

God's Will

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 24-Sep-18; Sermon #FT18-02

A night or two before hurricane Florence hit, Beth and I had a short conversation in which we were tossing about the question about just what do you ask God to do when a storm like this strikes? Do we ask Him to steer it north? Do we ask Him to make it come back south? We have brethren north and south. Do we ask Him just to let it go out to sea and hit the current in the wind stream and let it take it over to England? Nice little, breezy day, a little different from all that drizzle on everything you guys get all the time. God's people live everywhere.

I mentioned to her that one church of God member had posted on Facebook that she had decided to ask God to just dissipate it—kind of like letting the air out of a balloon—and ”poof” it is not there anymore.

Of course, we would pray for the safety of everyone who would be in the path and their property, too. But is that enough? Is that all we should pray about? I am not sure.

I guess if we went about the room asking each person to come up with something that we could pray about, make a list of different things that we could pray for, different ways to phrase our request to God, we could probably come up with a pretty good list of things to ask God.

Because we are individuals and we have different levels of knowledge, we each have our own way of approaching these things, of approaching God and speaking to Him, so it is hard to say that your approach is different from my approach and therefore it is wrong, or that somebody else's approach toward God and the things that he asked for in these things are themselves wrong. All that is part of the personal relationship we have with God. Everybody's way of approaching God and asking for things, requesting things is a little bit different, even though it is all based on the same knowledge of God.

Many times when situations like this come up, the thought passes through my mind that if I only knew God's will a little bit more precisely, I could pray more accurately. I could pray specifically and get to that one nugget of whatever it is that God wants me to ask Him about and to talk about in prayer. As it says in Exodus 30:36 that the incense that was offered there in the tabernacle on the altar of incense was beaten down fine. We are supposed to beat our prayers down fine so that we can come before God with as much as we can, so that we think about it. He does not need to worry about it. He knows all those things, but if we break it down fine then we have insight into various situations and hopefully this situation that we are praying about.

If that would happen, if I could know His will just a little bit better, my prayers would be in line, they would be synchronized with what He is working out. I would not have to say phrases like, “if it's Your will,” because I would know it. I would be able to say, “God, You know that it's time to do this” or, “I know that You are doing this, and I'm telling You that I'm submitting to this in knowledge. I know what it is that You're trying to accomplish.”

That would be great if I could know. Know, not guess, not surmise, or assume but know what God is doing, what God is trying to accomplish. Then I think I could pray accordingly—rightly, properly. I would be right in line with God's will.

You might like to open up to Matthew 6. This is Jesus' model prayer that He gave to the disciples.

Matthew 6:9 [He says] "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

He says that part of our prayer is to ask for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. You notice here, probably for lack of space, Jesus did not say what that will is. He just said, "Your will be done." The way it is phrased, it does not seem to matter at all, whether we know what His will is or not.

In asking for God's will to be done in this way, we place ourselves in submission to it, no matter what that will is. He is the Boss. So we come before Him in prayer and say, admit, we do not know what is going on, and so we say, "Your will be done."

Jesus here is acknowledging the fact that in many cases, we either do not know God's will or cannot know God's will in a specific matter. And there are reasons for this. There are reasons why there are times we do not know or cannot know. A lot of it has to do with our need to exercise faith. If we knew God's will every time, we would not have a care in the world. God is going to do this. "Okay, I'm going to the beach, because we know how it's going to be." But we do not know.

A lot of times we are stepping out over the abyss. We need to exercise faith because we do not know exactly what God is going to do. So we just have to step out.

Certainly, God wants us to know His will as much as we can. That is part of our job as Christians. But certain matters are well beyond our abilities to understand, far beyond, no matter how righteous we may be; how spiritual we are; how intelligent we are; how insightful on any situation, or anything that we are coming up against. It does not matter.

There are times we do not know His will, as in many cases, we are very human. We are quite limited, especially in comparison to God. He knows everything. He knows exactly what He is going to do, and we have just the smallest inkling of what that is. Let us look at an example. Let us go back to Genesis:18 in the life of Abraham.

This is when the Word, YHVH, came down with a couple of angels to visit Abraham. He was about to leave, and we pick up the story here.

