

# **THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE**

## **(LESSON TWENTY-SIX)**

### **DOES GOD HAVE TWO WILLS?**

#### **(PART TWO)**

In our last Lesson, we posited the view that the Scriptures indicate that there is a sense in which God does have more than one will. We argued that God may decree that a certain thing occur while also desiring that a completely different thing should come to pass. In other words, God has a will of **decree** and a will of **command**. We stated that it is important for us to distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what He has actually ordained to happen and we endeavoured to provide Scriptural evidence of God's willing something in one sense that He does not approve of in another sense. We considered, the death of Jesus Christ, the war against the Lamb and the hardening of person's hearts as examples. In this Lesson, we will continue our exploration of this subject.

Further evidence of God sometimes willing to bring about what He disapproves is His choosing either to use His power to restrain evil or not to use His power to do so. In this regard, let us consider first the case of Abimelech the king of Gerar recorded in **Genesis 20**. We will read verses **1-6** from the **New Living Translation**:

- 1 Abraham moved south to the Negev and lived for a while between Kadesh and Shur, and then he moved on to Gerar. While living there as a foreigner,*
- 2 Abraham introduced his wife, Sarah, by saying, "She is my sister." So King Abimelech of Gerar sent for Sarah and had her brought to him at his palace.*
- 3 But that night God came to Abimelech in a dream and told him, "You are a dead man, for that woman you have taken is already married!"*
- 4 But Abimelech had not slept with her yet, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation?"*
- 5 Didn't Abraham tell me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'Yes, he is my brother.' I acted in complete innocence! My hands are clean."*
- 6 In the dream God responded, "Yes, I know you are innocent. That's why **I kept you from sinning against me, and why I did not let you touch her.***
- 7 Now return the woman to her husband, and he will pray for you, for he is a prophet. Then you will live. But if you don't return her to him, you can be sure that you and all your people will die."*

It is clear from what we read in verse **6**, that God not only has the right and the power to restrain the sins of individuals but that there are instances in which He does exercise that right and power.

There are times, however, when God does not exercise His right and power to restrain the sins of individuals. We have an example of this in **1 Samuel 2:22-25**:

- 22 Now Eli was very old, but he was aware of what his sons were doing to the people of Israel. He knew, for instance, that his sons were seducing the young women who assisted at the entrance of the Tabernacle.*
- 23 Eli said to them, "I have been hearing reports from all the people about the wicked things you are doing. Why do you keep sinning?"*
- 24 You must stop, my sons! The reports I hear among the Lord's people are not good.*
- 25 If someone sins against another person, God can mediate for the guilty party. But if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede?" But Eli's sons wouldn't listen to their father, **for the Lord was already planning to put them to death.** (New Living Translation)*

Why would Eli's sons not listen to the warning of their godly father? The answer in verse **25** is very plain: *"But Eli's sons wouldn't listen to their father, for the LORD was already planning to put them to death."* The **New International Version** renders the clause as follows: *"His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the Lord's will to put them to death."*

This makes sense only if God had the right and power to restrain the disobedience of Eli's sons but chose not to exercise that right and power in this instance. God could certainly have intervened and restrained Eli's sons as He had done in the case of Abimelech, but it was obviously not His will to do so. We are forced to admit, therefore, that in one sense it was the will of God for the sons of Eli to continue to disobey their father and to persist in their immoral behaviour. When God exercises His right and power to restrain sin, it is clearly His will to do so. When He does not, it is also clearly His will not to do so.

Let us explore an aspect of verse **25** which is very interesting. The **King James Version** translates the final clause in the following way: *"Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them."* The word "would" is the translation of the Hebrew word **chaphets (khaw-fates')**, which means "to take pleasure in, to take care of, to desire, to delight in." It is the same Hebrew word that is translated as "pleasure" in the following verses:

### **EZEKIEL 18:23**

*"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?"*

### **EZEKIEL 18:32**

*"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."*

### **EZEKIEL 33:11**

*"Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"<sup>4</sup>*

In these 3 verses, God declares that He has **no pleasure, no delight** in the death of the wicked. He does **not desire** it.

But in the case of Eli's sons, we are told that the Lord had pleasure, He delighted in their deaths. He desired their deaths! It is apparent that in one sense God does not desire, delight in or take pleasure in the death of the wicked and there is a sense in which He does!

This is a strong caution for us not to take a declaration of God, such as the ones found in **Ezekiel 18:23, 32** and **33:11**, and assume that we know exactly what it means, without examining other verses such as **1 Samuel 2:25**.

