

- *There are many things we say as Christians- saying's prevalent in Christian culture, that we really should ask "What does that mean?"... Examples*
- **God won't give you more than you can handle**
- *Have more than we can handle all the time! This is distortion of 1 Cor 10:13- "Not tempted beyond what we can bear"... but NT teaches we aren't able to handle life apart from faith in God, apart from Trusting God. BUT What do we mean by that?*
- **Trust God**
- *Scripture tells us to trust God, and we say this all the time, but different people mean different things when they say this. ANOTHER...*
- **God is in control- God is sovereign.**
- *Was God in control of business failure that cost families livelihoods? Control when person sinned and devastated other people's lives?*
- *GOD IS in control, but does this mean we don't have a role to play in what happens in our own lives and the lives of others? I don't think so, but what do we mean when we say this?*
- *HUGE questions, and all three of these point to...*

† **Just what do we mean by "The Lord's Will?"**

- *Biblical concept, but concept we often cheapen or misuse in Christian culture*
  - o *God as a scapegoat- we face consequence of our own actions, but say "must have been God's will".*
  - o *On flipside, when something doesn't happen as result of our own inaction "must not have been God's will."*
  - o *OR, perhaps something happens to us, beyond our control, and we want to find something to explain why this happened, attach some meaning... and we may say "it must have been God's will"*
- *In all of these, we are thinking of "Gods will' in terms of God controlling, or at least influencing, circumstances and outcomes. THIS can get nuanced, because scripture definitely demonstrates God as being active in our world- this is a central theme of the book of Acts.*
- *AND YET, scripture also speaks to our responsibility for our choice and actions. We also can be very inconsistent and biased in how we think of God's activity in our own lives, in contrast with the larger reality of human events.*
- *MOREOVER, the idea of God's sovereignty- to what EXTENT does God pre-ordain and control what happens in life- this is one of the great debates throughout all of Christian history- AND, I'll humbly add- a question impossible to answer.*
- *But the concept of GOD'S WILL is essential for us to deeply consider. It is thoroughly biblical, and it's easy for us to get trapped in misunderstandings that can lead to confusion and frustration. EXAMPLE- one of NT's most famous statements about God's will is Romans 12:1-2...*

**Romans 12:1-2** *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

- *Based on this, a prevalent belief in Christian culture is that God has a perfect circumstantial plan and will FOR YOUR LIFE, and it's like a straight line... a series of*

*choices and actions, that if you are obedient enough, do the right things, and make the right choices, then you will be in God's perfect will and will experience his blessings.*

- *Trouble comes when life gets really hard, and we think "I must be outside of God's will". THIS IS VERY COMMON struggle I've seen in people over the years.*
- *Multiple issues with this idea, but biggest is when we define God's will exclusively- even primarily- in terms of specific decisions and specific outcomes.*
- *YOU SEE, IF we really search this out through the NT, we will see that..*
- *God's will is more about who we are and how we live than whether or not we should do specific things.*

**1 Peter 2:13** *For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.*

- *DOING GOOD... this is a picture of basic obedience- the fruit of the spirit- integrity, courage, LOVE*

**Philippians 2:13** *for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

- *What is God's 'good purpose' he is working in us to fulfill? May be specific decisions and tasks, but the greater NT theme is God's purpose of revealing himself through our character, our nature... God's purpose that we be present, participating, a force of unity within his church... God's purpose that the truth of Jesus Christ would be made known- and made beautiful- by how we live and what we say.*
- *You see, we often may pray "Lord show me your will" about a specific decision... but in a much broader New Testament sense....*
- *To pray "Lord, show me your will", is to pray "Lord, I surrender to your work of change/transformation in my life."*
- *In our flesh, we want to be able to call upon God for help with decisions that seem important to us, while at the same time pushing to the side the deeper work of transformation and spiritual maturity God wants to be doing.*
- *But again, from a NT perspective, it's virtually impossible to seek God's will in terms of WHAT WE SHOULD DO, if we aren't surrendered to God's will in WHO WE ARE.*

**1 Thessalonians 4:3a-** *It is God's will that you should be sanctified: (experience change and transformation)*

- *This passage goes on to speak of sexual immorality- but it's a principle to be applied to all of who we are.*
- *In first thessalonians 5, Paul describes God's Will in terms of three foundational attributes – three postures- of life itself for the believer...*

**1 Thess 5:16-18** *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

- *Is it God's will I change jobs, make this purchase, enter into this relationship???? I don't know, but in each of these dynamics, IT IS GOD'S WILL that HE is your source of joy, that prayer is an essential and ongoing presence in your relationship with God, and you are living with a perspective of gratitude. THIS IS GOD'S WILL, even more than "Door A or Door B"*
- *NOW, all that said...*