Genesis 18:16-26 Then the men [men, put that in quotes] rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I have known him in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him." [So the LORD obviously made a decision, He was going to tell Abraham.] And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom

and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” Then the men turned away from there and went towards Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. And Abraham came near and said, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this; to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked, far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”

Let us jump down to verse 32. In the meantime Abraham had gotten Him to forty-five then forty then thirty then twenty.

Genesis 18:32 Then he said, “Let not the LORD be angry [for my haggling here], and I will speak but once more. Suppose ten should be found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.” So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

Notice how Abraham, among the most righteous people that have ever lived on the face of the earth, deals with this situation. In an overall sense, God had personally revealed to him His will about Sodom and Gomorrah. He stood there in front of him, right there. They were talking, “mano a God-o” or whatever, “mano a mano,” and God said, “This is Abraham, the one I have chosen to raise up a nation and he is going to teach his children. And so I think I will tell him My will in this particular situation.” “Abraham, I am going down to see Sodom and Gomorrah because I have heard really bad things about them. I want to just make sure that this reporter is right?”

Abraham then begins his bargaining. Now, Abraham was pretty smart. You notice that that God did not say, “I am going to Sodom and Gomorrah, and I am going to send fire and brimstone upon them, and everybody will die.” What is God actually telling? He says, “I am going down to Sodom and look to find out whether these things, these reports of their iniquities are so.” Do you remember what happened the last time God went down, to look at the tower of Babel? Something happened. God does not go down and look for no reason at all. Usually when God goes down and looks there is something bad going to happen. God is going to destroy the city.

He knew that. Abraham understood that God’s going down there personally to look was a pretty good indication that there was going to be great destruction for those cities for their grievous sins.

Did you notice one thing that is not in this chapter? It is the name Lot. Lot is not even mentioned in Genesis 18.

Surely Abraham was concerned for his safety. He knew where Lot was, where Lot’s wife was, and all Lot’s children were. He knew they had been there a while. They had settled down. Lot was now living in the city, and he was very concerned for Lot. It comes through in the bargaining. He is whittling it down to only ten righteous people.

You notice, though, in his prayer, that is, his bargaining session—his prayer with God, his request—he never says. “Please keep Lot and his family safe. Please grab Lot, send Your angels in there to whisk him away.” Abraham does not say anything like that. he does not even mention the man's

name—his own nephew. Instead, he commences this bargaining process with God for the life of the righteous in the city.

It is, interesting to look at what he says. “In the city.” We are talking about Sodom and Gomorrah, but when he bargains, he talks about “the city” and he is obviously speaking about Sodom, because he is concerned about Lot. I am sure he did care about Gomorrah, but he was concerned mostly about Lot.

He was talking about that *particular* city, and God knows this and comes back with the singular “that city.” You know, God was pretty canny, too. So, let us think about this in terms of God's will. Abraham knew God's will in terms of punishing the cities for their perversions. But he was essentially clueless about God's specific will toward Lot.

Lot was lumped in with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but because Abraham knew God's character. Remember, he and God were “buds.” He is called the friend of God. He and God talked face to face. We just have this one particular example, there may be a couple others where we can assume that God came down and spoke to him. But it must have been a fairly regular occurrence, as those things go. If it was every fifteen years, it would be a regular occurrence to us.

But he and God had a relationship where one knew the other. Obviously, God knew more about Abraham than Abraham knew about God. But Abraham knew enough about God that he was able to say what he did there in Genesis 18:24-25. He knew His character. He knew that God would not destroy the righteous with the wicked.

Beyond his knowing that God judges with equity, he knew that God loves the righteous and wishes to preserve them and protect them because He loves them. He loves them and wants them to be well.

In Psalm 37:25-29 are promises that God will not let the righteous starve and God will uphold the righteous, that sort of thing.

Abraham knew that he knew that God wanted to help those who follow Him. So Abraham secures God's overwhelming mercy. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were really bad. They were wicked and evil, and they were corrupt and perverse. There was nothing good there, except one righteous man, and we only know that because Peter tells us. Because of some of the things that Lot did, you just have to shake your head. We will take God's Word for it that he was a righteous man. He knows Lot better than we do.

Abraham secures God's overwhelming mercy on Sodom for the sake of ten righteous people, but never once assumes that Lot is one of them. He hoped that Lot was righteous, and he had maintained his righteousness in the years that they had been separated.

It is easy to get caught up in the things that are going on in a perverse society; give in a little bit here, give in a little bit there, and pretty soon you are running with the pack. I am sure he hoped that Lot was righteous and that hope is what he based his bargaining on with God; that there would be at least ten righteous people in that city, and God would spare it.

