

The Reversal Of Human Will

The Effect of God's Will on Human Will

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Analysis of human history shows a direct conflict between *human will* and *God's will*, although God allows individual choice to make good and bad decisions. Inevitably, human will seeks to create God in its own image. One major way that God deals with this is to reverse the direction of human events and human will.

Tom Beaudoin is a Catholic who ministers to GenXers. And in his September-October 1998 article, in TIKKUN magazine, titled "GenX Spirituality" he describes what he thinks is the problem with the Generation X age group today. Keep in mind that the GenX generation includes those who were born from about 1961 to 1981. Today, this generation is between the ages of twenty-one and forty-one.

Mr. Beaudoin's conclusion about the GenX attitude towards religion is very revealing. He calls this attitude "***spirituality***." We've heard this term thrown around quite often in the world and in religious talk in mainstream Christianity. But it is never able to be truly defined, and I don't plan on defining "*spirituality*" today. But let me go on with the article, because I think you'll find it eye-opening and very interesting about this age group. [Quoting from Mr. Beaudoin's article:]

What could a young, irreverent but faithful Catholic possibly have to say about spiritual practices to a largely non-Catholic audience in a magazine such as TIKKUN? Easy: my spirituality is of the GenX variety, and I am convinced that GenX spirituality is a pan-religious phenomenon practiced by young Jews and Catholics, Methodists and Buddhists, pagans and Presbyterians.

This GenX spirituality includes four common characteristics—suspicion of institutions, primacy of personal experience, attention to suffering, and exploration of ambiguity [Of course, that is vagueness.]—but can be understood most immediately by taking the spiritual pulse of popular culture. Pop culture is my generation's lingua franca, and has become our surrogate "minister." Just listen to any conversation between young adults that lasts longer than thirty seconds.

We explain ourselves and understand ourselves with reference to scenes in movies or sitcoms, to moments in a particular song, or to a frame from a

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comic book. It's only natural, then, that popular culture is not only our common language, but the common site of our spiritual practice as well.

In the next section of his article, Mr. Beaudoin refers to the 400-page book that he wrote on this subject; and he continues:

It was not as if I wasn't attempting to be spiritually aware, even a little pious, in writing this book. On the contrary, I had continually prayed that "God's will be done." But I realized I had been actually praying and writing as if it was impossible to know anything in particular about God's will—and as if certain commitments did not really demand my attention and obedience, such as a concern for the poor and the excluded.

In this way, I slowly realized that my own "your-will-be-done" piety, when repeated like a mantra, served to shut my ears to the will of God that in fact cries out now to be done!

I'd like that to ring in your ears about his attitude towards God's will to be done. That really wasn't what he was asking. Continuing on:

My experiences writing this book and my own ministry to GenXers cause me to fear that many in my generation find themselves in a similar situation: not dismissing social justice outright (we do, after all, recall grainy footage of the civil rights marches), but seeing it as an "option"—an important option to be sure, but an option nonetheless.

Many GenXers, regardless of socio-economic class, have a bourgeois attitude toward the world.

Even if we're living off student loans and overloaded credit cards, most of us have the luxury of deciding whether we want to be engaged in social justice when we wake up each day, a luxury not shared by millions of people in the world. I am convinced that this "optioning" of social justice is not only a function of our economic situation but is also intimately related to the particular character of our emerging GenX spirituality.

Having grown up amidst largely pluralistic religious and secular spiritualities, and now awash in the billions of bits of information in cyberspace, we

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GenXers commonly feel free to pick and choose the "best" from various religious or spiritual traditions. Even the GenX Catholics to whom I minister are curious about Islamic Sufism and Jewish mystical Kabbalah. Many seem to be practicing pure religious syncretism.

As one member of the Generation told me via e-mail, "I don't really acknowledge any religious affiliation or bias. I believe Jesus walked the earth, and was the Son of God—in fact, I believe he 'was' God, the creator. I believe in Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, the writings of Lao Tzu, Confucius, and many other wise people proclaiming truth."

[If that isn't **syncretism**, what is?]

There is a real danger that this rich GenX eclecticism can become—or is becoming—merely an expression of the late capitalist veneration of individual "choice." After all, a GenX spirituality that takes tolerance as its fundamental commitment cannot justify the limits to such tolerance, such as child abuse, mistreatment of the poor, or exploitation of the earth. When eclecticism for its own sake is the GenXer's spiritual starting point, when a simple ethic of uncritical tolerance becomes a basic GenX "religious" commitment (whether one thinks such an ethic is religious or not, if it is a fundamental commitment, it is rightly called religious), GenXers not only have traded God's Spirit for the market, they also have almost certainly created God in their own image.