**Reality!** The Spirit will, at times, bring leadership into specific decisions we face in life. With that said, here's a question:

*It is possible for disciples who are sincerely listening to the Spirit, and sincerely desiring to be led by the Spirit, to reach opposing conclusions about how the Spirit is leading?*

– **THIS brings us to our story, as Paul has concluded his third missionary journey, and now begins his...**

† **The journey to Jerusalem**

**Acts 21:1-16** *After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. <sup>2</sup> We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. <sup>3</sup> After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. <sup>4</sup> We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup> When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. <sup>6</sup> After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home. <sup>7</sup> We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. <sup>8</sup> Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. <sup>9</sup> He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. <sup>10</sup> After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. <sup>11</sup> Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" <sup>12</sup> When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup> When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done." <sup>15</sup> After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem. <sup>16</sup> Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.*

– **OKAY- before we jump into main focus, lets cover...**

† **A few details from the journey**

• **Philip and his daughters**

– **Philip, if you recall, was one of the seven church leaders raised up to oversee the distribution of benevolence within the growing Jerusalem church, all the way back in chapter SIX. Philip went on to take the Gospel into Samaria, and it was Philip who was led by the Spirit into the desert near GAZA where he met and baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch.**

– **Comment about Philipp's daughters is interesting. It could also be translated "daughters were 'prophets' (NASB). Text doesn't say they prophesied while Paul was there, just this was a way God worked through them. If they had prophesied regarding Paul's journey, almost certain Luke would have included this, as he did with what Agabus had to say.**

– **This is detail Luke saw to be important enough to include, and speaks to authenticity of Luke's account. I DO HAVE TO POINT OUT... here we have four women occupying a place of recognized spiritual authority- as prophetesses, they were speaking truth from God- and while Luke doesn't give us any more detail, when they spoke it very likely would have been in the presence of other disciples.... AND, what is the word for a gathered group of disciples of Jesus? THE CHURCH. WOMEN, SPEAKING in a place of spiritual authority, in the church. Hmmm.... Moving on.**

• **Agabus the prophet**

– **We first met Agabus back in Acts 11, when he predicted a famine would hit Roman world. We know from other ancient sources this famine did happen**

– **Like Philip's daughters, Agabus was recognized among the believers as possessing the spiritual gift of prophecy- The Spirit would work through him to bring truth and discernment to the disciples.**

– **One other important theme we see in this part of the story... the presence, and blessing...**

- **The blessing of COMMUNITY**

– **Just in THIS part of his journey, we see Paul staying in four different homes, communities of believers. Yet another in continuous string of examples of how God's work throughout Acts happened in context of the community of disciples- doing life together, serving together, growing together, as the church.**

**OKAY... lets get back to question from earlier- It is possible for disciples who are sincerely listening to the Spirit, and sincerely desiring to be led by the Spirit, to reach opposing conclusions about how the Spirit is leading?**

– **Because as we follow Paul's journey, we see...**

**† Disagreements of will**

– **Start back in chap 19, Paul is still in Ephesus**

**Acts 19:21** After all this had happened, Paul (Resolved in the Spirit) to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also."

– **Clear picture- Paul concluding that the Spirit was leading him to go back to Jerusalem, and Rome.**

– **Last week, in his farewell address to the leaders of the church in Ephesus, Paul said...**

**Acts 20:22** And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.

– **THEN, fast forward to Paul staying with the disciples in the city of TYRE...**

**Acts 21:4** We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

– **Sense here is that the Spirit revealed that Paul would face great danger in Jerusalem, and because of their great love for him, these believers interpreted the Spirit's leading to mean that Paul should not go. CONTRAST this to Paul's words back in 20, where he said, "The spirit is leading me to Jerusalem, even though I don't know what will happen there."**

– **THEN, at Philips house, the Prophet Agabus uses a graphic illustration to point blank tell Paul that in Jerusalem he will be arrested, bound, and turned over to the Roman authorities. AGABUS DOESN'T tell Paul not to go, but he powerfully tells Paul what will happen if he does.**

– **WHEN we look at this sequence of events, we see YET AGAIN a compelling picture of the SPIRIT working through the community of believers to advance God's purposes.**

– **IN PAUL'S CASE, the Spirit is clearly directing him to go to Jerusalem, and ultimately to Rome. Paul is settled in his heart this is God's will, although he personally doesn't fully know what this will look like.**

– **IN THE CASE of the other disciples around Paul, the Spirit reveals to them what Paul's journey will entail.**

– **KEY! Even though these friends loving bias for Paul's safety causes them to mis-interpret the Spirits leading in terms of what they want to happen- FOR PAUL not to go- NONETHELESS, through these friends, the Spirit is preparing Paul to understand what he will be facing.**

