

IS GOD'S WILL, YOUR WILL?

REV. ROY HERMAN

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AS A BIBLICAL COUNSELOR, ONE OF THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED OF ME IS "WHAT IS GOD'S WILL" AND MORE SPECIFICALLY, "WHAT IS HIS WILL FOR ME?" THESE ARE INTRIGUING QUESTIONS, AREN'T THEY?

TONIGHT, WE WILL TRY TO SHED SOME LIGHT ON THIS THOUGHT PROVOKING SUBJECT AND UNPACK THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS. AND AS IT IS WRITTEN, "LET HE WHO HAS EARS, HEAR!"

LET'S PRAY!

FATHER GOD, WE ARE IN AWE OF WHO YOU ARE AND HOW YOU LOVE US AND CARE FOR US. WE ASK NOW THAT YOUR HOLY SPIRIT COME UPON US AND DIRECT AND GUIDE US THROUGH YOUR WORD THAT WE MAY BETTER UNDERSTAND YOUR WILL AND YOUR WILL FOR US. IN THE ALL POWERFUL NAME OF JESUS, I PRAY! AMEN!

LET ME BEGIN WITH THIS QUERY — "IS GOD'S WILL, YOUR WILL?" IF YOU ARE LIKE ME, SOMETIMES GOD'S WILL IS MY WILL! BUT UNFORTUNATELY, MY OWN WILL IS OFTEN THE PROBLEM IN SEEKING HIS WILL. AND I THINK THAT THIS IS TRUE FOR ALL OF US, ISN'T IT? AND WHEN OUR WILL DOES NOT ALIGN WITH HIS, WE DO NOT EXPERIENCE THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S GRACE.

WELL, WHY IS THIS SO? BECAUSE WE LIVE IN A CULTURE THAT PRIDES ITSELF ON EASE AND COMFORT, WE DESIRE A PIECE OF THAT BIG PIE.

AS A RESULT, WE TEND TO PERCEIVE PRAYER AS IMPORTANT, ONLY FOR MAKING A CHANGE IN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES RATHER THAN FOR THE DIFFERENCE IT CAN MAKE IN US AND FOR GOD'S GLORY.

THUS WHEN GOD DOESN'T ANSWER OUR PRAYERS IMMEDIATELY AND IN THE WAY WE WANT, WE OFTEN LOSE THE PASSION NECESSARY TO PERSEVERE IN INTERCESSION.

IF WE WANT TO HAVE THAT PASSION IN OUR PRAYERS, WE NEED TO REALIZE THAT THE REAL BENEFIT OF PRAYER IS NOT THE CHANGES GOD MAY MAKE IN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT THE CHANGES HE WILL MAKE IN US AND IN OUR PERCEPTION OF THEM.

WHEN HE DRAWS US INTO CONFORMITY TO HIS BLESSED PERSON AND WILL, OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, NO MATTER HOW INSURMOUNTABLE THEY MAY SEEM AT FIRST, WILL NO LONGER BE OUR PRIORITY.

THAT'S BECAUSE OUR ATTITUDE ABOUT THEM WILL BE DIFFERENT. WE MUST FOCUS OUR ATTENTION AND PRAYERS, NOT ON THE PROVISION, BUT ON THE PROVIDER!

WHEN OUR PRAYERS ARE ROOTED IN OUR FAITH IN GOD—WHEN WE BELIEVE HE WILL HEAR AND ANSWER OUR PRAYERS—WE ARE PRAYING WITH THE RIGHT ATTITUDE AND PERSPECTIVE.

THE GREATEST HINDRANCE TO PRAYER IS NOT LACK OF TECHNIQUE, LACK OF BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE, OR EVEN LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR THE LORD'S WORK, BUT LACK OF FAITH. WE SIMPLY DO NOT PRAY WITH THE EXPECTATION THAT OUR PRAYERS WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR LIVES, IN THE CHURCH, OR IN THE WORLD.

