

The Two Wills of God

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Turn in your Bibles to the 9th chapter of Romans, we want to begin reading at verse 14. I started a message several weeks ago on Wednesday night and every time I try to finish it, something happens so I'm going to sneak up on the devil tonight and preach on it in place of Proverbs. Romans 9, reading in verse 14,

“4 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. 17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. 18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. 19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? 20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? 21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? 22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: 23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, 24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? 25 As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. 26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.”

Let's ask the Lord's blessing on his word.

Father, we are praying now that you'll help us as we come seeking to understand something of the deeper truth of thy word. We know, Lord, that we come tonight to speak of things that in many ways are judgments unsearchable and ways past finding out but we do pray for the wisdom and grace to understand that which you would have us to

know, to see something of thy great working, thy mighty power in the affairs of men who might understand thy sovereignty and yet at the same time that we might understand our responsibility. We do pray that the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart might be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. We pray it all in our Savior's precious name. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago on Wednesday night, we were looking at some of the background of this 9th chapter of the book of Romans and we saw from the first 13 verses here that we have an explanation of the will of God as it's manifested in salvation. He wills the salvation of those who he knows by his foreknowledge to be the ones who will trust the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. He does this not in the sense of forcing people to be saved, singling out some people to go to heaven, some to go to hell, but he does it in the sense of working all things after the counsel of his own will because he knows about individuals. He knew them, the Bible says, before they were formed in their mother's womb. He knew what our thoughts would be and our actions, the decisions that we'd make in the course of this life and I think in looking at those things, we are seeing a type of background that's very critical to an understanding of what we're going to be talking about this evening.

I'm calling this message "The Two Wills of God." It's been requested that I speak to the subjects of the permissive will and the perfect will of God and that's what we're going to be talking about and we're talking about it in view, for example, of the life of Pharaoh as we find it mentioned in this chapter. Is there such a thing as the permissive will of God? That which permits the actions of say, somebody like Pharaoh? Or is it true that ultimately everything turns out to be the perfect will of God? Is it like that because God is sovereign and he already knows the end from the beginning, he's already determined how things are going to turn out and they must turn out that way?

I believe that we can best define our terms here by looking for a moment at the 12th chapter of Romans, verse 1. The 12th chapter of Romans, reading at the first verse,

"1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

There you have the terminology "the perfect will of God." It's making it very clear to us the fact that we can indeed prove or discover what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. We don't have to go around looking for the words "permissive will of God" because they're not in the Bible, it would be a waste of time to look for them, but I don't believe that's a problem because we use a great many terms that are not found in the Bible to communicate an idea. For example, we talk about the word "Trinity," a word that's not in the Bible; we talk about verbal inspiration, you won't find that phraseology in the Bible; we talk about the rapture, there is no such word in the Bible. What those are, are simply shortened forms of doctrines, words identifying doctrines that require a great

deal of explanation. We use those terms for the sake of convenience even though they're not in the Bible. To give you an example: suppose we're talking about the word "Trinity." It takes a great multitude of verses to establish the nature of God. We can look at one verse to see that the Father is called God, we can look at another to see that the Son is called God, we can look at another to see that the Holy Spirit is called God but then we'd need a verse to establish the fact that each one of the three is eternal, each one is omnipotent, each one is omniscient, each one is omnipresent. That's a total of at least 15 verses to show what you can sum up very quickly and simply by talking about Trinity. That identifies the fact that God, even though he's one true and living God, is a triunity of deity. There is a coequality in his nature that can only be explained by a great deal of turning from verse to verse. To avoid the turning from verse to verse, we use that one word, hopefully in the company of those who understand it, to communicate that idea. So once we have a principle established, once we know that something is in the Bible, then we can save a great deal of time by the use of a word to communicate what we mean. I think that's true when it comes to the term "the permissive will of God." Even though it's not in the Bible, it comes in handy to communicate a far-reaching principle, one that is very important for us to understand and it's a principle that we want to examine tonight for a few moments, think about the implications of it.