- **CHURCH- important lesson for us here.** I'M NOW QUOTING FROM THEOLOGIAN DARRELL BOCK...
  - We see here a community of fellow believers deliberating in a situation where the stakes are very high. Literally life and death. THIS INTERACTION between Paul and his friends- about whether or not he should face suffering- shows us that sometimes WELL- INTENTIONED PEOPLE can be wrong about what God desires.
  - Just because we deeply and emotionally sense that God is telling us something doesn't necessarily mean that he is.
  - THIS IS ALSO KEY! Once it becomes clear that Paul is being led by the Spirit to face what lies ahead, these fellow believers who LOVE HIM and also desire the Spirit's leading, they embrace Paul's decision and give him their support. Considering the entire situation, they set aside their initial conviction and confess- in a statement of profound trust- MAY THE LORD'S WILL BE DONE.
  - This scene shows us that different people who genuinely are seeking the Spirit's leadership can- for a variety of reasons and honest biases- come up with different understandings of how God may be leading- sometimes in direct contradiction with another sincere believer.
  - When this happens, a humble flexibility in seeking God leading will allow for support and unity to grow stronger in a situation that otherwise could lead to conflict.
  - This will include the need for sincere interaction- listening to another's understand, honest dialog- NOT just a desire to dig in and defend our own position.
  - IF ALL BELIEVERS possess God's Spirit- which we do- this means we must be willing to listen to one another and learn from each other- be it a church facing an important ministry decision, or a couple facing a decision in their family.
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- BRING THIS FULL CIRCLE- when Paul's friends finally confessed "The Lord's Will Be Done", what did they mean? What did this change?
  - One thing that changed, even if they couldn't have realized it at the time, is a great gift faith in Christ brings- the gift we've talked about a lot. FOR THESE believers, in the midst of a very difficult and emotional situation- the PRESSURE was off.
- ✠ The pressures off!
- You see, very often in life- even as sincere people of faith- we operate in mode of "MY will needs to be done." We all have responsibilities, goals, important things that need to be done. Perhaps what we are 'willing' to happen is good, or something good we desire to see in another person's life we deeply care about. Tell ourselves, "If I can just do this right, then I'll make things better"... and sometimes we do. We do have influence, although we don't have control.
  - The big problem is how we tend to attach our sense of worth, value, and identity to how well we get these things done... as a result, THE PRESSURE IS ON.
  - BUT, in CONTRAST, when we are truly able to say "Lord, Your will be done", this opens the release valve on the pressure cooker of life.
  - This doesn't mean we don't care, or that we don't have responsibilities. IT DOES MEAN that we are free to humbly engage these dynamics of life with wisdom and grace, while releasing the pressure of what will happen into the hands of God.
  - Consider what we read in James...

**James 4:13-15** Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” **(our will be done)**<sup>14</sup> Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.<sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

- **Some have interpreted this to mean God is a micromanager, and our sense of free will is an illusion. I don’t think this James’ point.**
- **James doesn’t say there is anything WRONG with making plans, living life, or even making money. The trap is when we look to these things as our source of identity, well-being, and our source of LIFE.**
- **Again, in contrast, there is great freedom in recognizing just how dependent we are upon God’s Grace. WE ARE but a mist that appears and then vanishes. This truth doesn’t devalue our lives, it simply reveals that our value comes from God, not our own performance- not our own will.**
- **AND SO we are able to engage life with energy, influence, and purpose, but free of the crushing burden of thinking we are in control of what happens next. This is the faith to say...**
- **“LORD- I desire to be led by your spirit... and with the light that I have, I’m making decisions and working toward certain goals, certain outcomes. But it recognize that I have no control over what will happen—and whatever DOES happen, my value, my source of hope and peace- my identity, the wellness of my soul- is from YOU.**

To say (and truly mean it) “Lord, Your will be done,” is to believe three things:

- **God is SOVEREIGN**
- **We’ll never fully understands what this means. God IS in control, and yet he has entrusted to us responsibility and purpose. But ultimately, God’s will WILL be done- with us or without us- and we can rest in the certainty of this hope.**
- **AND THIS IS A SOURCE OF HOPE when we don’t just believe God is sovereign, but that...**
- **God is GOOD**
- **THIS TOO we will never fully understand, and there will always be circumstantial evidence, and giant philosophical questions that will challenge God’s goodness. But with the cross as the ultimate testimony, God calls us into the great freedom of trusting in His goodness.**
- **And church, because God is sovereign, and because He IS GOOD, we may take the step of opening our hands, loosening our grip on what WE want to be done- how WE want things to be- and believing in our hearts...**
- **I can trust God with the OUTCOME**
- **This is the great gift of saying, from the depths of our heart... LORD, may YOUR WILL BE DONE.**