THE NOTION THAT WE MUST PRAY WITH EXPECTATION IS MADE CLEAR IN HEBREWS 11:6: "AND WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD, BECAUSE ANYONE WHO COMES TO HIM MUST BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS AND THAT HE REWARDS THOSE WHO EARNESTLY SEEK HIM."

TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THIS CRITICAL ISSUE, WE NEED TO EXAMINE FOUR DISTINCT ASPECTS OF GOD'S WILL, AS HE REVEALS IT TO US IN HIS WORD.

FIRST, THERE IS: "GOD'S SOVEREIGN AND COMPREHENSIVE WILL"

THIS REFERS TO GOD'S WILL OF PURPOSE—HIS VAST, ALL-INCLUSIVE, TOLERATING WILL, EXPRESSED IN THE UNFOLDING OF HIS SOVEREIGN PLAN IN THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE, INCLUDING HEAVEN, HELL, AND EARTH. THIS ASPECT OF GOD'S WILL ALLOWS SIN TO RUN ITS COURSE AND SATAN TO HAVE HIS WAY, BUT ONLY FOR A SEASON. BUT IN HIS APPOINTED TIME, SIN'S COURSE AND SATAN'S WAY WILL END EXACTLY ACCORDING TO GOD'S PLAN AND FOREKNOWLEDGE.

ISAIAH WROTE ABOUT GOD'S ULTIMATE WILL, SAYING IN CHAPTER 14 AND VERSE 24: "THE LORD ALMIGHTY HAS SWORN, "SURELY, AS I HAVE PLANNED, SO IT WILL BE, AND AS I HAVE PURPOSED, SO IT WILL STAND."" ISAIAH CONTINUES IN VERSES 26 AND 27: "THIS IS THE PLAN DETERMINED FOR THE WHOLE WORLD; THIS IS THE HAND STRETCHED OUT OVER ALL NATIONS. FOR THE LORD ALMIGHTY HAS PURPOSED, AND WHO CAN THWART HIM? HIS HAND IS STRETCHED OUT, AND WHO CAN TURN IT BACK?"

PAUL BEST EXPLAINS GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL FOR EACH OF HIS CHILDREN WITH THESE WORDS FROM ROMANS 8:29-30:

"FOR THOSE GOD FOREKNEW HE ALSO PREDESTINED TO BE CONFORMED TO THE LIKENESS OF HIS SON, THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BROTHERS.

AND THOSE HE PREDESTINED, HE ALSO CALLED; THOSE HE CALLED, HE ALSO JUSTIFIED; THOSE HE JUSTIFIED, HE ALSO GLORIFIED.”

AND EPHESIANS 1:11A REMINDS US THAT “IN HIM WE WERE ALSO CHOSEN, HAVING BEEN PREDESTINED ACCORDING TO THE PLAN OF HIM WHO WORKS OUT EVERYTHING IN CONFORMITY WITH THE PURPOSE OF HIS WILL.” GOD’S GREAT PURPOSE IS FOR A REDEEMED PEOPLE; FOR A UNIFIED CHURCH AND FOR A BODY OF SAINTS FOR ETERNITY.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IS NOT A ONE-TIME EVENT — IT IS A CONTINUAL UPWARD MOVEMENT THAT WILL BE COMPLETED WHEN WE REACH OUR FINAL DESTINATION — WHEN WE ARE IN HIS PRESENCE.

PAUL EXPRESSES THIS PROGRESSION WITH HIS WORDS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 3 AND VERSE 18:

“AND WE, WHO WITH UNVEILED FACES ALL REFLECT THE LORD'S GLORY, ARE BEING TRANSFORMED INTO HIS LIKENESS WITH EVER-INCREASING GLORY, WHICH COMES FROM THE LORD, WHO IS THE SPIRIT.”

NOTICE THE WORDS “BEING” AND “EVER-INCREASING”, THESE ARE ACTIVE VERBS INDICATING THAT THIS IS AN ON-GOING EVENT.

AND PAUL COMMANDED THE BRETHERN IN EPHEBUS TO “BE IMITATORS OF GOD” AND TO “LIVE A LIFE OF LOVE”, BECAUSE “CHRIST LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR US.” AMEN?

