Session 1

October 13, 2019

GOD'S WILL AND MY WILL

Romans 11:33–12:2; Ephesians 1:4-6

Understanding who God is is difficult enough. But understanding how God *operates* is even tougher. We know that God is sovereign; that He is God and as such does what He wants. Yet we also know He is not some maniacal dictator who acts apart from (or without regard to) His creation. As such, God is intentional; He is purposeful in carrying out His will. Yet He is personal in dealing with us. The first step to understanding His will is to understand some things about His essential being.

The mystery of God's sovereignty (Rom. 11:33-36). If any man could know the mysteries of God, it would be the apostle Paul. How ironic that the one who knew Him so well would be the one so overwhelmed by the immensity of His greatness! As Matthew Henry put it, Paul searched for the limits of God's being, "and despairing to find the bottom, he humbly sits down at the brink, and adores the depth." The passage is reminiscent of Ephesians 3:18, which applies the widest of dimensions to God's love. The grammatical construction of verse 33 allows for three areas of awe rather than two: "Oh the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and the knowledge of God!" In any case, the idea is that the treasury of God's resources is limitless within Himself. Because His wisdom and knowledge are inexhaustible, His *judgements* ("decrees," "decisions," or "determinations") are beyond our abilities to even investigate; and His *ways* ("methods" or "manners of carrying out His plans") are beyond our comprehension. The challenge issued in verses 34 and 35 is meant to establish the relative distance between God and man. The verses remind us of God's harsh confrontation with Job at the end of his book (Job 38-41). Paul needed no such rebuke…he fully realized that all glory belongs to the Lord, to Him alone, and to Him forever (v. 36).

The mercy of God's sovereignty (Eph. 1:4-6). Perhaps no passage of Scripture speaks more strongly about God's elective purposes than Ephesians 1. And perhaps no biblical doctrine invites more debate than the same. Generations of good, solid Baptists have nearly come to blows over whether or not the saved were pre-ordained to be so. One might not understand the doctrine of predestination, or like it, or even agree with it. But how foolish it would be to simply deny it! This beautiful and moving text reminds us that God set His affections upon us and chose us to be His adopted children before the world was even formed. His motive was love, and His purpose was to make us holy and blameless in His sight (v. 4). What a tremendous demonstration of His mercy and grace! This was done by an act of His divine will, and according to His good pleasure (v. 5). Do people still need to respond to Christ in repentance and faith? Absolutely! (see Acts 2:40; Rom. 10:9-10). But our responsibility to respond to Him does not nullify His divine election of us in the first place. Simply put, it's "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19); not the other way around.

Our response (Rom. 12:1-2). Now that we see the magnificence of God's being, and the wonder of His sovereign election, what is our response? That brings us back to Romans. The "therefore" marks a turning point. The doctrinal teachings of the apostle regarding God's redemptive work through Christ (specifically the theme of "justification by faith") now move

toward practical applications. The first is that we become *living sacrifices*. In the same way that the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament depicted the *act* of atonement, so the life of the believer is to depict the *effects* of atonement. The presentation of our *bodies* indicates this not only involves the inward, spiritually transformed mind (as depicted in v. 2), but includes a full-blown, total, inward and outward manifestation of God's redemptive work. The key idea here is *consecration*. The first step to discerning God's will, then, is to consecrate oneself as an acceptable vessel, a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.