

## THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 7, 2010 May God's Will Be Done

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Dear Radio Friends,

As we begin today, I want you to imagine that you are an employer and that you have a work force of angels—not Satan's angels who are rebels, but the sinlessly perfect angels of God. They never complain. They are always at work on time. They never call in sick or go on strike. They don't fudge their hours to take extended lunch breaks. They are always ready to work, night and day. They are completely dedicated to you and to your cause.

That would be the employer's dream, would it not?

Well, God has such a work force of angels. We read about them in Psalm 103:19-21. Please read these verses. These angels never question the will of God, but always do what He commands.

In the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, which is: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Jesus teaches us to ask God to help us to be more like the angels, to obey God's will as the angels do in heaven.

This petition is the third at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, in which we are taught by Jesus to begin our prayers with requests that have to do with God. We have already learned in the first two petitions to pray for the holiness of God's name and for the coming of God's kingdom. Now we pray for the doing of God's will.

In this petition, we do ask something of God. It is a petition. But in these words, "Thy will be done," we also learn something about the character of prayer. And it is such a needed lesson. We need this petition to show us how wrong it is to think of prayer as a way of getting what we ourselves want from God or to think of prayer as a way of changing God.

People often think of prayer as a way of talking God into doing something that they want. They believe that if they just pray the right kind of prayer, and just have enough faith, God will give them whatever they desire. But that is not the way that the Bible presents prayer. True prayer is not about getting what we want, but about learning what God wants, and bringing our will and desire into line with His divine will. In this petition, we make a prayer of surrender, a prayer of self-denial, a prayer of submission, in which we embrace God's desires and not our own.

To know what Jesus means here, we have to begin by answering this question: What is the will of God? The word "will" refers to what a person desires or wants. And so the question to be answered is this: What does God want? What are God's desires? When we turn to the Bible, we find that there are two ways to answer the question, "What is the will of God?"

First, we could say that the will of God is His eternal plan for all things—what is also called in the Bible, God's *decree* or *counsel*. This will of God includes and determines everything that happens in the history of this world. When God made the heavens and the earth in the beginning, He planned out and knew every detail of what was going to happen in history. And He had a purpose or a goal in it

all—to save His elect people in Jesus Christ and bring them to glory with Himself.

This is explained to us in Ephesians 1:9-11. And notice that the word "will" is used. "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." God, in His will, predestined to bring to glory, by Jesus Christ, a people. And God's people, those who believe, can say that they are part of that will of God.

God's will or decree for all things is comprehensive. It includes all the things that happen to every person in his life here on the earth. God has planned it all. No one can stand in the way of the will of God. God is not constrained or forced to do anything against His will. In Psalm 115:3 the psalmist says, "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." And then you read in the book of Daniel, chapter 4, verse 35: "he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

And so, this is one way to answer the question, What is the will of God? It is His eternal plan or decree for all things, mentioned again in Isaiah 46:9, 10: "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

But there is another way to answer the question, What does God want or desire? And that is to see that the Bible also teaches that God has a will for our lives, for how we should live in this world. In Matthew 7:21 Jesus says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Jesus means, "he that is obedient to the will of God." Again, in I Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." God's will is that we should live holy lives in this world. At the center of this will of God is the commandment to love God and to love one another.

So, there is a second way to answer this question, What is the will of God?

Which part of God's will are we praying for in this petition? That is not an easy question to answer. Theologians and those who have written Bible commentaries have differed on this. Perhaps the best way to answer this is to ask another question: Why do we have to pray for God's will to be done? This question is much easier to answer. It is really quite simple. We do not *like* the will of God, and we do not *do* the will of God as we should. We are not submissive to God's plans for our lives, and we do not obey as we should God's commandments. That is why we must pray this petition.

When we make this petition, we acknowledge that we also have a will—that God created man with a will. God Himself has a will. He is not a cold and impersonal being. He is not the God of fate or evolution. His will is not a piece of cold legislation. But God Himself has desires. God Himself makes choices. God resolves to do things. This arises out of who God is. He is a God with a will. And He created man in the beginning because He delighted to make man. When God made man, He made man a willing creature. He gave us a will as He also has a will. The difference is this, that His will is supreme, and the creature's will, that is, man's will, is subject to His will. He did not give man independence to do whatever he wanted. No. In the beginning God told Adam and Eve what His will for them was. He told them that they must obey Him and not eat the forbidden fruit.

At that point Adam and Eve were sinless. And they had a free will in the sense that they could choose

either good or evil. We know that they disobeyed God and fell into sin. The result for us is that we do not have the freedom of will that Adam and Eve had in the beginning. Now, by nature, our will is against God's will. We still have freedom in this sense, that we make choices. But our will is under the bondage of sin. So, apart from the grace of God, all our choices are sinful.