THE TERM, MOST OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH THIS TRANSFORMATION IS "PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION", WHICH MEANS "INCREASINGLY BEING SET APART FROM THIS WORLD AND ITS VALUES."

ANOTHER TERM, COMMONLY USED IN CHRISTIAN CIRCLES, IS "SPIRITUAL MATURITY." BUT THIS MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE.

TO SOME IT MAY MEAN HOW MANY VERSES ONE HAS MEMORIZED, WITHOUT ANY INDICATION OF HOW THEY ARE LIVING OUT GOD'S WORD.

TO ANOTHER, "SPIRITUAL MATURITY" IS A MEASURE OF HOW MANY TIMES THEY HAVE READ THROUGH THE BIBLE. MANY PEOPLE "KNOW THE WORD OF GOD", BUT DO THEY MOW THE "GOD OF THE WORD?"

TO OTHERS, IT IS SIMPLY A COUNT OF HOW MANY LOST FOLKS THEY HAVE LED TO THE LORD. BUT ARE THEY HELPING THE NEW BELIEVER "TO GROW IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST JESUS?" ARE THEY MAKING TRUE DISCIPLES OF THEM?

LET ME SUGGEST TO YOU A MORE DEFINITIVE DEFINITION OF "SPIRITUAL MATURITY" THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE THEME OF THIS MESSAGE. "SPIRITUAL MATURITY" IS A MEASURE OF HOW MUCH ONE HAS RELINQUISHED OR SUBMITTED THEIR WILL TO GOD'S WILL! AND, MY FRIENDS, THIS IS ONLY KNOWN BY YOU AND GOD, NO ONE ELSE!

LISTEN, WHATEVER GOD PURPOSES TO DO WILL COME TO PASS AND NO ONE CAN HINDER THAT PLAN.

ALTHOUGH GOD DOES NOT WILL EVIL, HE TAKES THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN HISTORY AND IN OUR LIVES AND PUTS THEM TOGETHER FOR GOOD.

PAUL WRITES IN ROMANS VERSE 28 OF CHAPTER 8: "WE KNOW THAT GOD CAUSES ALL THINGS TO WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, TO THOSE WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE." AND OF COURSE HIS GREATEST PLAN IS THE SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE!

BUT DO YOU REALIZE THAT BEING CONFORMED INTO THE LIKENESS OR IMAGE OF CHRIST ALSO REQUIRES US, ACCORDING TO PHILIPPIANS 3:10; "TO KNOW CHRIST AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF SHARING IN HIS SUFFERINGS, BECOMING LIKE HIM IN HIS DEATH, AND SO, SOMEHOW, TO ATTAIN TO THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD."

SALVATION, GOD'S GREATEST PLAN FOR US, IS MADE COMPLETE THROUGH THIS TRANSFORMATION.

IT IS VITAL FOR US TO REMEMBER THE WORDS OF PETER, FROM HIS SECOND EPISTLE IN CHAPTER 2 AND VERSE 17; "THE WORLD AND ITS DESIRES PASS AWAY, BUT THE MAN WHO DOES THE WILL OF GOD LIVES FOREVER."

BUT ROY, JUST HOW THEN DO WE PRAY IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN AND COMPREHENSIVE WILL? BY JOYOUSLY JOINING IN AFFIRMING AND AWAITING THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF HIS DIVINE PLANS. ALTHOUGH WE KNOW THAT SOMEDAY CHRIST WILL TAKE HIS CHURCH OUT OF THIS WORLD TO BE WITH HIM, JUST AS GOD PLANNED, WE ARE TO PRAY IN ANTICIPATION OF THAT GREAT HOUR AND FOR GOD TO HASTEN THE COMING OF IT.

THE SECOND ASPECT OF GOD’S WILL IS HIS “MORAL WILL.”

