

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE **(LESSON TWENTY-FIVE)**

DOES GOD HAVE TWO WILLS? **(PART ONE)**

Is there any evidence in the Scriptures to support the view that God may have more than one will? Do the Scriptures indicate that God may decree that a certain thing occur while also desiring that a completely different thing should come to pass? In other words, does God have a will of decree and a will of command, a secret will and a revealed will, an efficient will and a permissive will? It is my belief that this is in fact the case and I will endeavor in this Lesson to present my case, relying solely on the Word of the Lord.

I believe that we must distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what He has actually ordained to happen. Perhaps the most effective way of doing so is to, first of all, provide evidence from Scripture of God's willing something in one sense, that He does not approve of in another sense. After doing so, we can reflect on how to understand this apparent contradiction in the light of God's purposes in salvation.

THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

The most persuasive and fascinating example of God demonstrating a will for sin to occur while at the same time not approving the sin, is His willing the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. In **Acts 2:22-23**, Peter, preaching on the Day of Pentecost said, *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."*

The **New Living Translation** renders the verses as follows: *"People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him."*

Peter informs us that Jesus Christ's death was according to the *"determinate counsel"* or *"prearranged plan"* and *"foreknowledge"* of God. It was God's will that Jesus Christ should be crucified in order to provide an atonement for sinners. Our Lord was betrayed, falsely accused, unjustifiably condemned and executed. These were all sinful actions and we know that God does not and cannot condone sin, yet these sinful actions had to be carried out in order for God's will to be accomplished! All the sinful actions that were perpetrated in order for God's plan concerning the death of His Son to be accomplished involved the instrumentality of the devil, but yet it was all the ordained plan of God. There is a sense then, in which God willed the delivering up of His Son, even though this act involved a multitude of sinful deeds.

In **Acts 4:26-28**, we read the following: *"The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."*

The **New Living Translation** renders the passage as follows: *"The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah. 'In fact, this has happened here in this very city!'"*

For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will.”

Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, the Roman soldiers and even the Jewish people, all united in the sinful execution of Jesus Christ. Yet their sinful actions served the purposes of a Sovereign God who had before determined that these sinful actions be performed in order to provide salvation for His elect.

We are very certain that the awful death of Jesus Christ was the perfect will of God for the prophet Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 53:10**, *“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.”*

The **New Living Translation** renders this clause in the following manner: *“But it was the Lord’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief.”*

The will of God was directly involved in the events that led to the death of His Son, yet that death could not have come to pass without the sinful intervention of human beings. Now we know that it was not the “will of God” that Judas, the false witnesses, the Jewish leaders and people, Herod, Pilate, the Roman soldiers and all the others involved in our Lord’s death, disobeyed His Law. But we also know that the will of God for Jesus Christ to be crucified necessitated their disobedience of His Law! Therefore, it seems that God, in some sense, wills what He does not will in another sense. As we stated earlier, we must distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what He has actually ordained to happen.

THE WAR AGAINST THE LAMB

We will now consider **Revelation 17:12-17**, which has to do with the war of the ten kings against the Lamb. This passage reveals the apostle John’s understanding of God’s active involvement in fulfilling prophecies whose fulfillment necessitates the sinning of human beings.

REVELATION 17:12-17

12 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.

13 These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.

16 And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

Verse **14** indicates that the ten kings *“shall make war against the Lamb.”* We know, of course, that the Lamb is the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore, waging war against Him is sin, and sin is contrary to the will of God. Verse **17** informs us that these kings will agree to give their kingdom unto the beast, who is the enemy of the Lord. And yet the verse clearly states that it was God who put it into their hearts to do these things in order that they might fulfill His will! Therefore, God willed, in one sense to influence these kings to do what is absolutely against His will in another sense! God did this in fulfillment of prophecy, for the verse concludes, *“until the words of God shall be fulfilled.”*

This implies that John understands that God's prophecies are fulfilled not merely because God already knows what will happen in the future, but also because His divine intervention ensures that they happen.

John understands that God does not simply make predictions that "bad" events will occur, but in His sovereignty, God makes sure that these "bad" events come to pass. This is what God meant by His statement in **Jeremiah 1:12**: "*I am watching over my word to perform it*" (**English Standard Version**).

THE HARDENING OF PERSONS' HEARTS

Another evidence to illustrate God's willing a state of affairs in one sense that He does not approve of in another sense is the testimony of Scripture that God hardens the hearts of some persons in order to accomplish His will. In doing so, these persons become persistent in sinful behaviour that God hates.

The most famous example of this is the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the book of **Exodus**. In **Exodus 8:1** the Lord says to Moses, "*Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me.*" In this verse, God clearly expressed that it was His will for Pharaoh to release the Israelites. But we know that, before this, He had also expressed that it was His will that Pharaoh **not** release them! In **Exodus 4:21** He had said to Moses, "*When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.*"

Pharaoh's unwillingness to let the people go was sinful. He himself acknowledged this in **Exodus 10:16-17**: "*Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only.*"

Now why would God command Pharaoh to release His people and then harden his heart to prevent him from doing so? What possible reason could He have had for acting in such a seemingly contradictory manner? A careful reading of the following passages may help us to understand what was God's purpose for operating in such an apparently bizarre way.

EXODUS 7:1-5

1 And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.

2 Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land.

3 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.

4 But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.

5 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.

EXODUS 14:1-4, 15-18

1 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea.

3 For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.

4 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; **and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.** And they did so.