That is a very eye-opening article, I thought, having to do with that generation of roughly twenty-one to forty-one year olds. Mr. Beaudoin rightly analyzes a core problem of the Generation Xers, but it's not just a problem of his generation. It is **a problem attitude** that has become *the norm* of this present Babylonian society; and it fits in very nicely with the "one world religion" promoted by the leaders of most of the world's religions—directly to their members, as well as through the media.

Today, humanity has exerted its own will (that is, *human will*) to supersede *God's will*. They expect submission of God's will to THEIRS, rather than their **submission** to God's will! Although one may say to God, "*Your will be done,*" the reality of what they are saying to God is "*Your will conform to MY WILL, and so let IT be done!*" It's an arrogant, rebellious attitude towards the Creator God, but all under the idea (or, the guise) of being pious (or, of being religious).

The word "**will**" has two distinct meanings in the Bible. On the one hand, it means wishing, desiring, or choosing. On the other hand, it refers to a legal declaration of how a person wishes his possessions to be disposed after his death. This is commonly what our society thinks of as a "will." But the will that we are looking at today is the desiring or choosing to do something according to *human will* OR *God's will*.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for **will** is *abah*—which means to breathe after; to long for; to will, be willing, or consent. This word is common throughout the history of the Hebrew language. It occurs in the Old Testament just over fifty times. It is found for the first time in Genesis 24:5, where Abraham's servant (who is about to be sent to find a wife for Isaac) says: "Perhaps the woman will not be *willing* to follow me to this land?"

In the New Testament, **will** means wishing, desiring, or choosing—especially in reference to *the will of God*. In the Gospels (primarily in John), Jesus acted not according to His own will but according to the will of the heavenly Father; and Jesus does nothing apart from the Father's will.

John 5:19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."

Jesus overcame sin by replacing His *human will* with *the will of God*, the Father.

John 5:30 "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."

What is the will of the Father (who sent Jesus Christ) with regards to us?

John 6:38-40 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Of course, in the book of John, **doing the will of the Father** is considered Jesus'

nourishment.

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."

The energy of Jesus Christ to complete the character building of the saints (so that we can receive the gift of eternal life) comes from *the will of God*, the Father.

The "struggle of wills"—between man and man, and man and God—has permeated mainstream Christianity and has (at the very least) infiltrated the Church of God. We are, of course, aware of the biblical warnings about false doctrine and how human beings have a natural enmity against God. As members of God's church, we fight against such things continually.

But initially Satan doesn't usually use frontal attacks. He usually enters through the back door of our minds, where we are the most vulnerable. And the way that he enters in is through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Those commence subtly; but then, all of a sudden, when we are in God's church we realize (probably because the Holy Spirit reveals it to us) that we have a serious problem in one of these areas. From ***relinquishing control*** to these worldly enticements, we see the fulfillment of the apostle Paul's prophetic warning in I Corinthians 10:12.

I Corinthians 10:12 Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

So basically, if we allow *human will* to promote us to activate our **pride**, we will fall. The demonic world instigates the natural hostility of the human mind to exert its own will against God's will. God has shown us through His written Word how He deals with the exertions of *human will* contrary to *His own*. The Bible is full of examples of God's reversal of human will.

One biblical principle we see in the reversals of *human will* to conform to *God's will* is the mystery of God's providence, grace, and election—as 'unlikely' people are chosen for favor while people 'impressive by worldly standards' are scorned. This is one of the principles we see in the reversals that God uses as examples in the written Word.

Another biblical principle we see in the reversals of human will in the Bible is the judgment aspect, as people who think themselves secure are actually vulnerable. Time and again, as we go through the reversals in the Bible, we see these two principles

come to the forefront of what God is intending to happen by Him reversing the human will.

As long as people have been telling stories, storytellers and audiences have been thrilled to tales that include an element of surprise in the form of a reversal of the human will. Generally defined, **a reversal** is an action that produces or causes the opposite effect initially intended. The account of the first sin of Adam and Eve is the first reversal story in the Bible. Thinking to become Godlike (reaching for everything), Adam and Eve lost it all. God's reversal of human will, of course, didn't stop there; but it has continued down through human history as God carries out His careful plan to bring new sons into His Kingdom.

Some of the **examples of reversals** are, for example, *Cain* thought to rid himself of a righteous brother whom he envied—only to find himself condemned to the life of a restless wanderer. *Lot* lifted his eyes to the well watered plain of the Jordan River and chose a land that (in his mind) equaled material prosperity—only to lose his home and his wife as that region was transformed into a wasteland.

Another reversal: *Abraham* waited for twenty-five years for God to produce the promised son, during which time he experienced a series of false starts in which he undertook actions that seemed expedient but instead resulted in dead ends. One of these humanly reasoned situations involved Abraham and Sarah's decision to have a son by Hagar; and ever since then, it has caused nothing but trouble.

