

The Will of God

The human race is divided into two classes – “the children of God...and the children of the devil” (I John 3:10). There are not two wills of God, but two aspects of the one will of God as related to these two classes.

There is an aspect of “the will of God” for **the unbeliever**, one who does not have everlasting life. That subject matter involves two great issues: One, what Christ came into this world to do on behalf of sinners, called “thy will, O God” in Hebrews 10:7,9. And two, what God requires of the sinner in order to receive the benefit of Christ’s saving work, called “the will of him that sent me” in John 6:40. The first deals with the message, the second with the means of appropriating the benefit thereof.

There is also an aspect of “the will of God” related to **the believer** in Jesus Christ. To those “in...the Lord Jesus Christ,” identified as “you that believe,” we read, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification” (I Thessalonians 1:1; 2:13; 4:3). The “for” looks back to the conditions essential to this end, and such involved “commandments” (4:2) related to “how ye ought to walk and to please God” (4:1). This is termed “the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you,” God’s children (5:18). The “commandments” of 4:2 equals that “faith” by which the children of God “walk” in II Corinthians 5:7, since the latter is in order that “we...be well pleasing unto him” (5:9, A.S.V.), just as in the former.

How one “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) passes “from death unto life” (John 5:24), and thus “hath life” (I John 5:12), is one issue. And how one “dead...unto sin, but alive unto God” (Romans 6:11) is taught “that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest” (II Corinthians 4:10) is quite another. In an audience where both saved and lost are present, the speaker’s responsibility is to preserve the message to the unsaved from being confused with issues other than simple faith in Jesus Christ. Moreover, in addressing believers, with unbelievers present, on such matters as “how to walk and to please God,” the speaker should plainly declare that such matters have no application to the unbeliever. Failure to do this causes the unbeliever present to go away thinking that God is primarily interested in improving his manner of life, rather than in saving his soul.

Let us now consider “the will of God” as it relates to **the unbeliever** – the alien sinner. James 1:18 reads in part, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” Here, “the word of truth” is not defined. One could say, “all thy commandments are truth” (Psalm 119:151); or “thy word is truth” (John 17:17). It is certainly true that all of God’s Word is “the word of truth.” But, since “the word of truth” is the means by which God begets children, then we know that it relates to how one becomes a child of God, and not to what God requires of His children. The begetting of James 1:18 equals the “born again” of I Peter 1:23. “The word of truth” in James equals “the truth...the word of God...the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” in I Peter 1:22,23,25. Therefore, “the word of truth” relates, not to the whole body of truth – the Bible – but to a specific message, “the gospel.” The truth reveals animal sacrifices, circumcision which is outward in the flesh, and any one of a number of other issues with which we have nothing to do. Moreover, “the gospel” is glad tidings, and there are many things revealed in “the truth,” such as “the lake of fire,” that no one should confuse with “the gospel,” that message of “glad tidings” to the ear of the sinner.

“The gospel” is “the word of truth” by which God begets children. Thus, Paul said, “I have begotten you through the gospel” (I Corinthians 4:15). He referred to it as “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13). He defined “the gospel” as being “how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures: And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:3,4). This message convicts of human failure before the Divine standard, and brings to mind the Divine provision in meeting the sinner’s need. Therefore, “glad tidings” because it is the Person that gives value to the work. The saving efficacy of the death depends entirely upon the fact the He Who died was very God. “Who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7). But, He does it through “the shedding of blood” (Hebrews 9:22), and the blood shed was “his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Thus, Jesus Christ, who “hath power on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10), was “God...made flesh” (John 1:1,21,14; 20:28). He was “put to death in the flesh” (I Peter 3:18), making it possible for “the ungodly...sinners...enemies” to be “reconciled to God” (Romans 5:6,8,10). This is “glad tidings,” the message, “the word of truth” by which God begets children.

Christ, incarnate, came into this world, as He said, “to do thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:5,7). He “finished” that work before He left this earth (John 19:30; Hebrews 9:12; 10:12). This finished work provides the message designed of God to save sinners. The question is: What is God’s will in order to appropriate the benefit thereof? The answer: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (I John 5:1). This accords with “the will of him” in John 6:40.

“The word of truth,” by which God begets children, involves a message, “the gospel of Christ,” and the means of receiving its benefit, “believeth on him.” These two are linked together in such places as Acts 15:7, “the word of the gospel, and believe,” Ephesians 1:13, “the word of truth, the gospel...ye believed,” and II Thessalonians 2:13,14, “belief of the truth...our gospel.”