Now, if you want Bible proof that everything that happens does not turn out to be the perfect will of God, we have that proof right here in Romans 12:2. Here we read, "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." I'll give you an illustration: suppose I say to you, "I want you to find me the perfect Bible story to teach children that they can be important in the work of God." If I ask you to find me that story, I've just said two things to you by the very fact of asking: I've said 1. there is a perfect story to serve that purpose and you can find it if you'll look for it; but in the second place, I have implied very implicitly that there are other Bible stories which are not perfectly suited to prove that point. There are a great many other Bible stories that wouldn't do if you were to look for the perfect one to prove that children can be used in the work of God so by implication I've set forth both of those propositions. The point of that illustration is this: here in Romans 12, God says that we can prove, we can discover what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. He tells us that the perfect will of God does exist. Okay, but if it does exist and we need to discover it, then we know immediately by implication that there is something other than the perfect will of God and that's where the term "permissive will" comes in. In other words, if it's possible to be in the perfect will of God, it's also possible to be out of the perfect will of God so any time we're not in God's perfect will, we're obviously some place else and the term that we use to describe that is "permissive will."

That's true for a couple of reasons: first of all, God is sovereign; secondly, God is all-powerful. What that means is that someone who is all-powerful can stop anything from happening. That being true, everything that goes on in the world is permitted by God. If he has the power to stop something and he chooses not to stop it, then he's permitting it, it is his permissive will for it to happen. That's where the term "permissive will" comes from. It's a term that encompasses everything that goes on in God's world other than his

perfect will. Let's take an example: we know that it's the perfect will of God for men not to steal, the Bible says "thou shalt not steal," it couldn't be much clearer. At the same time, we know that stealing does take place in the world, a great deal of it. God could stop the stealing, he has the power, he knows perfectly the heart of every man, he has the power that he could immediately strike dead every individual who was about to steal and all stealing would cease in the world immediately but instead, God wills for the present at least, that men are permitted to steal if they want to. That's his permissive will. It certainly doesn't sanction stealing but within the scope of the overall will of God, he does permit people to steal. Again I say, his perfect will is that nobody ever steal again but he does permit it and that's permissive will.

Perhaps we can get that in a little bit better perspective by realizing that God actually only has two choices. 1. He can stop all sin today but he'd have to kill everybody to do that. He could stop all sin today by killing everybody. 2. He can permit people to go on sinning to the end that some might see their need and be saved. With the human race being what it is, those are actually the only two options that God has. With that in mind, let's go back for a moment to Romans 9 and notice what we read in verse 14, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." It says there that we can be sure of a couple of things: 1. no matter how things appear, there is no unrighteousness with God. The second thing we can be sure of is that God is going to do what he pleases whether we like it or not. If there's been any mistake, we've made it, it's not the Lord. And he says "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I'll have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Mercy is always a gift and the only hope of any sinner is the undeserved mercy of God. It's the only hope that any of us have. That's why it says in verse 16, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Here we have a verse that has to be rightly understood or we become hyper-Calvinists in our view of God's sovereignty. Is that verse saying that man's will has absolutely nothing to do with it? "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." That's what it appears to be saying at first glance, that we have no will, at least none that matters but let's get the context of it. Notice verse 17, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

We want to think of this very carefully tonight because it will shape your whole theology; it will color your view of the Bible; it will determine what you think about evangelism, about the local church, about Christianity in general. Here is the question that any thinking Christian must resolve: how do the will of God and the will of man fit together in Bible doctrine? There has to be some way for those things to be compatible in our understanding of the truth. Now, to answer that in a way that you will remember, I believe, I want you to notice verse 17, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." I was thinking about those three words "raise thee up, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up," that's what God did to

Pharaoh and in a sense, that's what he does to every human being. He raises us up out of a condition of nonexistence into existence. He raises us from existence into a condition of understanding and stability and he raises us out of that condition into a condition of salvation or condemnation.

I want to give you something to look at that I think will help you. That's a rather crude drawing but I believe you can make it out. As I say, what we're talking about here is the whole basis of a person's thinking about the sovereignty of God and his relationship to man and any place you go, any preacher you hear, any church you attend, is going to be somewhere in between hyper-Calvinism and hyper-Arminianism or maybe even at one of those two points so the kinds of things that we're talking about in this chapter and in this illustration give you what my understanding is of this particular point of theology as it relates to the will of God and the situation overall. What you see set forth in this little drawing is supposedly the appearance of a building, you might call it the building of life. This is a building that has a basement and it has a ground floor and it has two upper floors, the first story and the second story. It also has an elevator over there on the left hand side. In fact, it doesn't have any stairs; the only way to get up or down, travel from one floor to another is on the elevator. I call that elevator "the sovereignty of God" because that is the thing, I believe, that moves people from one place to another. Life is like this building: every person born is born on the elevator of God's sovereignty. For the sake of illustration you'll notice that each one of these floors has a name: the basement is called "total depravity"; the ground floor is called "helplessness"; the first floor is "permissive will"; and the second story is called "perfect will." Actually, to be exactly correct, the basement and the ground floor are part of God's permissive will and anything that happens outside his perfect is that but I think this will help you understand it a little better.

