

Prayer Lesson Three**Freedom in Prayer: Knowing the Will of God**

In order to have confidence that what we are praying will come to pass, we first need to know that what we are praying is God's will.

Now this is the confidence that we have³ in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears¹ us.

¹⁵ And if we know² that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have³ the petitions that we have asked of Him. 1 John 5:14-15

I It is assumed that no Christian in his/her right mind is going to want something that is not God's will. However, John makes it very clear that our confidence in prayer comes from KNOWING that what we are asking is indeed the will of God.

A *1 John 5:14-15 makes several things clear.*

1 There is a clear will of God.

Ephesians 5:17

Therefore⁴ do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

2 We can know what God's will is.

James 1:5-8

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

1 Corinthians 2:16

But as it is written:

*"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man*

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

¹⁰ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit

¹ Akouei: He is hearing us, He is giving us audience; His ears are hearing us

² Oidamen: We have perceived; we are aware

³ Echomen: We are having

⁴ Because the days are evil, therefore...

of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. ¹⁶ For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" **But we have the mind of Christ.**

John 16:13

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

3 God wants us to pray according to His will SO THAT He can do it.

4 The will of God does NOT automatically happen.

- o Things happen that are NOT God's will.
- o There are things that are God's will that don't happen.

a We are told to pray that His will be done.

Matthew 6:10

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

b We are told to know what His will is.

Ephesians 5:17

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

c It is not His will that people perish, and yet everyday people do.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

d We are told to resist the enemy. This means the enemy has a will which is to deceive and to harm us, but we are to resist him.

1 Peter 5:8-9

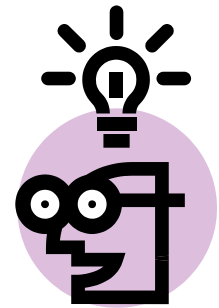
Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith.

e People have the right to choose. Often they choose to NOT do the will of God. This is obviously most true of non-believers.

f While men have a choice and often make wrong choices that affect others, God is not "allowing" evil to come into our lives for some divine purpose. (However, He will turn it to our good.)

5 Another thing that 1 John 5:14-15 makes clear is God will give us what we request that is His will.

John 16:24



Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Wrong Responses to God's Way of Doing Things

1. "Well, if it's God's will to do something why do I have to ask? Why doesn't He just do it?" *(This person is basically saying, "God, I don't the way you've set things up. Let's do it MY way. You just make sure your will is always happening in my life that way I'll know that everything that happens in my life is from You and then whatever happens happens. I'll be cool with that.") This person is telling God how to operate (dictating the terms of his relationship with God). He is walking in his flesh and not in the Spirit. He is a pacifist in prayer.*
2. "I am happy to have Jesus. Why should I ask for more than that?" *The answer to this is simple. He wants you to ask. He asks you to ask. He wants to bless you and bring you joy. LET HIM LOVE YOU IN THIS WAY.*
3. "Well, I don't believe that it is true He will give me what I ask, so I'm not going to ask." *This person does not believe that God will do what He has promised. He is walking in unbelief. He will not receive what God has provided.*
4. "I don't know if this is God's will or not, so I'll do without." *This person needs to find out what God's will is and then ask.*

Correct Responses to God's Way of Doing Things

1. "I know this is the will of God. I know He hears me when I ask. I will ask with confidence believing I receive what I am asking."
2. "I'm not sure if this is God's will, so I will study the word to find out and then ask and receive it."
3. "The word of God does not specifically tell me if what I want to ask for is His will or not, so I will pray for God's wisdom and an understanding of His will, THEN I will pray with confidence."

II The logical next question is: How can we know what the will of God is?

A The primary and most crucial way to understand the will of God is to have a proper understanding of the Word of God in light of the New Covenant⁵.

⁵ *Having a mixture view of scripture (both Old and New Covenant requirements, etc.) will GREATLY CONFUSE our efforts in prayer. The Old Covenant taught that in order to be blessed we did what what right. If you didn't do right, you were cursed (do good, get good; do bad, get cursed). Under the New Covenant we are ALREADY BLESSED and can do nothing but believe in order to obtain the promises and provision of God. All the promises of God are received by God's grace through faith in His Son.*

1 The New Covenant is NOT like the Old. We need to understand that the cross and resurrection CHANGED EVERYTHING.

2 What we think is God's will, must AGREE with what is written. God is not going to listen to illegitimate "prayers".

✎ He isn't going to hear you when you ask for things that would hurt you. "God I just can't take it. Please take my life."⁶

✎ He isn't going to hear you if you ask for something that would be immoral. "God, help me rob this bank."