AS A NEW CHRISTIAN, I LEARNED THAT WHEN THE ISRAELITES LEFT EGYPT, GOD PROVIDED CLOUDS DURING THE DAY AND FIRES AT NIGHT AS BEACONS FOR THEIR VOYAGE. I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, WOW, WOULDN’T IT BE AWESOME IF HE PROVIDED ME WITH SPECIFIC SIGNS TO GUIDE MY JOURNEY UNTO HIM. THEN I READ IN PSALM 119:105 THAT “HIS WORD IS A LAMP TO MY FEET AND A LIGHT FOR MY PATH.” I QUICKLY REALIZED THAT HE HAD GIVEN ME ALL THAT I NEED TO STAY ON TRACK.

GOD REVEALED TO US IN HIS WORD, HIS “MORAL WILL” FOR US — THE PATH THAT WE ARE TO REMAIN ON AS WE PROGRESS TOWARD HIS SOVEREIGN END POINT OF BEING CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST, JESUS. WALKING HIS PATH IS SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD, “BEING IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF IT.” GOD’S WILL IS ALSO “THAT WE SHOULD BE SANCTIFIED”, ACCORDING TO 1 THESSALONIANS 4:3.

I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU THAT INCLUDED IN HIS “MORAL WILL”, IS HIS “PERMISSIVE WILL” — WHICH IS BEST EXPLAINED BY SAYING THAT AS LONG AS WE REMAIN IN HIS “MORAL WILL”, WE ARE PERMITTED TO CHOOSE, FOR OURSELVES, JUST HOW WE ARE TO PROCEED. IN OTHERS WORDS, WE ARE FREED TO MAKE OUR OWN CHOICES, ASSUMING THAT GOD HAS NOT SPECIFICALLY INSTRUCTED US TO DO OTHERWISE!

LET US NOT, HOWEVER, CONFUSE OUR ABILITY TO MAKE CHOICES WITH THE TERM “FREE WILL”, WHICH CONNOTES THAT WE ARE FREE TO MAKE ANY CHOICE WE WANT, WITHOUT THE FEAR OR THREAT OF REPRISAL OR CONSEQUENCE. WE ARE NOT FREE TO DO THAT — WHEN WE MAKE CHOICES OUTSIDE OF HIS MORAL WILL, WE CAN EXPECT TO SUFFER, AND WE SURELY WILL.

AS LONG AS WE STAY WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF HIS “MORAL WILL”, WE WILL EXPERIENCE A JOYFUL AND FULFILLING LIFE, WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WHEN WE REACH OUR DESTINATION, WE WILL BE IN HIS PRESENCE.

REMAINING ON HIS PATH DOES NOT MEAN THAT OUR LIFE WILL BE FREE FROM SUFFERING. WE WILL SUFFER AND WE WILL BE PERSECUTED. REMEMBER, HOWEVER, THAT JESUS SAID, “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.”

AND PAUL TELLS US IN ROMANS 5:3-4 THAT WE MUST “REJOICE IN OUR SUFFERINGS” WHY? BECAUSE “SUFFERING PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE; PERSEVERANCE, CHARACTER; AND CHARACTER, HOPE.”

WE MUST BE MINDFUL, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN THOUGH OUR PATH MAY BE FRAUGHT WITH DIFFICULTY, HE IS STILL WITH US.

ROMANS 8:35 ASKS THIS QUESTION! “WHO SHALL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST?” “SHALL TROUBLE OR HARDSHIP OR PERSECUTION OR FAMINE OR NAKEDNESS OR DANGER OR SWORD?” THE ANSWER IS ABSOLUTELY NOT! GOD PROMISES HIS CHILDREN THAT HE WILL NEVER “LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US”.

BUT REALIZE THAT WE ARE STILL MERE HUMANS WITH A NATURE THAT WANTS TO PUSH US OUTSIDE OF THE PATH THAT HE HAD LAID-OUT FOR US.

AND BY OUR BAD CHOICES, THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT WE DO. WE STRAY LIKE LOST SHEEP. AND WHEN WE DO, SURELY WE EXPERIENCE THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR ACTIONS. BUT GOD IS FAITHFUL AND LEAVES THE 99 BEHIND JUST TO COME AFTER US AND ONCE AGAIN, “THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.”