Every person that is born comes into the world on the ground floor of helplessness. All little babies are in that condition, they are spiritually helpless. You can preach the gospel to them all day long and they wouldn't understand the words you were saying. There are some people who end up living on the ground floor of helplessness, we call them severe mental retardates, people in insane asylums who have no comprehension of reality. Some people end up living there on the ground floor of helplessness all their life but we know that is not the common occurrence. We know that most people grow up normally, not really for any explainable reason from the standpoint of human observation, we can't explain why people grow from babies into adults but people do grow normally.

On the elevator of God's sovereignty, he raises them up from a condition of helplessness to a condition of responsibility. He raises them up from the ground floor, so to speak, to the first floor to the permissive will of God. Now, the first story is where most people live; they live in the permissive will of God. They live there every day with God allowing them to exist even though they're not doing what he wants them to do. Most people are not saved nor wants people to be saved but there again, he has only two alternatives: either let them go on living or take them out of the world and so he lets them go on living there on the first story of his permissive will. I believe this: I believe that at some point in the life of every person, the elevator of God's sovereignty takes them up to the top floor. I

don't care who they are or where they come from, I don't care if they live in the jungles of South America or the jungles of the ghettos of New York City, at some point in life the elevator of God's sovereignty takes everybody up to the top floor and they have an opportunity to get off. Usually that happens a great many times. Most people get many chances to be saved. The sovereignty of God, the drawing power of God's Holy Spirit brings men to a point of time in their life when they can trust the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. He raises them up to a point where if they're willing, they can get saved. But by the same token, by an act of their own will they can refuse to be saved, they can refuse to trust the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Now, if they do that, just because God has raised them up to the place of potential salvation, that doesn't mean anything, it just means they've come under conviction, they've had an opportunity, they've been standing on the threshold of eternal life and turned their back on it. The same elevator of the sovereignty of God brings them right back down to the permissive will of God. I think an interesting Bible example of this elevator ride is Nebuchadnezzar there in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar was like everybody else: he was born on the elevator of God's sovereignty on the ground floor of helplessness; he was a baby just like everybody else. God raised him up to the first story in his permissive will and he became the King of Babylon, a big-time operator in this world. I mean, you couldn't get any more important as far as this world was concerned and God allowed that to happen but I'm sure if you know the story, you realize that one day the elevator of God's sovereignty took him back down again. He went insane and for seven years Nebuchadnezzar lived down there on the ground floor of helplessness just like a wild animal and yet at the end of those seven years, the elevator of God's sovereignty raised him up. In fact, it took him all the way to the top floor and he got off into the perfect will of God, he trusted the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ and got saved.

Look here at verse 16 of Romans 9, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." The point of this elevator illustration is this: God's sovereignty must bring us into the world; you can't will to come into the world. God's sovereignty must raise us above the level of helplessness; you can't will to be something other than a little baby, God's sovereignty has to do that for you. But by the same token, God's sovereignty must raise us up to the point that we can trust the Lord or reject him. There are no stairs in the building. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." We could never get off the ground floor of helplessness without the sovereignty of God, in fact, we sink down into the basement of total depravity if the Lord didn't choose to raise us up by the power of his Spirit. So you see, what I preach is not an Arminian view of God that makes man the author of salvation, I say that the sovereignty of God gives the gift of life, the sovereignty of God raises man to a level of responsibility, the sovereignty of God raises man to an even higher level of opportunity. It's only at that point in time that the will of man becomes an issue; it's only then that man can will to be saved, after the sovereignty of God has raised him up to that point of understanding. Life is a gift. Sanity is a gift. Responsibility is a gift. Opportunity is a gift. The free will to choose is a gift. Faith is a gift. Salvation is a gift. All those things are of grace, not of works lest any man should boast. It's a long way

from the basement to the top floor of a second story building. It's especially far when the only way to get to the top is the sovereignty of God but my contention is that the Bible teaches unmistakably that every man is taken to the top in the course of life. When a sovereign God has taken him there, it then becomes the responsibility of man, man's responsibility with God alone providing the ability, to either trust the Lord Jesus Christ or reject him.