✎ God is not going to listen to prayers to fulfill our lust. "God, I ask that you give me riches and fame beyond measure so that I can have lots of women (men) chasing after me and several mansions to enjoy them in."

James 4:2-3

Yet you do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

B We need to understand the New Covenant provisions of the cross to be convinced of what He has provided (what is His will) so that we can ask in confidence and receive what we ask.

Philemon 1:6

I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing⁷ which is in you for Christ's sake.

1 It is God's will to save.

a Therefore we can ask in confidence that God will do His part toward bringing that person to Himself. The person for whom we are praying can still chose to reject Jesus.

2 It is God's will to heal. He provided healing at the cross at the same time he provided salvation.

1 Peter 2:24

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were⁸ healed.

3 It is God's will to provide for your needs and cause you to prosper (have more than enough) in all you do.

1 Corinthians 16:2

On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

3 John 1:2

⁶ It is said, "Be careful what you ask for, you might get it," IS NOT IN THE BIBLE. It is a superstition. When we ask for evil things, we open the door for the enemy to bring them to pass. God will not grant evil to us.

⁷ This can be a wonderful motivator for studying the New Testament.

⁸ athEte: You may be being healed

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

Matthew 6:31-33

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

- 4 It is God’s will for you to be completely free from any habit, weakness, sin, etc.**

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

- 5 It is God’s will for you to be free of any demonic/satanic oppression. The enemy has been defeated and has no authority in your life unless you give it to him by believing in his lies.**

Hebrews 2:14-15

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

- 6 It is God’s will for you to be free.**

Galatians 5:1

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery⁹.

- C There are many areas in our lives that are not specifically mentioned in the word of God. To know God’s will in these things, we simply ask Him to show us. In this instance we are being guided by His Holy Spirit and by His peace.**

- 1 We can ask God for specific wisdom.**

James 1:5-8

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

- 2 We can trust that He is giving us desires that line up with His will. (See I.A.2 above)**

Philippians 2:13

For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

- 3 We don’t need to stress about routine things. God has given us a brain to make logical decisions: *Should I buy this coat or that one? Should I get roast beef or chicken?***

- 4 We are led by His Holy Spirit and He will show us things to come.**

⁹ God through Paul is clearly speaking of the slavery of the Law here, but of course, God does not want us to be oppressed by anything because He has set us free.

5 We are His sheep and we hear His voice and follow Him.

6 His peace will guide us.

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

- *brabeuō (brab-yoo'-o) to arbitrate, that is, (generally) to govern (figuratively prevail): - rule.*

D If our prayer request involves another person, their faith is also involved. Not even Jesus could do mighty works due to the unbelief of others.

Matthew 13:58

Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

E If our prayer request directly affects someone else (the most obvious being our spouse) we need to be in agreement with each other.

Matthew 18:19

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

F Of course you can't pray against another human being's will.

III Important Things to Remember When Petitioning God

A When we pray God's will, we are putting ourselves in agreement with God, and it will happen if we believe.

B If we don't know God's will, we should seek it out, and then ask with confidence.

C We cannot base our understanding of God's will on our experience or that of others. (*We'll mention this more in future lessons.*)

D There are many things which are continually ours and we do not need to ask God to give them to us, but rather thank Him for them (salvation, His abiding presence, His power, His anointing, His righteousness, holiness, etc.).

E God will say “Yes,” to all things asked in His will, and will immediately begin to bring that answer to be, but it might take some time for the result to appear, especially if others are involved or if we are dealing with unbelief (*also to be covered in a future lesson*). We can rest assured that God is working to make it happen.

F The person in whom we are having faith and hoping is GOD. He cannot lie and He keeps His promises. He will not fail you.

IV If your prayer is not answered:

- A You might be praying something that is not promised.**
- B You might be praying something that God knows will hurt you or someone else.**
- C You might be praying against someone else's will.**
- D You might have unbelief¹⁰.**

Understanding the Sovereignty of God¹¹

Before we can understand what the will of God is, we need to discuss the meaning of the word *sovereignty*. When we say someone or something is sovereign, we mean that it is its own supreme power and is free from external control.¹² For example, when a nation says that it is a sovereign nation, it is declaring that it has the right to govern itself, and will not accept dominance by other nations.

God is sovereign. He is His own supreme power and He is free from external control. He's the boss. Human beings do not get to set the universe as we'd like it, for example. We don't create the laws of physics. They exist because God established them. Similarly in spiritual matters, we don't get to tell God on what terms we will have a relationship with Him. He gets to do that. He has provided eternal redemption through His Son, and He has said there is no other way. So, no amount of arguing on our part is going to change that.

