

God's Will; Our Will

Scripture

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for [His] good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13 NKJV).

Commentary

The question for today is "How does God will us to do something without doing harm to our will? It seems in the verses above that both man's will and God's will are working in harmony. Man has the responsibility to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, and yet it is God who works in you to will and do for His good pleasure.

Another verse that both complicates and simplifies this reads as follows, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13 NKJV).

The latter verse complicates the issue because it seems to contradict the first notion of working out your own salvation. How can you work out your own salvation if no one is born of the will of man?

However, this also simplifies the problem because we are left with only one reasonable conclusion. Man's will is subject to the will of God, and yet God's will never does harm to man's will.

The answer to our question is answered in part. Still, how is it that God's will does no harm to man's will if man's will is subject to God's will? The solution is found in the way God changes man's will. It is not that God overrides man and forces him through some physical power. That would make man a mere wagon pulled about by God. Instead the Holy Spirit opens a man's understanding and presents an irresistible case which man then wills to follow.

You might argue that still leaves man's will to make the final decision. This is true and the reason we can say God does no harm to the will of man in His sovereign rule of the universe. However, we must understand that the influence God has in presenting His case to man is irresistible. Man will always follow the will of God, because God convinces him to do so. Notice the following passage.

"For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then [it is] not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed [it], "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?" (Romans 9:15-21 NKJV)

You may not like the answer, but God is sovereign over the will of men. He has mercy on some and he hardens others. Now we should never think that our will does not matter. Remember the first passage, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." We are responsible like Pharaoh was responsible for his actions. Notice in the following passage. Who it was that hardened Pharaoh's heart?

"And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; He removed the swarms [of flies] from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. Not one remained. But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go." (Exodus 8:31-32 NKJV)

Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Therefore, we see that the will of man works in harmony with the will of God, and at the same time is subject to the will of God. Oh how marvelous and majestic is our God!

Understanding this allows us to have confidence in prayer, the power of God to change things, and in the need for personal holiness.

Prayer

Father, we do not fully understand how you influence your creatures. However, we know that you do so, and that you do so without making us puppets. Therefore, Lord, we call upon you to have mercy. Please make us vessels fit for your use. We thank you that you have willed to do good in us and by us. We know we are responsible for our actions so forgive us when we fail because we know that you do not tempt us to sin. Lord, please guide us today by your Holy Spirit, amen.