Back to this illustration: human existence has these four levels. We enter the world on the ground floor of helplessness and you'll notice that that is above the basement of total depravity. I put it like that because by nature we're totally depraved but here's an important point: we don't experience total depravity. Total depravity is just what we are potentially. The only way we know it is because God says it, we've never seen a totally depraved individual in action. God holds us up. God by his sovereign mercy keeps us above this condition of total depravity. He doesn't allow us to be in practice what we are by nature. The story of the rich man and Lazarus proves that. In hell today, there are people asking for mercy. That's what the rich man was doing. In hell today, there are people desiring the salvation of their living relatives. That's not total depravity. It's only after the final judgment that all the restraints are going to be removed and the elevator of God's sovereignty is going to lower people into the lake of fire forever. Now in the lake of fire, that's where you'll find total depravity. You'll find man being true to his nature. You'll find the ultimate expression of what you read about in the third chapter of Romans, people being what they are in the lake of fire. That's going to be one of the worst parts of being there. If man today in the world, if every human being was not being held up by the elevator of the sovereignty of God, he'd be down in this condition of total depravity and left to himself, every lost man at this moment would be a raving maniac. He'd be cursing and blaspheming God; he'd be torturing himself; he'd be weeping and wailing and gnashing his teeth. We don't see anybody living out their total depravity. That's something that's only going to happen after the final judgment in the lake of fire.

But it's the mercy of God, it's the sovereignty of God that has raised human beings up to some level of sanity, some level of morality. You know, what's so ironic is this: the Lord takes a lost man, he holds him in this condition above total depravity, he blesses him with all kinds of understanding, he raises him up above this level of helplessness in which he's born, he takes man and he puts him all the way up to this place where he can function and he can enjoy life in the permissive will of God. But instead of man being thankful for that, instead of man looking to his Creator because he's done that for him, man takes credit for it. Being the fool that he is, man assumes that he's raised himself up by his own goodness, by his own intelligence, by his own ability. That's known as pride and that's what happened to Pharaoh.

Notice what we read in Romans 9:17, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Keep in mind that God is no respecter of persons. What was true of Pharaoh is true of every man. The same God who promised to draw humble sinners to himself has also promised to harden the proud and the

rebellious. That's what he did to Pharaoh, "whom he will he hardeneth." He hardened the heart of Pharaoh, therefore, God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble. Verse 19, "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault?" Why does God find fault with people if that be the case? "For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" In other words, we're not to sit in judgment on God's dealings with men. If he wants to harden the hard-hearted, that's his business and not ours. Our only part in the matter is to be sure that we're not one of the hard-hearted so he'll have no cause to do it to us because even though God is obligated by his word to raise men up to this level of responsibility, to raise them up to this position of opportunity to give them a chance to be saved, he has no obligation to continue doing it, to keep on and on offering these opportunities to men. And what he's chosen to do is very simple: God has chosen to help the humble, to harden the hard-hearted. You might not agree with that, we might not like it but we just don't happen to have much to say about it and we can't say that it's unjust because God as the Creator is not obligated to do anything.

Let's go on with the question of permissive will and perfect will. The Lord raises up men and women from helplessness, the ground floor, to permissive will. That's the first big step toward salvation. Little babies can't get saved, incompetents can't get saved. They have to be raised up above that level of helplessness. Then at a certain time in life, for most people many times in life, he raises them up to that point where the perfect will of God is right in front of them. We see our sin and need. We see the Savior and all that is left is to step into the perfect will of God by faith to receive the gift of eternal life. Every person here tonight who knows the Lord has been in the perfect will of God at least once in your life, that's when we got saved. Salvation was the perfect will of God for your life and when he raised you up in the elevator of his sovereignty, you stepped off by faith into his perfect will.