Jacob thought to better himself by stealing his dying father's blessing—only to find himself an exile for twenty years in a hostile foreign locale. In the story of *Joseph* and his brothers (the happiest of the cheat-the-prophecy stories in the Bible), everything the brothers did to prevent fulfillment of Joseph's dreams of supremacy led directly to their fulfillment.

Then we have the example of *Gideon*, who began his story with a severe case of inferiority complex as virtually all the details early in the story painted a portrait of a reluctant hero. But halfway through the story our expectations were denied, as Gideon (with God's help) showed sheer mastery over everything that stood in his way.

In the book of Esther, the story of *Haman* was based on the reversal of pride that goes before a fall. Overextending himself in his pride and hatred of the Jews, he ended up overseeing the exaltation of his enemy, Mordecai; and he died on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. On the national level, the seemingly hopeless situation of the Jewish nation was reversed by a sudden victory.

The examples of the reversal of human will, and of human events, in the Bible are numerous; and they all carry wonderful examples and wonderful principles for us. The Psalms are full of such reversals. The Psalms of Lament present their own variations of God's reversal of human will. Nearly without expectation, these quests for consolation in the face of terrible crisis include a reversal—or even a recantation. After painting a picture of seemingly unconquerable threat, the psalmist suddenly reverses himself in a statement of confidence in God; and he vows to praise God. The situation that was portrayed as 'hopeless' turned out suddenly to be 'solvable' after all, thanks to *God's will*—to His **reversal** of the *human will*.

Other psalms also illustrate God's reversal of human will. For example, Psalms 73 (one of the psalms of Asaph), after presenting a portrait of the arrogantly wicked of the world, reverses itself with a contrasting picture of the sudden fall of these same people. At the beginning of Psalms 73, we see people of prosperity seeming to have the upper hand. But at the end of Psalms 73, we see God's people having the upper hand.

Psalms 73 speaks of the reversal of the prosperity and success of the wicked of the world, as well as the reversal in the minds of those who stumble and slip while trying to trust in God—but who eventually realize their shortsighted thinking is faulty. Asaph takes us step-by-step through the quandary in human reasoning about the fairness of God.

We're going to go through the entire chapter of Psalms 73. It's an amazing chapter that I found myself getting a lot of encouragement from. Lately, I've heard a lot of you in God's church stating how you seem to feel somewhat depressed as you see others seemingly being blessed, while people in God's church don't seem to have a response from God. This psalm here—Psalms 73—is a wonderful psalm that answers a major question that those of us in God's church probably have all dealt with at one time or another. So I'm going to go through Psalms 73 like a Bible Study, scripture by scripture—because I think it's extremely valuable and interesting.

Psalms 73:1 Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.

God is good to the church, to those who serve Him. He is our real, genuine, Friend—because He is faithful to His covenant. He has not forgotten us. He never abandons us. Neither is He indifferent to us. But, on the other hand, He is NOT the friend of the wicked; and the administration of His government is NOT in favor of wickedness. So Asaph starts this psalm with stating this as an absolute fact and a truth. And this is the fact of what the pure in heart—the people in God's church—have to rely

on, and also what they have hope in.

Psalms 73:2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.

Now, put yourself in Asaph's place as you read down through this, to understand where he is coming from. The phrase "But as for me" is literally "And I." The meaning is, *"And I (who so confidently now trust in God, and believe that He is good) was formerly in a far different state of mind. I was so hesitating, and so troubled, that I had almost entirely lost confidence in Him as a wise and just moral governor."* A governor is a controller of events.

Psalms 73:3 For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

The phrase "the prosperity of the wicked" is more literally "the peace of the wicked." The reference is not so much to their prosperity in general, as to their peace—their conscious safety. It refers to their freedom from trouble (especially in the sense of their calmness) and to their freedom from suffering in death.

In observing this about the life of the wicked, the psalmist (in this case, Asaph) temporarily doubted whether there was any benefit to obeying God. He asked himself if God was just, and if He really befriended the righteous any more than He did the wicked. And this is something that a member of God's church can fall into, when he starts looking at material goods and material things that we see these people of the world—especially those we think of as being awful or wicked people—are accumulating for themselves.

Psalms 73:4 For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm.

The word rendered "pangs" here means pains, pangs, or torments—as if they were twisted or tortured with pain. Those in the world (the wicked) don't seem to suffer in this way, or die in this way. Some do, but many don't. The word "pangs" occurs only here in verse 4, and in Isaiah 58:6.

The idea that bothered the psalmist was, when the wicked die, they don't seem to suffer in proportion to their wickedness; neither does there seem to be any special results of

God's displeasure as they are about to die. They live in prosperity and seem to die in peace. They have enjoyed this world, and their sinful life seems to be followed by a peaceful death. They don't even suffer as much in death as relatively "good" people often do. So the psalmist is asking himself, *"What then is the advantage of goodness? How can we believe that God is just; or that He is the Friend of the righteous; or even that there is a God?"*

It's obvious that many of the wicked prosper and die in this peaceful way. The fact has puzzled relatively "good" people throughout all of man's history. And I know that occasionally this will even slip into our minds. *"Why do the wicked seem to do so well and prosper so much? Where are God's blessings?"* Well, Asaph answers that as we go along.