When it comes to the sovereignty of God, most people believe what I've written so far, but then go in different directions from this point. Some people believe that because God can do what He wants how He wants, when and where He wants to whom He wants, etcetera, that *everything* that happens is the *will* of God. They believe that if God is not the instigator of a certain event, He at the very least "allowed" it to happen. This is to clearly state their belief that God is in perfect control at all times of every action that takes place on the face of the earth. So, if something horrible happens, God either did it or allowed it to happen. Another way I've heard quite religious people put this is, "Whatever happens in this life is for a divine purpose."

Take an extreme example, that of the terrorist attacks of 9-11. People who take this view would say that God either caused these to happen or He at the very least allowed them to happen. Well-meaning Christians reacted just this way after the attack. They said things such as 9-11 was God's judgment on the United States, and then depending on their particular point of view, it would be for a certain reason. Some said He was judging the U.S. for allowing millions of abortions; others said it was because homosexuality is permitted in our society; others said it was because we haven't been a good enough friend to Israel. That is to say, in effect, that God was responsible for the deaths of over 3,000 people many of them born again Christians who had not engaged in any of the activities listed here!

This point of view of God's sovereignty also means that anyone who is murdered, raped, robbed, or discriminated against can legitimately look to God and ask, "Why? Why

¹⁰ *You are going to love, yes love, the lesson on unbelief. It will set you free. So, don't let yourself worry or fret about it. Perhaps do some word searches on the topic before we meet.*

¹¹ Taken from *The Love of God Discipleship Series: Your Response to God's Love*, Lesson Six "Knowing the Will of God" by C.D. Hildebrand

¹² Merriam-Webster's Dictionary
C.D. Hildebrand

did this happen? Why did You allow this to happen?” In fact, those who take this to an extreme believe that when horrible things happen we should actually thank God for them.

Sovereignty Verses Fatalism

What I have described above amounts to fatalism with a religious twist. Fatalism is “the doctrine that all events are predetermined by fate and are therefore unalterable”¹³. The religious twist is that “fate” is God. If we believe that everything that happens on the earth is God’s will, we live in essence the same as the fatalist. ¡Qué será, será! Whatever will be, will be! However, in order to take on this point of view we must ignore the multitude of Scriptures that indicate otherwise.

Let us go back to this verse, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” With just this verse the concept of God’s sovereignty as described above begins to erode. If God does what He wants, there is no need for us to know what His will is since it will automatically happen anyway, and even if we don’t do His will, that ends up being His will since it will be *allowed*. It doesn’t matter that we are not to kill someone. According to that concept of God’s sovereignty, it ends up being God’s will anyway. If God wanted to stop it, He could have, we are told. This is ridiculous thinking. Here are some more Scriptures that negate the concept of fatalistic sovereignty.

In **Matthew 6:10** Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. One of the things He told them to pray was, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus told them to ask that His will be done. If we are to believe that everything that happens is God’s will, there is no reason to pray that His will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. We know also, that in heaven, where God’s will is done, is a place of life and peace, completely opposite of earth.

In **Mark 3:35** Jesus responded to those who had told Him that His mother and brothers and sisters had come to visit Him. Looking at His followers, He said, “For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.” Jesus was clearly implying that there would be those who did NOT do the will of God. That shows that God’s will is not always done.

We also know that God gave His Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life. In **2 Peter 3:9**, we read that God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” Do all come to repentance? No. Every day hundreds die who will perish. It is NOT His will than any perish, and yet they do.

Consider also that we have an enemy in this life named Satan. He is defeated by Jesus, but still seeks to “steal, to kill, and to destroy” anyone who will believe in him. It isn’t God’s will that any of His children be robbed, murdered or destroyed, and yet, sadly, it does happen.

I believe that many times it happens because we do not understand the true nature of the sovereignty of God. Instead of knowing God’s will concerning a certain situation, we pray, and if nothing happens, we consider *that* to be the will of God. In other words, because we do not know what the will of God is, we cannot receive it. “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

A Proper Perspective

¹³ American Heritage Dictionary
C.D. Hildebrand

God is sovereign. That is still not debated. He is the One who created it all, and He is the One who gets to decide how things will be. As all Kings He has ordained that certain things will be certain ways in His kingdom. Because He is a righteous and just King, He will not allow things to be any way but as He determines is best for His citizens. At first glance, you might think that this just described fatalism. Yet, not at all. Simply, we declare that God is sovereign, and that our sovereign God has established certain aspects of His kingdom that He has declared unalterable.