**Proverbs 1:24-27** indicates that there is a sense in which God does, in fact, have pleasure in the calamity of the wicked: *"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you."*

Another example of God choosing not to restrain wayward tendencies is found in **Judges 14:1-4**:

*1 One day when Samson was in Timnah, one of the Philistine women caught his eye.*

**2** When he returned home, he told his father and mother, “A young Philistine woman in Timnah caught my eye. I want to marry her. Get her for me.”

**3** His father and mother objected. “Isn’t there even one woman in our tribe or among all the Israelites you could marry?” they asked. “Why must you go to the pagan Philistines to find a wife?” But Samson told his father, “Get her for me! She looks good to me.”

**4** His father and mother didn’t realize **the Lord was at work in this**, creating an opportunity to work against the Philistines, who ruled over Israel at that time. (**New Living Translation**).

Undoubtedly, Manoah and his wife acted correctly in trying to dissuade Samson from marrying a pagan woman, but it was the will of God for him to pursue the relationship because God desired to create “an opportunity to work against the philistines.”

**Romans 1:21-32**, provides us with a New Testament example of God deciding **not** to use His right and power to intervene in the lives of persons in order to restrain sin:

**21** Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused.

**22** Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools.

**23** And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

**24** **So God abandoned them** to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies.

**25** They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.

**26** That is why **God abandoned them** to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other.

**27** And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

**28** Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, **he abandoned them** to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done.

**29** Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip.

**30** They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents.

**31** They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy.

**32** They know God’s justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too. (**New Living Translation**).

Three times in this passage (verses **24**, **26**, and **28**), Paul says that God “abandoned” or gave persons over to their sinful propensities. We know that if He had willed to, He could have restrained them, but in light of the fact that He did not do so, it is apparent that, for His own purposes, He did not will to do so.

At this point, we desire to say something that we believe is very important. The Bible is not **our** revelation of God. It is **God’s** revelation of Himself and of us. When we study the Bible, therefore, our thinking must always start with God. Unfortunately, due to the fact that we are so self-centred, so subjective, so egocentric, so human, we make the mistake very often of starting with ourselves. We have a tendency to impose upon God’s revelation our feelings, our emotions, our likes and dislikes, our sense of what is fair and unfair, just and unjust. And so we wrest the revelation of God to suit our unbalanced moral measurement.

“God could never have meant that,” “That doesn’t seem fair,” “That’s not logical,” we argue in our pride and arrogance. The Word of God suffers violence at our hands and the violent take it by force. In our misguided religious zeal, we sweat and strain and twist and maim God’s revelation of Himself until we succeed in re-creating God in our own image. We worship a God of our own making, all the while deluding ourselves that we are worshipping the God revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The sovereignty of God is swallowed up in the sovereignty of man’s logic. This is why so many professing Christians have ended up becoming the gods of their own idolatry without even realizing that it is so!

Brothers and sisters, the message of the Bible from **Genesis** to **Revelation** is designed to bring us back to God, to rid us of our self-importance, to humble us before God and to enable us to see who He really is and who we really are. It is designed to allow us to understand our true relationship to God. The Bible is a mirror where we look into the face of God and know that *“the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.”* The Bible is the revelation of who God is and what He has done and is doing. God, the eternal, self-sufficient, omnipotent, sovereign, Almighty God who needs no one, who lives and reigns in His own absolute and eternal glory. When we open up the pages of our Bibles, let us not start with ourselves and our needs and thoughts and feelings and suppositions. Let us start with God and forget ourselves.

Behind the complex relationship of the two wills of God, His will of **decree** and His will of **command**, is the foundational Biblical doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God. God is in control of all the calamities and disasters wrought by human beings or the forces of nature. The passages set out below support this truth. We have utilized both the **King James Version** and the **New Living Translation** in each instance.

### **ISAIAH 45:5-7 (KJV)**

*“I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.”*

### **NEW LIVING TRANSLATION**

*“I am the Lord; there is no other God. I have equipped you for battle, though you don’t even know me, so all the world from east to west will know there is no other God. I am the Lord, and there is no other. I create the light and make the darkness. I send good times and bad times. I, the Lord, am the one who does these things.”*

### **LAMENTATIONS 3:37-38 (KJV)**

*“Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?”*

### **NEW LIVING TRANSLATION**

*“Who can command things to happen without the Lord’s permission? Does not the Most High send both calamity and good?”*

### **AMOS 3:6 (KJV)**

*“Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?”*

### **NEW LIVING TRANSLATION**

*“When the ram’s horn blows a warning, Shouldn’t the people be alarmed? Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has planned it?”*

In his first epistle, the apostle Peter mentions the “will of God” in two senses. In one sense, the will of God was something to be pursued and lived up to. We get this sense from **1 Peter 2:13-15**: *“For the Lord’s sake, respect all human authority — whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. **It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you**”* (New Living Translation).