THE THIRD ASPECT OF “GOD’S WILL” IS HIS “COMPASSIONATE WILL”

THIS FACET OF GOD’S WILL REFERS TO HIS HEART’S DESIRE, WHICH IS WITHIN THE SCOPE OF HIS “COMPREHENSIVE WILL” AND COMPLETELY CONSISTENT WITH IT, ALTHOUGH IT IS MORE SPECIFIC AND FOCUSED. UNLIKE GOD’S “SOVEREIGN WILL” HOWEVER, HIS DESIRES ARE NOT ALWAYS FULFILLED. IN FACT, OUR PRESENT AGE ATTESTS THAT SATAN’S DESIRES ARE REALIZED MORE OFTEN THAN GOD’S.

JESUS DESIRED JERUSALEM’S SALVATION, AND HE PRAYED, PREACHED, HEALED, AND MINISTERED TO THAT END. LUKE, QUOTING JESUS IN 13:34, WRITES, “O JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM, I WANTED TO GATHER YOUR CHILDREN TOGETHER, JUST AS A HEN GATHERS HER BROOD UNDER HER WINGS, AND YOU WOULD NOT HAVE IT!” BUT WHAT WAS THE TYPICAL RESPONSE TO JESUS? FEW BELIEVED HIM; MOST REJECTED HIM; AND SOME EVEN CRUCIFIED HIM.

JESUS SAID IN JOHN 5:40, “YOU ARE UNWILLING TO COME TO ME, THAT YOU MAY HAVE LIFE.” THIS IS TRULY A SAD COMMENTARY ON THE CHOICE OF UNBELIEF AND THE REJECTION OF HIS OFFER OF ABUNDANT LIFE. BECAUSE GOD, OUR FATHER, ACCORDING TO 1 TIM 2:4; “DESIRES ALL MEN TO BE SAVED AND TO COME TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH.”

AND PETER, IN 2 PETER 3:9, EXPANDS THIS UNDERSTANDING OF THIS ASPECT OF “GOD’S WILL”, WRITING THAT “THE LORD IS NOT SLOW IN KEEPING HIS PROMISE, AS SOME UNDERSTAND SLOWNESS. HE IS PATIENT WITH YOU, NOT WANTING ANYONE TO PERISH BUT EVERYONE TO COME TO REPENTANCE.”

GOD’S “COMPASSIONATE WILL” IS ALSO A MANDATE FOR ALL MANKIND TO REPENT FROM THEIR SINFUL WAYS.

YES, REPENTANCE MEANS TO CHANGE ONE’S BEHAVIOR, BUT UNDERSTAND THAT A CHANGE IN THOUGHT AND ATTITUDE IS A PREREQUISITE TO A CHANGE IN THE WAY WE ACT. PRIOR TO BECOMING CHRIST-LIKE IN OUR ACTIONS, WE MUST FIRST BECOME LIKE CHRIST IN OUR THOUGHTS.

LISTEN TO WHAT PAUL WROTE IN ROMANS, 12:2; “DO NOT CONFORM ANY LONGER TO THE PATTERN OF THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND. THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TEST AND APPROVE WHAT GOD’S WILL IS--HIS GOOD, PLEASING AND PERFECT WILL.” AMEN?

UNFORTUNATELY, THAT DESIRE IS NOT FULFILLED IN THE LIVES OF THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE. INSTEAD THEY REJECT CHRIST, AND THE MOST THE LORD WILL DO FOR THEM, IS WEEP. (JER. 13:17).

THE FOURTH ASPECT OF GOD’S WILL, HIS “COMMANDING WILL”, RELATES DIRECTLY TO HIS CHILDREN, BECAUSE ONLY WE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO OBEY.

GOD’S ARDENT DESIRE IS THAT WE, WHO ARE HIS CHILDREN, OBEY HIM COMPLETELY AND IMMEDIATELY, WITH WILLING HEARTS.