There is one thing that our sovereign God cannot do. In fact, the Word says that it is IMPOSSIBLE for Him to do this. Don't be shocked. He Himself has decided that He would place this limitation on Himself. In fact, if He were to violate this limitation, the entire universe would implode! In **Hebrews 6:18** it says that "it is impossible for God to lie." He never has, He does not, and He never will lie. Consider **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 He not do?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*

God cannot and will not lie. This is the way that He wants it, and because He is sovereign, He will abide by this limitation He has chosen. What He promises to us, He will always do. We can rest in this fact. If He has spoken something will be, then it will be.

This is only one of the many examples that refute the false concept of fatalistic sovereignty. There are others. For this reason, understanding the King of the Kingdom of God is very important. What other principles has He set out?

Another very important aspect of God's sovereignty is His Word. It does what it is supposed to do. Whatever He promises, it is ours if we believe. In **Isaiah 55:8-11** God speaks of Himself saying,

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.
9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.
10 " For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."*

The sovereignty of God establishes that His word will accomplish what it was sent out to do. This is closely linked with His inability to lie. That is why Paul confidently declares in **2 Corinthians 1:20**, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." **His promises are His word, and if He were to ever not keep His word, He would be a liar, and that is IMPOSSIBLE.**

So, we see that the sovereign God in His infinite sovereignty is who He is based on principles He has chosen. Because He is a benevolent God, He has determined that certain

things will come about in certain ways. For example, He tells us to ask, to seek, to knock (**Luke 11:9**). He tells us we will receive from Him whatever we ask in prayer believing (**Mt. 21:22**). He says that whatever we ask the Father in Jesus name, He will do it (**Jn. 16:23**). He tells us we can have whatever we say (**Mk. 11:23**). He has made it so that if we believe, all things are possible to us (**Mk. 9:23**). In His sovereignty He has decided that if we abide in Him and His words in us, we can ask what we will or desire and it will be done (**Jn. 15:7**). All of these Scriptures indicate that we are in many ways involved in bringing about the sovereign will of God. This should honor and amaze us.

Free Will

Our sovereign God has also determined that mankind has a free will. This means that we have the God-given right to choose. God could have created man as a robotic or puppet-type, or he could have made us like the animals that live their lives primarily by instinct. However, God wanted to love and be loved. A being that is programmed to obey or one that is ruled only by automatic reactions cannot love because it cannot choose.

A good example of this is the love between a man and a woman. If the woman has no choice, we call this rape. There is no satisfaction in this act beyond the demented. However, in marriage, if she chooses to give herself, we call this love. It is a mutual free choice that springs from a desire to give joy to the object of one's love. Additionally, when this sharing becomes a duty instead of a gift, it loses meaning.

Man has demonstrated his free will repeatedly over the course of human history. God wanted Adam and Eve to live in the Garden of Eden and to have unobstructed fellowship with Him. He gave them everything, but He also gave them a free will. He created man to love and to love Him in return. Giving man the choice to obey was an act of love. Obeying God would have also been an act of love. We know that man chose to submit to Satan instead of to God.

Did God know this was going to happen? Yes, of course He did¹⁴. He knows everything. In fact, it says that Jesus "was slain from the foundation of the earth." This means that while God created the earth, the plan of salvation had already been made.

God has always given man a choice, and He urges us to obey. Sometimes He intervenes to help us obey (consider Balaam¹⁵ and Jonah¹⁶), but the choice to obey is still always ours. It is therefore inaccurate to say that everything that happens is God's will.

God's will is NOT always done, that is why bad things happen in this earth, but God has made a promise to us as believers in His Son. In **Romans 8:27-29** it says,

Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

¹⁴ Some debate the foreknowledge of God to this extent, but at the very minimum, God knew it was a possibility because he had given man the choice.

¹⁵ Balaam was hired to curse Israel. God intervened by allowing a donkey to speak to him. Balaam could have gone on with his plan, but the donkey and the angel of the Lord rather got his intention that God was clearly NOT in favor of the plan (Numbers 22).

¹⁶ God told Jonah to go to Nineveh to tell them to repent. Jonah didn't want to do it, so he went in the opposite direction. When a storm arose, Jonah jumped ship and was swallowed by a large fish where he spent three days. He could have still refused, but finally decided to go to Nineveh (Jonah).

God determined beforehand that those who would come to Him would be conformed to the image of His Son. This is our destiny. God is working in us to make the will of God happen. No matter what happens, even if it is not God's will, God will turn it around for our good because we are called according to His purpose. The New Living Translation puts it this way,

And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. 28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. 29 For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Instead of finding meaning in adverse situations by attributing to God every event in history, let us instead gain a proper perspective on the principles of the King and His kingdom. When we realize that He has given us authority to pray that His will be done, and that by believing in His promises we can also see His will accomplished, we regain the rightful sense that God is in control as far as we are concerned. We also find peace in knowing that even if something horrible happens that is against us, God will turn it around to actually work for our good.