Psalms 73:5 They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men.

The phrase "not in trouble as other men" is literally "in the labor of man they are not." That is, they are exempt from the common burdens and troubles of humanity. There seems to be some special intervening in their favor to save them from the common disasters that come on the rest of humanity. It would certainly fit that the god of this world, Satan, would reward those human beings that are most like him.

One of the things that comes to mind is some of these scandals we've seen in the news in the last few months, like the Enron scandal and the World Com scandal. It's interesting that many of the wealthy leaders of those companies are doing very well. They got bonuses the years that the companies had their problems; and many of them, if not most of them, seemed to go unscathed from the law. Here they are, going on their way, enjoying their wealth; and they will probably die a peaceful death. Of course, that's unless they die in the Tribulation. But you know what I mean. We see this common in our society. Many of the wicked do very well, and they seem to enjoy life.

The phrase, in verse 5, "nor are they plagued like other men" is literally "and with mankind they are not afflicted." The calamities that come so heavily on humanity don't seem to come upon the wicked. They are favored, prospered and happy—while others are afflicted.

Psalms 73:6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment.

The wicked are proud. They are arrogant, and they are domineering. Often that's how they got to be in these leadership responsibilities in worldly governments and also in worldly companies. They put on the ornaments and trappings of pride. Their name-brand clothing and their decorations are indicative of a proud heart. They believe that they are better than others and that they are treated in this manner BECAUSE they are better than others. So they expect everyone to be subservient to them. It's assumed in their mind.

In the original, it is a single word that is rendered "serves as their necklace." The word means to adorn with a necklace, or collar. The idea is that pride surrounds them as with a necklace, or a collar, around their necks. They wear **pride** as an ornament. They make it conspicuous. It is obvious on a self-aggrandizing neck, in an erect and stiff demeanor. It's like wearing a medal around their necks—they are so prideful. President Clinton is a prime example of this type of individual. No matter what he does, no matter how awful the sins he commits are, he holds keeps his chin up; and he just seems so proud of his whole life.

The phrase "violence covers them like a garment," in verse 5, speaks of the injustice or cruelty that seems to be their covering. It is manifested in their whole gait and demeanor that they are people of self-importance and smugness—that they are destitute of tenderness, sympathy, and mercy. And we see that just in the fact that they have stolen so much money from people. In this Enron situation, they didn't think twice about cheating people out of their life's savings.

Psalms 73:7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish.

Because of the fruit of their high living, they aren't weakened or emaciated by work and lack of necessities, as other people often are. You see people out there "in the trenches," so to speak—digging ditches, or in construction jobs—working themselves to the bone. But these wealthy, wicked, individuals aren't like that. They just seem to have everything so easy.

The phrase "they have more than heart could wish" is literally "the imaginations (or thoughts) of the heart pass." That is, pass along or pass forth. The meaning seems to be not as much that they have more than their hearts could desire (as in the King James and New King James translations)—because people are never satisfied. We are all familiar with the quip, which is often stated in a humorous way, *"I don't want a lot of money. I just a little more than I can spend."* Well, how much is that—for any human

being?

The phrase in verse 7 expresses more about their thoughts, their plans, and their purposes—passing freely along without any obstruction, their desires are continually gratified, their plans are accomplished; and they keep getting what they want. Whatever desire comes into their minds is usually obtained without difficulty. They seem only to wish for something, or to think of something, and they get it with ease. What talks in this world, in this Babylonian system? Money talks! So, if you have enough money, you can get anything your heart desires.

Psalms 73:8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily.

"They scoff" (or, as some translations have "they are corrupt") is literally "they mock." Barnes' Notes says that the word rendered "scoff" or "corrupt" never has this significance of "scoff" or "corrupt." The original Hebrew word is *muwq*, from which we get our English word "mock." And it means the same thing that we believe the word **mock** means. In fact, that may be very well the way that Hebrew word is pronounced—mock.

The idea is that they ridicule religion, or mock at all that refers to God and to His future punishment of the world. They don't just not believe God will punish people for sin, they ridicule the very idea that there is a coming judgment.

The phrase "speak wickedly concerning oppression" is literally "they speak in wickedness; oppression they speak from on high." That is, they use arrogant language. They speak in a proud manner, as if they were above others. They use harsh and violent language, not regarding the feelings or the rights of others. And we certainly see this type of attitude in our media today—on television and in movies. The English language, and the way it is portrayed in the media, is a very harsh and violent language.