We also get this sense from **1 Peter 4:1-2**: *“So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin. You won’t spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but **you will be anxious to do the will of God**”* (New Living Translation).

These two passages can be said to reflect God’s will of **command**. In other passages, however, there is a sense in which the will of God is not what He commands but the state of affairs that He sovereignly brings about by His will of **decree**. In **1 Peter 3:17** we read, *“For it is better, **if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.**”*

In **1 Peter 4:19**, the apostle says, *“Wherefore let them that suffer **according to the will of God** commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”*

In the context of these two verses, the suffering that Peter is referring to is the suffering that comes from persons who are hostile to Christianity. These persons would have had to commit sin in order to cause the people of God to suffer. God would have **allowed** them to sin against His people but He certainly would not have **approved** of their sin.

The New Testament accounts indicate that the members of the first century church were acutely aware that every detail of their lives was overseen by the sovereignty of God. The following passages indicate that the apostle Paul understood clearly that the sovereignty of God superintended his travel plans:

### **ACTS 18:18-21**

*“And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, **if God will**. And he sailed from Ephesus.”*

### **1 CORINTHIANS 4:19**

*“But I will come to you shortly, **if the Lord will**, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.”*

### **1 CORINTHIANS 16:7**

*“For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, **if the Lord permit.**”*

**James** in chapter **4:13-16** of his epistle warns us that even the most common-place plans of our lives must not be spoken of in a presumptuous manner. Instead we must leave everything in the hands of God who sovereignly controls every area of our lives. He says, *“Look here, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.’ How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog — it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. What you ought to say is, **‘If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.’** Otherwise you are boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil”* (New Living Translation).

In **Hebrews 6:1-3**, we see a remarkable instance of an individual's consciousness of how all-inclusive the sovereignty of God is: *"So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. You don't need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And so, **God willing**, we will move forward to further understanding"* (**New Living Translation**).

This is striking because the writer is speaking here of his desire for his readers to leave basic, elementary things behind and press on to Christian maturity. Surely such a thing would be the will of God! But the writer has such an exalted view of the sovereignty of God that he is aware that even such a desirable thing as the saints attaining to the level of Christian maturity, is subject to the will of God. He recognizes that it is only if God wills it that Christian maturity will be realized!

Perhaps the most wonderful implication of this awareness of the absoluteness of God's sovereign will is that it provides the foundation of the hope of the saints to achieve the holiness *"without which no man shall see the Lord"* (**Hebrews 12:14**). Under the Old Covenant the Law was written on tablets of stone and brought death because it was met with resistance by those whose hearts had not been renewed. In **Deuteronomy 5:23-29**, Moses speaks to the children of Israel:

**23** *And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders;*

**24** *And ye said, Behold, the Lord our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth.*

**25** *Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die.*

**26** *For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?*

**27** *Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.*

**28** *And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.*

**29** ***O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!***

The Children of Israel said that they would obey all that God instructed them to do. But they did not have a heart that would allow them to make good on their word. In **Deuteronomy 29:2-4**, Moses explains to them why they did not have a heart to fear God and keep His commandments: *"And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles: **Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.**"*

But the promise of the New Covenant is that God will not let His plan and purpose for a holy people be defeated by our human weaknesses. Instead, He guarantees to do what needs to be done to ensure that we become what we ought to become. In **Jeremiah 31:31-34**, we read,

**31** Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

**32** Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord:

**33** But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, **I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;** and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

**34** And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

In **Jeremiah 32:39-40**, we read, **“And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.”**

In **Ezekiel 36:26-27**, God says, **“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”**

These are some of the “*exceeding great and precious promises*” that Peter says have been given to us (**2 Peter 1:4**), and it is in the light of these promises that we are to understand **Philippians 2:12-13**: *“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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 which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”*

Brothers and sisters, the Scriptures clearly indicate that the will of God is spoken of sometimes as an expression of His moral standards for human behavior. This is an expression of His will of **command**. But the Scriptures also indicate that the will of God is spoken of sometimes as an expression of His sovereign control even over acts that are contrary to that very standard. This is an expression of His will of **decree**.

In our next Lesson, we will consider how these two wills of God harmonize and make sense.