Abraham never assumed that Lot was one of the righteous, never mentioned him here, specifically. He just asked for God to spare the righteous and left it in His hands to determine who actually came under the label of righteous. It is very wise of him.

When we say, “I’m sure that this and this and this, this person is converted or righteous,” or however you want to put it, do we know that? Can we tell that? It was very nonjudgmental of Abraham to say, “God, I’ll leave it in Your hands to determine who is righteous here. But please save the righteous.”

He exercised faith in God. He did not know who specifically would fall into that group. But he exercised his faith in God that He would be merciful and do something about Lot, for Lot, protect Lot. He knew because of who God is in His perfect character, that He would do the best thing, whatever that was, for the righteous. God is good and His ways are perfect. But we, being human, being very limited, do not altogether know what that actually might turn out to look like.

Knowing the will of God is not an easy task. You probably figured that out by now. We spend our entire converted lives trying to get a better grasp on His will. And as we have seen just in this one example, it is not as simple and straightforward as we sometimes think.

We will spend the rest of the time laying a foundation for understanding God's will as an overall concept. It would take me years and lifetimes to tell you about God's will in full. I do not know it. I would have to be learning it right beside you. I only know in part.

In laying a foundation of looking at God's will as a concept, we may be able to quell some of the frustrations we might have about not knowing God's will. Maybe, we like Abraham, will learn to leave certain things to Him in faith.

Leviticus 23:33-36 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. On the first day, there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days, you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day, you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it.’ ”

These are our instructions for keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. Have you ever considered it just from the standpoint that these instructions are God's will for us? In fact, we can say that God's instructions throughout the Bible are His will for us. But specifically, for this particular time, this week, these eight days, He wants us keeping the Feast; that is His will for us. He wants us here. Now, on this particular day, it is His will that we have a holy convocation, and this is what we are doing right now.

He wants us not to do any of our everyday work on it. He wants you to be free from those responsibilities so that you can concentrate on this day, on the instructions and the fellowship and all that, that He has provided through this instruction. During the Feast He wants us to offer burnt offerings to Him. Now we are not going to go out on the beach and kill a goat or a sheep or a ram or whatever it is. We are not going to do that. We look at things through a spiritual lens.

What is a burnt offering? If you go to Leviticus 1, you begin to see His instructions for giving whole burnt offerings. And if you would listen to John Ritenbaugh’s sermons on the offerings of Leviticus, you would find out what the burnt offering represents. The burnt offering represents a holocaust. It means the whole thing is burned up fully in sacrifice to God; it means is that you are wholly or fully

devoted and dedicated to God. More of these offerings are made during the Feast of Tabernacles than any time of the year. It is seventy or one hundred seventy during this time. It is a lot. But this is God's will for us during this time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

His will is that we offer burnt offerings to Him throughout these days. Not just the Feast, but the Eighth Day, too. So, this Feast is a feast of dedication to Him. He is telling us here that the Feast of Tabernacles is quite different from a vacation. Do you offer burnt offerings when you go on your vacations, whatever that is, throughout the year? I do not think so.

This is a time when we can be devoted to God—meeting in holy convocation with Him and fellowshiping with our brethren; showing our complete dedication and devotion to Him and His way of life. Now I know that He does not mind at all that we eat and drink well, as a matter of fact, He commands it in Deuteronomy 14:22-27. He says, get some good food, get some good drink, if you can handle it—and do handle it, please. Enjoy food and drink and the fellowship that happens when people get together to eat.

Have fun with your brethren and in the fellowship He does not mind that we have enjoyable activities. That is all well and good, but He wants us to prioritize being dedicated to Him during this time. Let your light so shine while you are here. Work on those things that you need to work on while you are here.

God, and your relationship with Him, comes first; everything else comes a distant second. In other words, His aim in giving us these instructions for revealing His will in this chapter is that we have a spiritual Feast; and the physical Feast, all that enjoyment and bounty is a bonus—it is added on top. In these few verses, He has revealed His general will for us during this week of the year, this week of feasting.

Now we are going to get a little academic: God's will is one of His attributes of purpose, as scholars call it. His attributes of purpose are those traits of God that deal with making and carrying out decisions. These include His will, His freedom, and His omnipotence, along with other traits that are called His summary attributes. These are things like beauty, blessedness, glory, and perfection.