ABOUT OUR OBEDIENCE PAUL WROTE IN ROMANS 6:16-18, “DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT WHEN YOU PRESENT YOURSELVES TO SOMEONE AS SLAVES FOR OBEDIENCE, YOU ARE SLAVES OF THE ONE WHOM YOU OBEY, EITHER OF SIN RESULTING IN DEATH, OR OF OBEDIENCE RESULTING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS? BUT THANKS BE TO GOD THAT THOUGH YOU WERE SLAVES OF SIN, YOU BECAME OBEDIENT FROM THE HEART TO THAT FORM OF TEACHING TO WHICH YOU WERE COMMITTED, AND HAVING BEEN FREED FROM SIN, YOU BECAME SLAVES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. SINCE WE ARE GOD’S SERVANTS, IT IS ONLY NATURAL THAT WE OBEY HIS COMMANDING WILL.

AS PETER SAID, “WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN.”

WHEN WE PRAY, “THY WILL BE DONE,” WE ARE PRAYING FOR THREE THINGS: THE CONSUMMATION OF THE WORLD AND THE USE OF SIN’S CONSEQUENCES FOR GOD’S ETERNAL PLAN, THE SALVATION OF PEOPLE WHO DON’T KNOW GOD, AND THE OBEDIENCE OF EVERY BELIEVER TO GOD’S COMMANDS.

WHEN WE STUDY THE PHRASE “THY KINGDOM COME,” WE LEARN THAT THE KINGDOM COMES TO EARTH IN THREE WAYS: THROUGH THE CONVERSION OF UNBELIEVERS; BY THE COMMITMENT OF BELIEVERS TO LIVE ACCORDING TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND JOY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT; AND AT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST WHEN HE ESTABLISHES HIS EARTHLY RULE. I SEE A PARALLEL BETWEEN THESE THREE ELEMENTS AND THE THREE ASPECTS OF GOD’S WILL WE JUST LOOKED AT.

GOD’S “COMPREHENSIVE WILL” EMBRACES THE ULTIMATE END OF MAN’S DOMINION ON EARTH AND THE RETURN OF CHRIST TO SET UP HIS ETERNAL KINGDOM.

HIS “COMPASSIONATE WILL” EMBRACES THE CONVERSION OF UNBELIEVERS. AND HIS “COMMANDING WILL” DEMANDS COMMITMENT FROM HIS PEOPLE.

THE PRIMARY OBSTACLE TO CONFORMING TO HIS WILL IS OUR OWN PRIDE, WHICH WE MUST OVERCOME BEFORE WE CAN PRAY FOR GOD’S WILL TO BE DONE IN OUR LIVES.

PRIDE CAUSED SATAN TO REBEL AGAINST GOD, AND PRIDE CAUSES UNBELIEVERS TO REJECT GOD AND BELIEVERS TO DISOBEY HIM. TO ACCEPT AND PRAY FOR “GOD’S WILL” IN SINCERITY AND FAITH, WE MUST ABANDON OUR OWN WILL FOR THE SAKE OF GOD’S.

RECALLING ROMANS 12:1-2, THE APOSTLE PAUL TELLS US HOW TO DO THAT: “I URGE YOU THEREFORE, BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING AND HOLY SACRIFICE, ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL SERVICE OF WORSHIP. AND DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND, THAT YOU MAY PROVE WHAT THE WILL OF GOD IS, THAT WHICH IS GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT.”

LISTEN, UNTIL WE LAY DOWN OUR LIFE ON GOD’S ALTAR AS A LIVING SACRIFICE—UNTIL OUR WILL IS DEAD—“GOD’S WILL” WILL NOT BECOME MANIFEST IN OUR LIVES.

WHEN WE PRAY IN FAITH AND IN CONFORMITY TO GOD’S WILL, OUR PRAYER IS A SANCTIFYING GRACE THAT CHANGES OUR LIVES DRAMATICALLY. THUS PRAYER IS A MEANS OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION. THAT IS WHAT BEING ALONE WITH GOD IS ALL ABOUT. WE REALIZE POWER AND PASSION IN IT WHEN WE ARE COMPLETELY DEPENDENT ON GOD AND LIVE IN OBEDIENCE TO HIS WILL.

