

God's Will

In the name of him who gave his body and blood on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, dear friends in Christ: I expect that from time to time every Christian asks the question, "What is God's will for me?" It only makes sense: as children of the heavenly Father we want always to be doing his good and perfect will, and so it's right that we seek it out in all that we do. And certainly, he has given us plenty of guidance in his holy Word. He didn't leave us guessing. We have lots of instructions regarding what kinds of behaviors he approves of and what kind he condemns. Still, sometimes we're looking for a little more specific guidance. When faced with a difficult decision or when pondering the kinds of questions that shape the major trajectory of one's life, like where to live, whom to marry, what kind of career to pursue or to change to, whether or not to retire, and so on, Christians are right to want to know what the Lord has to say about it. And as a pastor, it happens on occasion that someone will ask me, "What is the Lord's will for me in *this* particular situation? What would he have me do?"

When someone makes an inquiry like that, I'm more than happy to direct them to the pertinent Scriptures that address their issue. And very often after looking at a few texts the answer emerges right away. But other times people are disappointed that I can only provide general guidelines. They're looking for something more. They want to know, "Does the Lord want me to do *this* or *this*?" But the simple fact is that I can't open my Bible and find a passage that says whether someone should take a certain job offer, or marry a particular person, or buy a piece of property. The Scripture doesn't say. And I can only say what it does say. And it's not like the Lord is an overbearing tyrant who wants to dictate every tiny little aspect of our lives. Yes, the very hairs of your head are numbered, and yes, he ensures that all things work together for the good of those who love him, and yes, he has a precise plan for your life; but at the same time he's also made each one of us unique, with different likes and dislikes, and a variety of talents and abilities. And within the broad boundaries of the guidelines that he's given there's a lot of freedom for us to make any number of different choices that can all fall within his will. So with a lot of things I can't be very specific about what God's will is.

Ah, but there are other things on which I can be very precise. In our Lenten evening devotions this year we've been meditating upon the seven last statements of Jesus spoken from the cross. Thus far we've examined the first six statements, and tomorrow evening on Good Friday we'll do the seventh and final one. And hopefully we've come to understand that these last utterances of our Lord spoken even while he was in the process of giving himself for our sakes are heavy with meaning. Like the last words spoken by a loved one from a death bed, they are words meant to be remembered, retained, and reflected upon—and how much more so in this case because of whom it is that's speaking and the momentous circumstances in which he says them.

But, you know, there is a different kind of a person's last words that are meant to be given serious attention—no, more than that, that are meant to be enforced and acted upon. In fact, they are invested with real legal power and authority to ensure that they are carried out. I'm speaking of a person's last will and testament. These are the words

that carry the real weight. As significant and tender as words spoken from a deathbed are, if you really want to know what's important to someone and what's on their mind concerning their loved ones who are left behind, you have read their will. That's where you'll find the specific and legally binding instructions. That's where you'll find: "Here's what you are to do with what belongs to me when I'm gone."

And in this Jesus is no exception. Yes, his last words from the cross are loaded with deep feeling and significance; but if we really want to know what's most important to him, we need to back up some twelve to fifteen hours from his crucifixion when, in the presence of at least twelve witnesses, he dictated his last will and testament. That's when he said in a legally binding way, "Here's what you are to do with what belongs to me when I'm gone."

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night that he was betrayed, took bread. And after he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also, he took the cup after supper. And when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, 'Drink of it, all of you. This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sin. This do as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

Do you want to know what God's will is for you? What you just heard pretty much says it all. He wants you to receive what belongs to Jesus. He wants you to take into yourself and be nourished with his body that was broken and blood that was shed upon the cross. And so, doing he wants you to receive his concrete assurance that your sins, in a legally binding way, have been forgiven. And at the same time you are receiving this assurance, he wants you to receive everything else that belongs to Jesus: namely his glorious inheritance, which from his point of view is not so much your happy eternal home (though that's part of it), but rather your brothers and sisters in Christ – all those who have also received him and his forgiveness, and who are therefore united with him in the same way you are. He wants you to receive them in forgiveness and love just as he has. And by sharing his sacrifice, by feeding upon him, he gives you his own Spirit to enable you to do it.

This is God's will. And we know that it is now in force because the One who made it died. He signed and sealed it with his own life blood. And now, whenever and as often as we execute his will, he touches us again with the perfect sacrifice that forgives our sins and makes us holy. And that is the best part: by performing his lasting will that was meant to be carried out after he was gone, he himself becomes truly present among us – not in a dead sacrifice; but in a living and powerful way, to live in us and through us, and so, even as Jesus did, to carry out God's will in every aspect of our lives. God give us the grace to do his will. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!