Summary attributes are those attributes or traits that apply or modify His other attributes. For instance, His will, modified by these summary attributes, is beautiful. His will is blessed. His will is glorious, His will is perfect. We could go on: His freedom is beautiful, blessed, glorious and perfect. His omnipotence is beautiful, blessed, glorious, and perfect. We could say this with holiness. We could say it about His omniscience. All of these summary attributes modify these larger attributes that He has.

His will is an attribute of purpose. That has to do with His way and ability of making and carrying out decisions—the choices that He makes.

Ephesians 1:11 [Breaking into the midst of a sentence here] In Him also, we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

You were predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

Here is a definition. This is from Wayne Grudem in his systematic theology about God's will. This is his definition. God's will is, “That attribute of God, whereby He approves and determines to bring about every action necessary for the existence and activity of Himself and all creation.”

It is a pretty big, overarching definition of what His will is. You can say, God exercises His will when He considers, decides, and establishes whatever He does—the whole process. God's will deals with both the general and specific choices He makes, whether He is going to act or whether He is not going to act. Call it the mental process of making a decision, as well as His declaration and enactment of what He decides.

It goes from the mental processes to the actual, or we might call it the physical—both saying or declaring, and doing of whatever it is that He has decided to do. It is the whole gamut of what He decides to happen. And, barring someone's disobedience or rebellion, it is what *will* happen, and in most cases, it does happen. Maybe go through a trip here and there as somebody stubbornly stands up against Him. But it eventually God's will prevails. In Ephesian 1:11, to put it in a different way, Paul is saying that God continually works out everything according to His purpose and His decisive resolve.

There are a couple of words here that maybe I should just highlight. “Works”: The purpose of Him who works all things, that is the word *energeo*, and it means to bring about or produce. The other word that I want to bring to your attention is “all things” that is the Greek word *panta*. It means everything—everything that exists, all creation. This is a huge scope we are talking about.

Paul is telling us here that God continually works out everything—all things, according to His purpose and decisive resolve. He is not just talking about what we might call physical things—spinning of the planets, the cycle of the seasons. He is not necessarily talking about just nature or the physical universe, or what have you.

Hebrews 1:3 [A well known scripture tells us that] He [Jesus Christ, that is] upholds all things by the word of His power.

This means He sustains everything that goes on. But it is not just His physical creation. If we read Ephesians 1, we would find out that Paul is speaking about spiritual things. He is going beyond just God the Creator in terms of the physical creation. He is talking about the spiritual creation that He is involved in, which is far more important. Paul, in Ephesians 1:11, is encouraging us with the awesome fact that we, the called, those that He predestined, are not only part of His will, but have been front and center in His plans for ages.

God did not get up one morning and say, “Hey, I’ve been noticing that guy. He's pretty neat. I think I will call him.” Nothing is spur of the moment with God. He thinks about things, for ages, if He needs to, so that He gets it exactly right. He has a perfect will. We know, as Paul goes on here in Ephesians 1:11 that God is determined. He has set His will to bring it all to pass according to His plan.

It should be encouraging to us that God has been thinking about this for ages. He has been thinking about you for ages, thinking about all the different circumstances that He wants to bring about. He is thinking about how He is going to put each one in His Family, into the body where it needs to be. He has got everything lined up and He is not only thinking about these things, He has chosen already. He has decided and He is working His plan, and He will work it to perfection.

So, in this verse, we glimpse the scope and certainty of God's will. He has long ago, before the foundation of the world, determined a goal, , a course of action, and the people that He wants. We do not know how specifically He has chosen each person.

We do know that people like Jeremiah and John the Baptist and others He knew before they were born. David talks about God's knowing him when he was in the womb and who knows how far back that was. But He has determined this goal and the course of action. That is His purpose and His plan. And it is awesome—way more awesome than we could come up with. It is awesome and perfect.

Though He has revealed some of it to us, we have a good idea about parts of it. We cannot know or fathom its breadth and glory. We are just too little minded. We cannot think in those terms. The dimensions are just mind boggling of the things that He has determined. In God's mind and in reality, everything in heaven and on earth is secondary to what God is working out, both universally and personally with each individual. To Him, it is done, because He has thought it through, He made a decision and gotten the ball rolling.