15 And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:

16 But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.

17 And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: **and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.**

18 **And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.**

Clearly it was God's desire to manifest His glory to Pharaoh and the Egyptians in a dramatic and unforgettable manner and this could not be accomplished without Pharaoh's stubborn resistance. If He had submitted easily to the command of God through Moses and Aaron, God would not have gotten the full measure of glory and honour that He desired.

In the scenario of the Exodus we see that there is a sense in which it was the will of God that Pharaoh release the Israelites, for His command was very clear. He commanded, "Let my people Go." But there is also a sense in which it was not God's will for Pharaoh to release them for He hardened Pharaoh's heart. This is an example of why theologians speak about God's **will of command** ("Let my people Go"), and His **will of decree** ("I will harden Pharaoh's heart").

The Exodus is not a unique instance of God acting in this way. The two passages outlined below are further examples of God willing something in one sense that He does not will in another. Both have to do with God hardening the hearts of men in order to accomplish His will.

DEUTERONOMY 2:26-31

26 And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying,

27 Let me pass through thy land: I will go along by the high way, I will neither turn unto the right hand nor to the left.

28 Thou shalt sell me meat for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only I will pass through on my feet;

29 (As the children of Esau which dwell in Seir, and the Moabites which dwell in Ar, did unto me;) until I shall pass over Jordan into the land which the Lord our God giveth us.

30 But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: **for the Lord thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day.**

31 And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land before thee: begin to possess, that thou mayest inherit his land.

JOSHUA 11:16-20

16 So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same;

17 Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them.

18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle.

20 For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses.

It is evident that when the time has come for judgment, it is sometimes God's will that those who are to receive judgment, do things that are contrary to His revealed will. In other words, He decrees that they act in a manner which contravenes His commands.

This hardening of the hearts of persons was not limited to non-Israelites. In fact, it plays a central role in the life of the nation of Israel, even at the present time. In **Romans 11:7-8**, Paul writes, *"What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day."* Even though it is the will of God that His people see, hear, understand and respond to Him, nevertheless, He has given them a spirit of slumber at the present time which prevents them from doing any of these things. In other words, He **commands** them to do what He has **decreed** they will not do.

Our Lord explained to His disciples that one of the reasons why He taught in parables was to execute on the Jews of His day the judicial blinding that Paul wrote about in **Romans 11:7-8**. In **Mark 4:10-12**, we read the following: *"And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them."*

The **New Living Translation** renders the passage as follows: *"Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant. He replied, 'You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders, so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'When they see what I do, they will learn nothing. When they hear what I say, they will not understand. Otherwise, they will turn to me and be forgiven.'"*

In this passage, we are again confronted with the seemingly contradictory scenario of God willing a certain condition to prevail that He regards as sinful. We know that in one sense it was the will of God for the Jews to repent and believe the gospel, for earlier in Mark's Gospel we read the following: *"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: **repent ye, and believe the gospel**" (Mark 1:14-15).* But in another sense, it was not God's will for them to repent and believe the gospel, for Jesus taught them in parables to the end that *"seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them."*

Astonishingly, Jesus is clearly implying that if He had taught plainly and not in parables, the Jews would in fact have been converted by His teaching and their sins would have been forgiven! Even more astounding is the fact that their failure to perceive, understand and be converted was a fulfillment of prophecy! (**Isaiah 6:9-10**) Here, we have another example of God *"watching over [His] word to perform it."*

And here also, we have another example of God **commanding** one thing (“repent and believe the gospel”), while **decreeing** another thing (“That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.”)

In John’s gospel, this particular prophecy of Isaiah and its fulfillment is even more strongly emphasized. In **John 12:37-41** we read the regrettable words,

37 *But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him:*

38 *That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

39 *Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again,*

40 *He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.*

41 *These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.*

In verse **39**, John informs us that they “*could not believe.*” He does not say they “did not,” but rather that they “**could not**”. The words “*could not*” are the translation of a Greek word which indicates that the Jews did not have the ability or power to believe. And why did they not? Because God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts!

The apostle Paul sees this divine hardening of Israel as a nation as part of God’s comprehensive salvation plan. He explains this in **Romans 11:25-32**. We will read the passage from the **New Living Translation**.

25 *I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ.*

26 *And so all Israel will be saved. As the Scriptures say, “The one who rescues will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness.*

27 *And this is my covenant with them, that I will take away their sins.”*

28 *Many of the people of Israel are now enemies of the Good News, and this benefits you Gentiles. Yet they are still the people he loves because he chose their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

29 *For God’s gifts and his call can never be withdrawn.*

30 *Once, you Gentiles were rebels against God, but when the people of Israel rebelled against him, God was merciful to you instead.*

31 *Now they are the rebels, and God’s mercy has come to you so that they, too, will share in God’s mercy.*

The last clause in verse **25**, “*but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ,*” clearly indicates that the divine hardening of Israel is not merely a chance event outside of God’s main purpose, but rather a definitive plan of God, at the very center of His purpose. Even though Paul is aware that the divine hardening of Israel is God’s perfect will, He expresses not only his heart, but God’s heart also when he says in **Romans 10:1**, “*Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*” But the apostle understands that while in one sense it is God’s will that Israel not harden their hearts (**His will of command**), He Himself has hardened their hearts for the time being in order to accomplish His purpose of bringing salvation to all nations (**His will of decree**).

In our next Lesson, we will continue our study of this interesting subject.