But in the Christian, God has done something very marvelous. He has given us a new heart with new desires, and a new will that wants the things that God wants, and does the things that God commands.

But, even then, the old will to sin is still there. In Romans 7, Paul describes it this way. He says, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." He has a new will and heart. But Paul continues, "The good that I would, I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do." He is speaking of a struggle within him as a believer. There is the will of the flesh and the will of the spirit warring against one another.

As we pray this petition, that is what we recognize as well. We are asking God to help us to let go of, to put down, to renounce, to abandon, to relinquish, our own will. We are saying, "Not my will, but Thine be done." All too often, our will is against God's will. We want the things that God has forbidden. We want to rebel against authority. We want what someone else has. We are envious and covetous. We do not want to be truthful and honest, but we want to put up a front. We want to use God's holy day, the Sabbath, for ourselves and not for God. We want to enjoy the pleasure that God intends for marriage outside of the bond of marriage.

Or we rebel against God's decrees. We do not like it that God, in His decree, chooses some and determines that others will be vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. We do not like it that salvation is *all* God's work, that He works in us both the willing and the doing of His good pleasure. We want to say that man's will can do something. Or, in our own lives, we grumble about God's will—that we be single and not married. We complain that God is not giving us employment or good health, or that He takes something or someone from us that we want badly to keep.

Here, in this petition, Jesus is teaching us to pray that God will help us to abandon our will for His. That makes this a very difficult petition to pray. We are stubborn. We are asking God to break our stubborn will. If you have children, you know how difficult this can be. The child does not want to do what you as a parent want him to do. And the process of breaking the child's will will include discipline of the child. It sometimes means pain for the child.

Sometimes that is God's answer to this petition, too. He has to put us through some very difficult things in order to bring us into submission to His will. This was true of the psalmist. In Psalm 119:67 and 71 David says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word..... It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."

When you have learned to pray this petition, child of God, then you have learned what it is to be a Christian and to be a child of God. Then you have really learned what prayer is. Prayer is a deeply spiritual exercise, the exercise of a pilgrim who has his eye on God in praise and faith.

We should think of the Christian life as a journey. We are traveling towards heaven. We know the beginning of the journey. We know what has happened along the journey to this point. We know the end and the goal of our travels, but we do not know yet the way from here to the end of our journey. All we have along the way are signposts to guide us to our destination, to tell us: "This is God's will. This is God's way for you." There may be deep waters of trial ahead of us that we have to pass through. There may be dark valleys of death through which we must traverse. We do not know. For us, it is to keep following the signposts of God's word, obeying His commandments, submitting to His purposes

for us. We do that because we know that this journey is taking us, in the end, to heaven, and to be with the Lord.

God's will is not always *easy*. But God's will is always *good*. There is always more to God's purposes than we can see. God has an ultimate purpose, and everything serves that end. His will is always good—good for Him, and good for His people in the earth. There is great comfort for us in that. Paul puts it this way for the believer in Romans 8:28, "And we know," he says, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Things do not happen to us by chance. We are not like a floating bottle at sea, tossed around with no purpose or direction. We are not like feathers blown around here and there by the wind. But God, in His will, is leading us on to glory. In Psalm 73, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

This is our confession: God is good. In all that He requires of us and in all that He has planned for His people, God is good.

Jesus Himself had to pray this prayer. When He was here on the earth in our human flesh, He came not to do His own will, but to do the will of the One who had sent Him. And you remember that in the Garden of Gethsemane, as He faced His arrest and trial and execution and the suffering of sin at the hands of the just God, He prayed, in Matthew 26:39, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." What was God's good will? It was that Jesus would suffer the agonies of the cross to bring glory to Himself and to bring salvation to His people. Jesus submitted because He knew that God's will was best.

May God give us such hearts of submission.

Let me close by assuring you that God does answer this prayer. What does God do, and what does God give, in answer to this prayer? He gives us His Holy Spirit so that we abandon our own will and submit to His. As we pray this petition, we should expect that we will become more and more like Christ—that God will give us the attitude of the angels who serve Him in heaven.

In answer to this petition, God gives us the grace to see that whatever the circumstances of our life, they are from Him. In answer to this petition, God gives the grace of obedience to His will. Think of what that means! He gives us diligence and honesty and kindness and love and submission. He writes His will in our hearts so that we obey Him from the heart in love.

And then, also, in answer to this petition, God gives us hope, so that we live more and more in anticipation of the day of perfection, when we will, with the angels and all the redeemed, do God's will perfectly.

Today we struggle to understand the will of God. We wrestle with sin. But there comes a day of perfection. And that is our hope as we make this petition.

Let us pray.

Lord, give us hearts to know Thy will, to obey it, to abandon our sinful desires, and to submit to Thy good way for us. Amen.