The next question: how do we stay in the Lord's perfect will? We saw it there in the 12th chapter of Romans, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." A continual burnt-offering the Old Testament called it. This is the counterpart in the New Testament, the living sacrifice. To present ourselves daily as a living sacrifice to the Lord Jesus, we stay in his perfect will but there is something worthy of note here: the perfect will of God is not automatic. This tells us here in Romans 12 that we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds in order to discover or prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Turn for just a moment to Psalm 143. This is an important point about the will of God. A good many people take a very fatalistic view and they call it predestination. That's not a correct Bible term but it's the idea that whatever's going to happen is going to happen. That's not what the Bible says. Here's a very interesting statement on the will of God in Psalm 143:10, "Teach me to do thy will." That's what the Psalmist said about the will of God. "Teach me to do thy will." He said the will of God is something you can be taught. Paul said there in Romans 12 we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds and caused to discover the will of God. We must be taught to do the Lord's will and that's a critical point of understanding. The perfect will of God is something we learn. Early in the Christian life I'm sure you've noticed that the elevator of God's sovereignty goes up and down, up and down many times a day. We're in the Lord's permissive will and then we're in his perfect will and then we're back down in his permissive will. It's because we don't understand, we haven't been taught what the Lord's will is in many areas but from that experience he teaches us and we confess our sin and we're back in his perfect will again. "Teach me to do thy will." So you see, Christian growth is a matter of learning to spend more and more time in the perfect will of God, learning the Lord's will on various subjects so that we just move from one point to another, staying in the Lord's perfect will without coming out of it into his permissive will.

Here's another important question: is it possible to miss the Lord's perfect will and spend your life living on second best? Now that's something that I thought about for several weeks because it's a very complicated question. Is it possible to be up there in the second story, up there in the perfect will of God and do something that brings you back down into the permissive will of God and because you've done it you stay there, you can't get back in the Lord's perfect will ever again. Suppose, for example, somebody marries in a lost condition, a man and woman are lost when they get married. They couldn't have had the wife or husband of God's choosing except in a negative sense; they didn't consult God about it. What about the person who says they were called to the mission field or called to preach and didn't go? Are they spending the rest of their life living in God's second best? Living in his permissive will? Or let me put it in a little bit more complicated form: suppose somebody gets saved and they're living for the Lord, they sing in the choir, they teach Sunday School, they have this work that they like to do packaging up Bibles and sending them to countries overseas and for some reason that person begins to get out of fellowship with the Lord and the next thing you know they've gotten drunk, kind of like Noah did, except this time, unlike Noah, they're riding down the highway at 75 mph and they have a wreck and they go through the windshield and they're blind for life and in the hospital they wake up, find out they're blind, they're very sorry and repentant, does God give them their eyes back? No he doesn't. They don't get their eyes back and that means that they can't package up anymore Bibles to go overseas, they can't sing in the choir because they can't read the words and the music, they can't teach Sunday School because they can't see the lesson. The question is this: must that person live the rest of life knowing that they can never be in the perfect will of God again because of their sin? It's a very important question.

To answer it, let me explain something to you: when you read books, if you read a lot of Christian books, you'll find that there's a good bit of confusion around this subject.

Disraeli said if you would converse with me to find your terms, we have to be very clear on what we mean when we talk about perfect will and permissive will. My definition of permissive will and perfect will is based on God's sovereignty. I say that you only get into the perfect will of God or into the permissive will of God by the elevator, the elevator of God's sovereignty. God doesn't wake up one morning to find out that during the night you've slipped out and gotten drunk and had a car wreck and now he's got to adjust his plans to what you did. He is never taken by surprise by anything that we do so to speculate about what might have been is very foolish. When we talk about permissive will and perfect will, we're speaking only to what does happen and what potentially may happen in the future.

Now there's one verse primarily that directs my view on that. Look at Ephesians 2, a very familiar verse, verse 8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." But notice that 10th verse, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works," and these words in particular, "which God hath before ordained," or prepared the margin says, "that we should walk in them." That passage says that there is a pattern of good works in the life of every believer that God has before ordained that we should walk in it. In other words, God has a perfect will for the life of every Christian before they're ever born. Not before they are ever saved but before they are ever born. He's always had it if you can understand that. The point is this: even though this is true, it must be equally true that God has this pattern of good works, this perfect will, planned in the life of every believer that's adjusted to what he knows we're going to do. Take the man who is blinded in the wreck for example, he left the perfect will of God by an attitude. The elevator of God's sovereignty brought him down when he planned to do wrong. That's when he got out of the perfect will of God into the permissive will of God. Humanely speaking, he could have gotten back into the perfect will of God while he was thinking about getting into trouble if he just repented of his thoughts, confessed them to the Lord and gotten straightened out. He could've gotten out of the permissive will of God when he was standing at the door of the liquor store or wherever he went to get whatever it was he drank. He could have turned around and gone back and said, "No, I'm not going to do that. I've changed my mind." He could've gotten out of the permissive will of God and back into his perfect will at the driving stage. He could've said, "Now here I've done a terrible thing. I've gotten drunk. I know this is not the Lord's will. I'm going to drive very slowly and carefully back home and go to bed."