A few years ago, our daughter mentioned how much more happy people were—the songs were, and the movies were—30, 40, or 50 years ago as compared to the songs and the movies today. There's hatred in the movies and the songs today that you didn't see in the same way 30, 40, or 50 years ago. So it's very obvious that the attitude has changed.

Psalms 73:9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.

The phrase "they set their mouth against the heavens" is literally "they set their mouth in heaven" or "in the heavens." The idea is that they speak as if they were "in" the heavens; as if they were clothed with all authority; as if they were superior beings and had the right to command the universe. Notice the similarity of attitude in the Beast power of Revelation 13:

Revelation 13:5-6 And he [the Beast power] was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.

So we see this same literally satanic attitude in the Beast power, in the future.

The phrase "their tongue walks through the earth," in verse 9, means it has no limit. It's as if their tongue roams over all the earth. The wicked speak without any restraint of law, or decency; without any regard to the commandments of God, or to what is good and fair. In other words, they set themselves above the law—above all law; and they act as if there were no one in heaven or in earth to control them.

So what we see in the wicked, the wealthy, the leaders of nations and companies in this world is such an extremely arrogant promotion of *human will* driven by Satan's pride; and it becomes their own pride.

Psalms 73:10 Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them.

"His people," of course, are the pure in heart—mentioned in verse 1. They truly love and obey God. At this point, the pure in heart return in their minds. In their meditations on spiritual things, they come back to their question (because the subject still perplexes them). That is, the question of why the wicked prosper so much. That is something that is incomprehensible.

They think about it over and over again, and are more and more puzzled and embarrassed (the more they think about it). The difficulties that these facts suggest about God and His government are such that the pure in heart can't solve them. That is, why doesn't God come upon the wicked and punish them now?

The phrase "waters of a full cup" is literally "waters of fullness," or full waters. The

Chaldee renders this "Many tears flow from them." The word rendered "are drained by them" means to suck; then, to suck out; to drink greedily. It is applied to someone who drinks greedily of an intoxicating cup, but also applies to someone who drinks a cup of poison to the dregs.

The meaning in verse 10 is that the facts in the case—and the questions that arose in regard to those facts, and which so puzzled them (the pure in heart)—were like a bitter cup. Those facts were a cup of poison, or an intoxicating cup, that overpowered them and distorted their view of the truth. In their bewilderment, they exhausted the cup. They drank it all—even to the dregs.

So the more bewildered and puzzled they allowed themselves to be about God's justice, the more confused they became. They didn't merely taste it, but they drank it. It was a subject of complete puzzlement—a subject that totally overpowered all their faculties and exhausted all their energy. Thus, the picture we have here is 'the pure in heart' taking a step back, so to speak, in wondering why God doesn't seem **just**. And their puzzlement was so bothering to them that it exhausted them. It just made them feel energy-less.

Psalms 73:11 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"

His people are compelled by these facts to start painful inquiries about God. This is a distressing investigation because of the doubts that they involve. These thoughts pass through their minds; but they keep them to themselves, because they don't want to cause needless pain and confusion to those who have no such puzzlement over this.

So His people ask such questions as: *"How can these facts be reconciled with God's omniscience?" "How can it be that He sees all this, and yet puts up with it; or that He does not intervene to prevent it?" "Can it be explained, can it be believed, that God sees all this and that He calmly looks on and does nothing to prevent it?" "If He sees it, why doesn't He intervene and put an end to it?"*

These are some of the questions that go through people's minds at times—when they are trying to do the right thing before God, but they see the wicked being blessed and prospered. These bewilderments were not confined to the psalmist. These questions have been asked by all sorts of people, both good and bad. And no one yet has been able to completely provide a solution to them that is completely free from any difficulty.

Even God's church only has a glimpse of the awesomeness of God! The glimpse that we have puts us in **awe** that God is so much greater than that. So *God's will* is not only absolute, it is also all-wise. Sometimes He seems detached and not interested in preventing the evils. To the human mind, it doesn't seem consistent that He knows what is happening to them but doesn't intervene or make any attempt check these evils.

Psalms 73:12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches.

In this verse, we hear a puzzled "good" man discouraged by the fact that the wicked are prosperous and happy. The meaning in this verse is *"Look, these are wicked people—people of undisputed decadence. They are people who live sinfully, regardless of God. And yet they seem peaceful, secure, happy, and wealthy."*

This is one of the facts that so much embarrassed the psalmist. If there had been any doubt about the character of those people, the case would have been not so difficult. But there was none! They were people whose character for wickedness was well known; and yet they were permitted to live in peace and prosperity, as if they were the favored of God. So this is obviously a question that people have struggled with, probably since Adam.