God has awesome sovereignty and omnipotence. And nothing can thwart His plan, nothing, no one. God is too much for us to understand. We do not get that we make a plan, and it goes off the tracks immediately. “Oh, it's raining outside, I can't do that today.” God does not have thoughts like that. It is going to get done. He will make sure it gets done. Nothing could move the mind or plan of God off its track. It is progressing directly toward His aims, at His pace, because it is all working out according to His will.

His will is a train that is chugging along the tracks without a hitch. Nothing can stop it. He has got a great big cow catcher out there front. If something comes along, it is just swept off to the side. And He keeps going because He is God. That is the grand depth and sweep of His will.

We can make other distinctions about His will. Theologians have long differentiated between two different aspects of His will. These are God's necessary will, and God's free will—two different things.

Exodus 3:13-14 [This is in His conversation with Moses on the mount there.] Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, what is His name? What shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus, you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.”

This has to do with God's necessary will. God's necessary will is what He must decide and do because of His nature, because of who He is. That is, God must choose and act a certain way, because He is God and has perfect, holy, righteous character. And His name reflects this. The name He gives to Moses states emphatically that He is Who He is. That does not change.

In some way, from our limited perspective, God cannot choose to live or act differently than His permanent and unchangeable character dictates. It is hard to imagine because you do not think of God as being limited.

But He has purposely limited Himself because that is His character. He has decided that is the way He is going to be. Therefore, there are certain decisions that He makes simply because He is perfect, righteous, and holy, and He will not act any other way. Along with this is another thing, He cannot

cease to exist. It is part of His character, part of His being that He is ever-living, He is eternal. He will not ever commit suicide. He will never stop being who He is. These are parts of His necessary will.

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

He cannot lie. You can also find this in Titus 1:2 where it says specifically, “God, who cannot lie.” This is part of His necessary will; He will never lie to you. He will never lie, period. He will never deceive. He will never fabricate; He will never obfuscate. He does not do that. He *cannot* lie because His character dictates that is part of His will. *He will not do it.*

So, there are some things that God must do or cannot do, because He will not do anything out of character. He will never cease being God. He is and does what He is and does. God is self-limiting, according to His being and character. And you know what? That is exactly what He is trying to teach us. He is trying to teach us to limit ourselves to His character—those things that He allows Himself to do, or that He says, is good. That is what He is trying to do, to make us pare off all those things that stand outside of that character.

Now, let us go to the other distinction: Free will, God's free will. These are decisions that are not necessarily according to His nature—things that He does not have to do, but does anyway, because He is free to make these decisions. He can choose.

These are actions that He does not or did not have to take. This is a lot of stuff that He did not have to do, and these are things that His character did not necessarily infringe on. They were not things that were necessarily a part of His character that He had to do. For instance: He did not have to create the universe. He did not have to start in the first place, but He freely chose to do it. He freely chose to create the universe.

He did not have to make the Milky Way galaxy a spiral galaxy. He could have made it any shape He wanted, but He decided the spiral kind was really pretty. I do not know why He thought to do it. I am not an astrophysicist, I do not know why He used that, but He did. He made it a spiral galaxy, and we are out here on one of the arms, far, far away from the center of the galaxy. He did that, He chose to do that.

Why did He put earth way out here if it was the center of all that He was doing? I do not know, but this is what He chose. I am glad He did not put us in a black hole. That was a great choice. He did not have to have one of our planets out there. Saturn has rings. Why did He make Saturn have rings? I do not know, it looks pretty. But He did it. He freely chose to do that.

He did not have to make zebras, or giraffes. Giraffes are kind of funny looking creatures. What about the platypus? He had spare parts left over? Maybe He said, “Doesn’t it make an interesting creature to confound those evolutionists?”

He did not have to put really tall mountains in Tibet and Nepal. He could have lowered them a little bit, made them a little easier climb. We do not need them that high. Put them down maybe to twenty four thousand feet. Then we might not need oxygen to get up there. Everybody would go beat a path

to the Nepalese door and say, “Hey, we want to climb your mountain,” But no, they have to go get all this gear and spend thousands of dollars and die at the top. But He did not have to do that. That was part of His free will to make really tall mountains in Nepal and Tibet.

Nothing in God's intrinsic nature made Him make you or me. More importantly, He did not have to redeem a special people for Himself, a bride for His Son, sons and daughters to inherit His Kingdom and eternal life. These things He did freely because He wanted to.