But somewhere along there, somewhere along the line in those events that were taking place in that man's life, it became the perfect will of God for him to have a wreck. That's true because "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receives." We're talking about a principle here. We create the need for chastisement by getting out of the perfect will of God. Chastisement itself then has to become the perfect will of God. Now as soon as that man was in the hospital, he woke up and he saw what he'd done, he repented and he stayed in the perfect will of God. It was the perfect will of God to stop him with that wreck from doing what he was doing, from taking the path that he'd planned in his life and it was the perfect will of God for him to stay straight from

that point forward to be walking with the Lord and that's what the Lord gave him: a new kind of life formed around what God knew would happen.

You notice the kind of message as you get up and you're going to say in five minutes what you've been thinking about for five weeks and it's hard to know what's going on in somebody else's mind whether they're understanding what you're saying or not just having heard it in the course of a few minutes. But in an attempt to simplify it let me say this: at any point in the permissive will of God, it has to be true that we can get back in the perfect will of God by repenting, by confessing our sin. If our sin has changed our circumstances, that doesn't matter. It can't matter. The will of God can't depend on circumstances because he knew all the circumstances from the beginning. Let's David and Bathsheba for example. David left the perfect will of God when he stayed home from the battle. It wasn't when he looked at Bathsheba; it wasn't when he committed adultery; it wasn't when he had Uriah murdered. He left the perfect will of God when he stayed home from the battle when he should have been out there. A long time before there was any evident sin in his life because he was the King and he could do what he wanted to. No doubt there were a period of days when he could have repented, when he could've gotten back into the perfect will of God and said, "I'm going out there to battle where I'm supposed to be." But he didn't do it. He could've repented after he looked at Bathsheba and nothing would have ever happened. He could've repented after he called her to come to him before she ever got there. He could've repented after he committed adultery and there never would have been a murder. He could've repented after the murder which he did and a very interesting thing happened. The baby died because that's what the Lord had told him was going to happen but the next child born turned out to be Solomon. Now, was that the perfect will of God for Solomon to be born of David and Bathsheba? I imagine it was. I don't think that was some kind of accident produced by a change in the circumstances of which God was not aware. The Lord reclaimed his life. He brought him back to the point of repentance, the point of obedience, back to the place of the perfect will of God in spite of what had happened in the past, the place that God had foreordained that he should be walking in view of what he knew David would do.

You know, it's a wonderful thing that the Lord knows the end from the beginning and yet it's a wonderful thing that in the midst of his sovereignty he's preserved our opportunity to choose to believe or disbelieve his word. Not only with regard to salvation but with regard to the value of obedience in the Christian life. And it's only as we look to him with that kind of understanding, knowing that we're not the great I Am, he is. We're not the ones who ultimately decide anything that makes any sense or any difference. We place the decision making process in our life in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ where it is indeed possible to disobey the word of God, to turn our back on what we know to be true, to get out of that pattern of good works that God foreordained that we should walk in them and it's only when we confess our sin that he's faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, to get us back into that place of obedience, the place of the perfect will of God.

Let's bow together as we close in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you've given us opportunity again to come together. We pray that you'll give us understanding of the things that we've heard, that this word might help us to know something of thy matchless grace. We know, Lord, that so many times we walk through this world insensitive to the tremendous understanding that you must have of every thought and every circumstance and every idea. We forget the greatness of thy wisdom, the ultimacy of thy power to work all things after the counsel of your own will. How we thank you that even this night you knew the people here by name, you called us by our names. We thank you that you provided for us individually the glorious opportunity of personal salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, the blood that he shed. How we do pray that you won't let the men and women in this place this evening turn their back upon such goodness and such mercy but I'm seeing very clearly the opportunity that's set before them to be saved. We pray that as thy people you'll give us a clear understanding of the need to walk in the light as thou art in the light that we might have fellowship one with another. We pray these things in our Savior's precious name. Amen.