The literal meaning of the word rendered "who prosper in the world" in the King James Version—and "who are always at ease" in the New King James—is "tranquil (or secure) for the age." It includes the idea of occurring forever, or constantly. The wicked know no changes. They see no reverses. They are the same through life. They always seem tranquil, calm, happy, and successful.

Now, we in God's church also realize that mentally they are going through a lot of agony that they don't even realize they are going through. Their marriages are poor. Their children grow up to be awful citizens, and so on and so forth.

Psalms 73:13-14 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning.

Of course, this is the psalmist speaking on behalf of "good" people. Doubts sometimes enter our minds that there is no benefit in all our efforts to become pure and holy. It can be frustrating to work hard at overcoming problems and ridding our lives of sin, only to

see the wicked prosper. Especially in the condition of the church today, we are scattered. We see so many of God's people suffering. Many people are suffering very terrible things. Mrs. Regnier has just died, and she had suffered through her illness. And so the question does arise in our minds sometimes, as to why God allows such things to happen; but we know that it is always for the good. There is just no doubt there.

On the surface, it doesn't seem to help us in obtaining God's favor. That is, it doesn't seem to help us at times to live righteous lives. And it seems that it would be just as well to live a sinful life—to give in to the lust of the eyes. It appears that nothing is gained by all our painful efforts at self-discipline. But somebody who allows this attitude to sink in and stay—and doesn't rid their mind of it—will eventually pull themselves right out of God's church; and we occasionally see that. We've seen many over the years.

It seems we acquire fewer blessings from God than the wicked do. We have less physical happiness and less prosperity in this world. We are subject to more trouble and sorrow. Added to this, we have spiritual struggles, conflict, and warfare in the painful effort to be pure and to lead a holy life. Such thoughts as these are not confined to the psalmist. They are thoughts that will come into our minds from human nature and satanic influence. And they are very tough to control and overcome; but we must grab hold of them. We must control and overcome them. That's one of the things this psalm seeks to help us to do.

The phrase, in verse 13, "washed my hands in innocence" refers to the feeling that *it has been of no use that I have washed my hands in innocence*. The word **innocence** here means **purity**. He has washed his hands in that which was pure, such as pure water. We remember that Pilate (as recorded in Matthew 27:24) said that he "took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person.'" So we see there the meaning of this word innocent, and pure; and how it is applied.

It should be a high priority in a Christian's life to be pure—to worship and serve his Creator in purity. The psalmist had stated that he had no sympathy with the wicked and that he didn't make them his friends. Now he states what his preferences are and where his heart is. His *preference* is to serve God, and he must make *a conviction* of doing so.

Psalms 73:15 If I had said, "I will speak thus, 'Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.'"

It is implied here that he hadn't stated his thoughts out loud. This was just something

that was being hashed through his own mind. He was keeping them to himself. He is saying, *"If I were to state what is on my mind, others might be led to feel as if I had no confidence in God. This might give them the idea that I am faithless, which could offend or bother them. Such thoughts might hurt their faith and hope."* So this is part of the reason why he is saying that he kept it to himself—so that he wouldn't be untrue to the generation.

The word translated "I should offend" in the King James—or "I would have been untrue" in the New King James—means to treat deceitfully, or in a faithless or treacherous manner. It means to deal falsely with. So the intended meaning here in verse 15 is, *"I would not be true to them. I would not be faithful to their real interests."*

The idea is that he should not say or do anything that would tend to lessen their confidence in God, or that would suggest any distrust in God whatsoever. Whatever might be his own troubles and doubts, he had no right to fill their minds with doubts and distrust of God. (That is, the generation of our children.)

This is not to say that, if a person is having doubts, he should not mention them to another to get help to remove them. These types of questions occur to sincere and devoted people. There is nothing improper about asking for help from someone of greater age, or longer experience, or wider knowledge in God's church. It's certainly proper for a child to ask advice or answers to questions from a parent, or a church member to ask advice or answers to questions, related to doubt, from a minister. This is NOT to say that we should bottle them up and let them carry us out of the church. We need to deal with them, but we shouldn't go around striking up doubt in other people's minds. We don't see that happen very often, but occasionally we do.

Psalms 73:16-17 When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.

Overwhelmed by the greatness, glory, and majesty of God—the psalmist regained a true perspective of his situation. He rediscovered something he had known, but had forgotten. **God is just!** In the end, evil is not; and it never will be victorious. The wicked will be severely judged!

In verse 17, the phrase "their end" is literally "their after things." That is, the things that will occur to them hereafter. So that solves the whole problem that the psalmist was posing! There will be **a judgment** hereafter. And, dark as things may now appear, it will be seen in the end—or in the result—that exact and equal justice will be done to all,

according to God's righteous will.

Psalms 73:18-20 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.

Whereas God had not allowed the psalmist to slip into sin, the wicked were doomed to fail. Their fall is always characterized by the element of surprise and by the evident judgment of God. God has set them up for the fall. The **when** is not as important as **the certainty** that they will slip and they will fall.