He and the Word got along so great for all that time, and still do. They could have just continued their peaceful existence for eternity, and not have to worry about stupid us in all of our bad decisions and all of our crying, and all of our neediness. They could have lived well and it would have been great. But no, He freely chose to make us; freely chose to have a plan that included us. His plan is not just to include us, but He will eventually glorify us to be like Him.

Revelation 4:9-11 [This is the glorification of the Father here with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders.] Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will, they exist and were created.”

Here in the fourth chapter of Revelation, we are told that the creation, all of it, is based solely on God's will and proceeds from God's will.

In Greek, this last phrase in verse eleven is a bit of a head scratcher. It says there they were, and they were created. It almost sounds like a little bit of stammering or something. They were, and they were created, but it is perfectly good Greek. It probably means something like they are sustained and they have come into being. This is referring to God's continuous upholding of all things, as well as His initial creation of everything, including all that is in it.

In a way we could say it is a refutation of the deistic idea that God may have created the world but left it to run on its own ever since. No, it says here very clearly that, yes, He created them, but He is sustaining it as well. He is right there, watching over it all.

Overall, this idea, this phrase supports the idea of God's free will; that He did all of this of His own volition, and He is worthy of all honor, glory, and praise because He was under no obligation to do it.

He loved us even before we were, and so He decided to put this whole creation together for us, to be the testing ground for His people.

Now we come to aspects of His will that frustrate us because we want to know about things. Do not we enquiring minds like to know? Especially we in the church like to know. Remember, most of us were pulled in by the hook of prophecy, “1975 in Prophecy.” Those were the booklets that everybody wanted. They heard Mr. Armstrong say on the radio. “The Book of Revelation Unveiled At Last,” and they would write in or call in for the book. They would want to know just how prophecy was going to be fulfilled.

We never seem, though, to be able to get any concrete answers to a lot of these things. And so we are frustrated because we have the same old general knowledge as anybody else. We make all kinds of speculations and they never come true.

We need to understand a few of these things about God's will so we have a fair idea why we do not know certain things. We are going to now look into two other aspects of His will: His revealed will—that is the good one; and the other one is His secret will. That is the one we are trying to pry into and keep getting frustrated about.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 29:29. This is a great one as a memory scripture, because it is 29:29. This scripture comes at the end of a renewal of the covenant. The children of Israel had come into Moab. They were about ready to cross over Jordan into the land, and they renew the covenant there before they cross over. The entire last half of chapter 29 is a warning to the children of Israel not to turn away from keeping the covenant, because God does not spare those who forsake Him. He curses them with all kinds of terrible things. It is kind of a small reiteration of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28; the blessings and the curses. Once you get to verse 29 you think it would say something that fits, but we get this:

Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God but those things which are revealed belonged to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

There are scholars (I do not put much stock in them) who say, “Oh, this was an editor, and he just decided to put his favorite proverb at the end of this.” I do not know if they have gone quite that far, but that is what they say—that this is a proverb tacked on in order to try to explain what has just happened, what has just been said. And it is not. It is a maxim there in ancient Israel, and we need to understand.

Remember, the lead up to this is renewing the covenant in the first half of the chapter, and listening to God's warning of all the bad things that are going to happen if we forsake the covenant. And so, He says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belonged to us and to our children forever, that we may do all they words of this law.”

What it essentially means is what God has in store for us in the future. He has not told us that, but He has revealed His law. That is what He is saying here.

What is His law? I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon. His law is essentially an encapsulation of His will for us. So, our best bet is to keep it as well as we can.

He is talking about two different kinds of will as we call them: His revealed will and His secret will. He is talking about both here. He is talking about first His secret will. He is going to keep secret those of the future things. But His revealed will is His law, His torah, His instruction.

That is what He has revealed to us. That is the will that we can know, putting this back into the context of ancient Israel. Israel can avoid the curses and destruction and death if they keep the covenant—what is revealed.

In a nutshell, God is saying, “If you do, if you keep what you know, you’ll be fine. And these other things will not touch you. Just follow what I have revealed and you’ll do great. Don’t worry about those secret things. If they were important, I would have told you.”

So, we have in this verse, the delineation of two parts of God's will—what He has told us in His Word, and what He has kept to Himself. Whether speaking of His purpose and plan, whether about His people in general or an individual in particular; whether history or prophecy, God has not divulged the entire matter. He has kept some things to Himself.

