof text.

a. The logic is: Since God is sovereign, and it is not God’s will that any be lost then no one will be lost. So eventually, everyone will be saved; no one will “perish”.

2. The truth is that IF this verse refers to the sovereign will of God than everyone will eventually be saved. No one will “perish”. If God not only is not willing that any should perish but has decreed that none should perish then it is true—all will be saved.

3. But this verse is not referring to God’s sovereign will; it is referring to His *dispositional* will. **Theologian R.C. Sproul** explains:

**“God is not willing in the sense that he is not inwardly disposed to, or delighted by, people’s perishing. Elsewhere Scripture teaches that God takes no delight in the death of the wicked. He may distribute justice to wicked offenders but takes no personal pleasure in the application of such punishment.”**

a. The same God whose disposition is that none should perish has also decreed eternal judgment upon sinners who refuse to repent: **Dr. Sproul continued:**

**“God may decree what He does not enjoy. A human analogy may be seen in our law courts. A judge, in the interest of justice, may sentence a criminal to prison and at the same time inwardly grieve for the guilty man. His disposition may be *for* the man, but He will pass judgment *against* the crime.”**

4. Many American Christians are falling into the doctrine of devils known as Universalism. They now believe that because God is good, God is love, God is merciful He will not allow any to eventually be lost. This is happening because they do not know how to distinguish between the different expressions of God's will.

5. I just ordered a book that looked great; I'm not finished with the Introduction and discover the author is a Universalist-he believes everyone will eventually be saved. One of his proof texts is 1 Timothy 2:

**1 Timothy 2:1-4**

**Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

**1 Timothy 2:4 KJV**

**Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.**

a. Referring to verse 4, he writes this:

**Chip Brogden, "The Irresistible Kingdom"**

**"We are not making a case for predestination." (This is the biblical doctrine that some will be saved and some will be lost). "God 'will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth'; all, not just a predetermined, select few."**

b. Brogden believes everyone will be saved because he doesn't know the difference between God's sovereign will and his dispositional will.

c. He could have been helped by the Puritan scholar's comment on the Timothy passage:

**Matthew Henry**

**"All men are to be prayed for is because there is one God, and that God bears a good will to all mankind. This one God will have all men to be saved; he desires not the death and destruction of any (Ezekiel 33:11), but the welfare and salvation of all.**

**Not that He has decreed the salvation of all, for then all men would be saved; but he has a good (dispositional) will to the salvation of all, and that none**

**perish but by their own fault, (Matt 23:37).”**

6. Universalism, or “utter reconciliation” is just one of many errors ensnaring those who cannot discern the difference between the various expressions of God’s will.

7. And even more errors await those who have no real revelation of the first and most important expression of the will of God; it concerns the subject of the sovereignty of God. But be warned...

**C.H. Spurgeon**

**“No doctrine in the whole word of God has more excited the hatred of mankind than the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God.”**

**Closing Prayer**

**Skill Drill**

**Which of the 7 expressions of the will of God are these?**

**God is love**

**I am praying that God’s will be done in my life**

**Owe no one nothing but love**

**Summer is coming**

**If you love me keep my commandments**