The destruction of the wicked is sudden and unexpected. There is no security for their apparent prosperity. *Their end* must be seen in order to form a correct calculation of their punishment. We can't just look at the moment to see whether or not they are punished in a just way. We have to look at God's whole plan for mankind.

The wicked are like **a dream** that has a sense of 'reality' when we are asleep, but is gone the moment we are awakened. The coming of **God's righteous judgment** brings all things into perspective. In the meantime, we live with the vision that the wicked are nothing but fantasies. The experiences of terror and anguish will turn out to be little more than a nightmare—that is, a bad dream.

Psalms 73:21-22 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

So we see here the psalmist realizing the type of human being he really was, at the moment of his doubts towards God. "Was grieved" here is literally "was soured." Deep inside, the psalmist was grieved and disillusioned—resulting in depression. In this condition, he was irrational and without wisdom. Without wisdom, he was like the fools. He was plagued with oppressive questions and self-pity.

If you have a marginal reference, you'll notice that "vexed in my mind" is literally "pierced in my kidneys." You can just imagine how that would feel, if you were pierced in your kidneys. That "vexed in my mind" is a painful event.

But he had to **go through the experience** before he could more fully appreciate and enjoy a close relationship with God. Quite often questions, anguish, and a sense of

The Reversal of Human Will by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

stupidity are used by God to mature His servants. The same type of thing was experienced by other psalmists, and by Jeremiah. For example, this same Psalms 73 is parallel to Lamentation (which Jeremiah wrote).

Psalms 73:23-24 Nevertheless I am continually with You, You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

Verse 23 begins **the transformation** OF pain and anguish TO the joy of God's presence. Because of God's presence, the psalmist is also more assured of His protection and guidance. God protects him by holding his right hand, by giving him internal strength and courage, and by providing for all his needs. Now he stopped murmuring and complaining—**relinquishing** *his own will*, preferring rather to **submit** to *the will of God*.

Psalms 73:25-26 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

The psalmist is saying, *"After all my complaining and all my doubts, there is NO ONE—not even in the heavens—who can fill the place of God (or be to me what God is). The warm affections of my inner being, of my heart, therefore are truly towards Him. [Then he asks the questions:] What would even the Kingdom of heaven be to me without God? Who in heaven, even of the angels of light, could supply the place of God?"*

Since God is the strength of his heart, he is more prepared to face this present life with all its problems. He is prepared to grow old and experience failing health, and even persevere through adversity BECAUSE God is his strength and portion. You see him transitioning here, or turning, or God reversing his attitude—from a somewhat negative one to a positive one (and an encouraging one).

Psalms 73:27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish. You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.

The psalmist places himself in the future in this verse, and speaks of this as if it were already done. If it is *God's will*, it will be done! It will be so certainly done that he could

speak of it as if it were already accomplished.

A departure from *His will* is compared with spiritual immorality against a marriage contract. Spiritual fornication and adultery is manifested in religious syncretism, as we read by the author at the beginning of the sermon; and that is embraced by so many Christians today.

Psalms 73:28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works.

To ***draw near to God*** is pleasant and eternally rewarding. A saint finds happiness in his **intimate** relationship with God. Others find (or attempt to find) happiness in material things, or fantasies of the mind. This is the conclusion the psalmist arrived at, after all his bewilderment. With all his doubts and difficulties, his real desire was to be near God—where his true happiness was found. And so he began to desire this very strongly—to be with God in His Kingdom.

The psalmist had finally concluded that he had truly confided in God and that is where his loyalty relied. The doubts that he had had were not real doubts about the outcome of *God's will*. There was an underlying **trust in God** in the midst of all his meditation on why the wicked prosper and the saints suffer. He didn't want to dwell on such doubts, and he did still trust in God.

He arrived at the reason for drawing near to God and putting trust in the Lord God. He understood why *human will* had to be reversed—so that, in a saint's life, God could be glorified and all His works made known as a witness. That's part of the purpose that we have in suffering as Christ suffered—so that, in our life, God could be glorified and all His works made known as a witness.

The psalmist's concerns and puzzlement were NOT because he was an enemy of God, nor because he doubted His power; but because ***the fairness of God's will*** 'appeared' to be against the pure in heart. And, of course, deep in his mind he knew that it wasn't; but he struggled with the idea nevertheless.

Therefore, he wanted to understand how the things that occurred to benefit the wicked could be explained consistently with a proper belief in the goodness and justice of God. He wanted to know the answer so he could better understand and increase his own faith—and go and explain it to others. In this light, his concerns and perplexities were NOT really as inconsistent with true love for God and genuine confidence in Him as it

first seemed (when he started explaining his thoughts).