He has not given us an information dump by any means, so that we have all the background and the facts to make decisions. “This is what’s going to happen.” No, He has not done that. Instead, He has decided that some information is “need to know.” You can find it right here in the Bible. And the rest is top secret. Let us go to Acts 1 just to get an example of this from the lips of our Savior Himself.

Here He is about to ascend up to heaven, and His disciples want to know, “Tell us the secret things, Jesus and it is interesting how He replies.

Acts 1:6-8 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Here we have some revealed will and some secret will. Jesus felt that it was important that they know beforehand that they would be endued with power through the Holy Spirit so they could be witnesses of Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ultimately worldwide. That is what He determined that they should know. That was what is important, and it still is.

That is spoken to us, too. That is part of the work of the church. It is a major part of the work of the church, a major part of our work, to be witnesses to Him, wherever we go. Remember one of the first things out of His mouth, “I must be about My Father’s business.” This is essentially what He telling us is our business. “Look, you twelve,” He said. “Keep your minds off of when all this is going to happen. You do the work. Your work is to be witnesses, because you're going to get the power to do that wherever you go. We will start here in Jerusalem, real small, and then we will start expanding out until you can go all over the world and witness of Me.”

He says, “That’s what you need to do, not get bogged down in dates, or this is exactly the way it has got to happen, because it says it in back here and Ezekiel or whatever.” No, He totally avoids it. “You be witnesses of Me, because I’m going to give you the power to do it.” “And besides, “Fellas, this is in the Father’s hand, not Mine, that is His knowledge to reveal and He is not going to reveal it until the time comes.”

He held back the information about when He would restore the kingdom of Israel. We can also find this in Matthew 24:36. This information is firmly in the mind of the Father, and no one will pry it out in this age.

By the time we know when it is going to happen, it is going to be too late. I know you probably realized this because I have said it many times. I believe that it is vain and perhaps even spiritually

perilous, to try to discover the timing of Christ's return. Now, why do I think that? It often leads to a person drifting away from God. It often leads to great disappointment. And it often leads to people distrusting God. It undermines credibility and can distract us from what is truly important—that is, Christian living and witnessing for God. That is what is really important, not what day He is going to come.

I do not know if I told you this story. One day, somebody at Ambassador College came running into Dr. Meredith's office, "Hey, Dr. Meredith, did you hear what Dr. Hoeh said? He's got a new date for when Christ is going to arrive." And Dr. Meredith said, "Oh, really?" "Yeah, yeah, this is really great, you ought to hear this." He said, "Well, okay, but he hasn't been right yet." It is probably apocryphal, but I heard it when I was at Ambassador College. But that is true, no one will ever be right. No human that is, only God, the Father knows.

Jesus here is giving us our marching orders about what is priority for us, "You are going to be given the Holy Spirit. Use it for Me, for My work, for witnessing."

Another thing that dwelling on prophecy does, especially when Christ is going to come, is that it tends to get us focused on the physical aspects of God's Kingdom—its, politics, its physical power over the nations. "Yeah, we're going to have a rod of iron, and we're going to smite this nation and that nation, and the Egyptians because they're not going to come up to the Feast of Tabernacles, with no rain." That is great, but it gets us all involved in all those little things that are not really important, not to us now.

And so what do we do when we are all focused on those physical aspects—the timing, and when, where, and all those these sorts of things. It means is that we have probably stopped thinking about the spiritual things, especially the character that we need to develop as individuals in cooperation with God to wield the power and the position that He is preparing us for. Knowing the date, knowing the when and where is not going to help you much when you have got five cities, ten cities, whatever it is, that you have to judge and rule.

What should we be doing? The New King James Version heads this paragraph with "Walk in Wisdom." That is a pretty good summation.

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then, that you walked circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the LORD is.

The apostle is telling us what we should be doing with the time that we have. We have a finite length of time on this earth. We have a small window to do what we need to do. And a big part of His instruction here is that we should be filling our time with coming to an understanding of God's will.

It is all here. The pages of the Bible are chock full of God's revealed will, not necessarily His secret will. What He has revealed in these thirty-one thousand one hundred and two chapters is more than we can absorb in a lifetime. As for the secret things, we have faith in God that when it comes to revealing His will, He knows best.