BOTH ISAIAH AND JEREMIAH SPOKE OF THE POTTER AND THE CLAY AND HOW THE POTTER, GOD, BY HIS HAND, TRANSFORMED THE CLAY, US, INTO A THING OF WORTH.

I KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS, BECAUSE I WAS THAT LUMP OF CLAY. AND GOD SHAPED ME AND MOLDED ME INTO ONE WHO HE COULD USE FOR HIS GLORY.

ALTHOUGH WRITTEN LONG, LONG AGO, THE PSALMIST DESCRIBED MY EXPERIENCE AS HE PENNED IN PSALM 40:1-2, "I WAITED PATIENTLY FOR THE LORD; HE TURNED TO ME AND HEARD MY CRY. HE LIFTED ME OUT OF THE SLIMY PIT, OUT OF THE MUD AND MIRE; HE SET MY FEET ON A ROCK AND GAVE ME A FIRM PLACE TO STAND." AS CAREFULLY AS THE POTTER SELECTED HIS CLAY, SO GOD USED SPECIAL CARE IN CHOOSING ME AND YOU, TOO! AMEN?

UNDERSTANDING THAT OUR FATHER'S WILL IS TO TURN OUT TRULY BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE, WHY THEN IS IT BROUGHT TO NAUGHT AGAIN AND AGAIN? WHY, DESPITE HIS BEST EFFORTS AND ENDLESS PATIENCE WITH HUMAN BEINGS, DO THEY END UP A DISASTER?

I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU THAT THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY RESIST HIS WILL. THOSE WHO HAVE NOT RELINQUISHED THEIR WILL TO HIS, CANNOT AND WILL NOT BE CONFORMED INTO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST!

IN CONSIDERING THE POTTER'S HAND, ONE WRITER, AFTER VISITING A POTTERY STUDIO, WROTE THESE WORDS: "THE SOBERING, SEARCHING, SEARING QUESTION I HAD TO ASK MYSELF IN THE HUMBLE SURROUNDINGS OF THAT SIMPLE POTTER'S SHED WAS THIS: AM I GOING TO BE A PIECE OF FINE CHINA OR JUST A FINGER BOWL? IS MY LIFE GOING TO BE A GORGEOUS GOBLET FIT TO HOLD THE FINE WINE OF GOD'S VERY LIFE FROM WHICH OTHERS CAN DRINK AND BE REFRESHED? OR AM I GOING TO BE JUST A CRUDE FINGER BOWL IN WHICH PASSERS-BY WILL DABBLE THEIR FINGERS BRIEFLY, THEN PASS ON AND FORGET ABOUT IT?" THE AUTHOR THEN SAID, "IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST SOLEMN MOMENTS IN ALL OF MY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES."

IN CLOSING, MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, I WANT TO LEAVE YOU WITH FIVE FUNDAMENTALS OF GOD'S WILL THAT WILL HELP YOU QUANTIFY IF "HIS WILL, IS YOUR WILL." AND I ENCOURAGE YOU TO MAKE NOTE OF THESE QUESTIONS AND THEIR CORRESPONDING PASSAGES AND MEDITATE ON THEM!

- 1. ARE YOU CONTINUALLY FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT? EPH 5:18.**
 - 2. ARE YOU PROGRESSIVELY BEING SANCTIFIED? 1 THES 4:3.**
 - 3. ARE YOU SUBMITTING TO GOD'S ORDINANCES? 1 PETER 2:13-17.**
 - 4. ARE YOU SUFFERING ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD? 1 PETER 4:19.**
- AND LASTLY,**

5. DO YOU HAVE JOY IN THE LORD, ALWAYS PRAYING AND GIVING THANKS? 1 THES 5:16-18.

OH HOW I PRAY THAT YOUR ANSWER TO EACH OF THESE QUESTIONS IS A RESOUNDING — YES! THEN YOU CAN BE ASSURED THAT “GOD’S WILL AND YOUR WILL” ARE ONE IN THE SAME AND YOU WILL RECEIVE ALL OF THE BLESSINGS THAT GOD HAS ALREADY APPORTIONED FOR YOU! AMEN?

LET’S PRAY!