So we see in Psalms 73 a "good" man, who wants to put his confidence in God, momentarily meditating on why he has to suffer and be poverty stricken while the wicked prosper and appear to be happy (even though they have a total disregard for God—even a fierce rebelliousness for God's way of life and for those who are pure in heart). But God uses such a reversal of the conditions of the 'wicked' and the 'pure in heart' to show His absolute sovereignty, and to test and refine the understanding of His saints.

So, who in the world ever liked taking a test? There may be some, but tests and exams are tough. We agonize. They are mentally taxing and painful. And that's part of the purpose of what God does when He has the 'pure in heart' suffer while the 'wicked' prosper. Obviously though, the wicked don't always get off without penalty. Eventually, their sins do find them out—as do all the sins of all human beings.

The book of Proverbs is an unforgettable book of sudden reversals—sometimes in the form of predictions about the wicked of the world. I'll just mention three proverbs here. Proverbs 1:10-19 predicts that people who get gain by violence will be trapped in their own designs. Another proverb, Proverbs 6:9-11, foresees that the sluggard will find that his excuses for not working will bring him to sudden poverty. Proverbs 6:12-15 foretells that the person who undertakes elaborate means to avoid being brought to account for his evil will be broken "in a moment."

So there are certain immutable penalties that human beings suffer as a result of sin. And even the wicked, with all their money, can't turn that around. So when the psalmist talks about the wicked prospering in Psalms 73, he's talking about the heads of nations and companies as well as just the average neighbor who seems for a while to be able to prosper so much, and be able to do so much, and have so much. So there are temporary times of such prosperity as well.

No "type" in the Bible is more saturated with **reversal** than in the biblical prophecies. The predictions of judgment are filled with visions in which current conditions are reversed contrary to all present evidence. Above all, the nations that are currently powerful will have their prosperity snatched away from them. But, in keeping with the mysteries of God, these same books—despite all their predictions of judgment—end with a sudden reversal (not prepared for) in which the nation that has been corrected throughout the preceding visions is portrayed as being restored to prosperity.

We certainly see that in Israel, where Israel was allowed to go its own way. Look at this

nation today—the immorality and the sin that is being committed in this country. But God will reverse all that, and He will prosper Israel eventually—and, visa versa as well, those who are doing the right thing will be blessed.

Prophetic stories spring reversals on us—especially the book of Daniel, where Nebuchadnezzar cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego into a fiery furnace only to find them miraculously spared; where the same king suddenly fell from power in the moment when he least expected it; where Belshazzar received the prophecy of his imminent defeat on the very night that he threw the biggest party of his life.

So many times, God's reversal of events takes you right down to the wire (as it did with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego)—where you are having to make the decision that you are **willing** to be killed, or martyred, for God's sake. And God may or may not reverse it at that time. It's *His choice* when He does reverse such things. But you can have CONFIDENCE that God will reverse adverse situations and turn them into "good" for His saints.

In the New Testament, ***reversals of human will*** are illustrated in the many conversion stories in which a person's whole pattern of life is **reversed by God's calling**. We see God's reversal of human will as God chooses people from undistinguished backgrounds—reversing their world's standard of value.

The disciples are the best examples, but the timeless expression of the principle is seen in Paul's statement in I Corinthians 1. Here we see several reasons for God's calling on the 'not so impressive' human beings—to put to shame the wise, that no person can take credit for anything himself.

I Corinthians 1:26-31 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

God declares His sovereignty and His will through the use of reversals. Psalms 143 is

David's appeal for the guidance and deliverance (for the present, and for the future). There must be a desire to know ***the way we should go***, and a desire to be taught that way.

Psalms 143:8-10 Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You. Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; in You I take shelter. Teach me to do Your Will, for You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness.

David set the example that we should ask that God's will (and NOT our own will) be done in our lives as *a way of life*. This means doing things in our own lives that we know God would want us to do, even though we may find them unpleasant or fearful at times. Doing the will of God requires **complete submission** to His will as revealed in His Word, so that the deeds done in the flesh are acceptable to God. We must do good works to conform to the will of God. Psalms 90:17 says, "establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands."

Here in Psalms 143:10, David writes that IF God instructs him and guides him, THEN he will receive inspiration by the Spirit of God to **do** the will of God. The struggle of *human will* against *God's will* will continue until the end of God's 7,000-year plan of salvation. The firstfruits of God's plan are those who have replaced their own *human will* (their own human reasoning) with *the will of God* (the way of life of God the Father and Jesus Christ). ***Conformity to the will of God is submission to the sovereignty of God.***

Through our calling and our conversion, God is in the process of reversing the tendency of our *human will* and replacing it with *God's own will*. As it was Christ's 'food,' so also ought it to be our source of energy and nutrition—because whoever lives by **the will of God** will live forever!

I John 2:17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who **does** the will of God abides forever.