In I Peter 1:22 Peter speaks of “obeying the truth” as the means of “being born again.” The word “obey” where the alien is in view is equivalent to believing on Jesus Christ. Words such as “obey” and “disobey” may refer to two classes of believers, or may simply be a distinction between believers and unbelievers. The context must determine the sense. In Romans 10:16, we read, “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?” Here, to obey the gospel is equal to believing our report. The Lord quotes from Isaiah’s prophecy and, as Paul did, shows that the failure to believe “our report” was fulfilled in those who “believed not on him” (John 12:37,38). Therefore, the word obey in this connection is not descriptive of one’s responsibility as a believer in Jesus Christ.

In II Thessalonians 1:8,9 we have the consequence of obeying not the gospel, which answers Peter’s question, “What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (I Peter 4:17). The point is this: “Them...that obey not the gospel” in II Thessalonians 1:8 stand in contrast to “all them that believe” in verse 10. Thus, it follows that unbelievers are they who “obey not the gospel,” whereas “all them that believe” are they who have “obeyed the gospel.” This accords with Romans 10:16 and John 12:37,38.

In II Peter 2:7 we find “you therefore which believe” standing in contrast to “them which be disobedient.” The word “disobedient” here describes unbelievers, not disobedient believers. The context deals with Christ as “the stone” (2:7). A twofold reaction is expressed in the word “precious” (2:7) in contrast to “a stone of stumbling” (2:8). Thus, “unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient...a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient” (2:7,8). Paul wrote, “they stumbled at that stumbling stone” (Romans 9:32). But, why? “Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law” (9:32). And these are in contrast to “whosoever believeth” (9:33). The word “disobedient” is from “apeithes,” meaning “non-persuadable,” or “spurning belief.” The noun “apeitheia” is translated “unbelief” in Romans 11:30,31.

Peter authored I Peter 1:22-25, and he was also involved in the speech of Acts 15:7-9. In comparing the two we find that the “obeying” of one equals “by faith” of the other. And “the truth” of one equals “the word of the gospel” of the other. In Acts 15:8,9 we read of “God...purifying,” but in I Peter 1:22 we read, “ye...purified.” Purifying one’s heart is something that God does, but He does it when “the word of the gospel” is believed, or obeyed. Take note also of the fact that both the message, and the means by which it is received, are subjects of Old Testament prophecy: “To him (Jesus Christ, the One slain and raised up the third day, verses 39,40) give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

In I Peter 1:22 we read, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth...unto...love...see that ye love one another.” In I John 3:23 we read of two commandments: One, “That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” And the other, “that we should love one another.” Are the two commands essential to the same end? Unbelievers “have not the love of God” (John 5:42). Peter’s command, “see that ye love one another” arises from the redemptive relationship. Therefore, it is not part of “obeying the truth” by which one is “born again.” The matter is clear: One commandment, to “believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ,” precedes all commandments, including “see that ye love one another,” involving overt acts in the employment of one’s “members as instruments of righteousness.” Therefore, in “obeying the truth,” in order to the new birth, one must “do” that which takes precedence over obeying any commandment imposed on God’s children.

This “do” involves “the will of God” for the unbeliever (Matthew 7:21; 12:50). It is exactly equivalent to believing on Jesus Christ. “This is the will of God for the unbeliever (John 6:40). When the question was asked, “Sirs, what must I DO to be saved?”, the answer was, “**Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:30,31). Where is repeating some suggested “sinner’s prayer” found in this answer? If such is essential to the salvation of the unbeliever, you would think that Paul and Silas would have taken the opportunity to lead the inquirer in some such

prayer. But they did not. Their answer was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." If they should have said, "Just pray this prayer" but did not, then their inspired answer was incomplete, and misleading to say the least. Their answer is the means of receiving the benefit of God's saving message – the gospel of Christ – and the answer will stand forever.

The truth is: "He that believeth on him is not condemned" (John 3:18). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (3:36). The "**whosoever**" of John 3:16 **leaves room for you**. You are a sinner, and the penalty of sin is death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Christ's death paid the penalty of sin. He was raised from the dead in proof that what He offered in His death was acceptable to God. The work is finished. And God is satisfied. **Your part is to adjust your thinking to a perfect and finished work, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.** Truly, "he was wounded for our transgressions...and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5,6). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." The truthfulness of that promise as an accomplished fact is seen in John 3:18,36; 6:47; I John 5:1, etc.

Consider three words: Salvation, Righteousness, and Life. The unbelieving sinner is in need of all three. He is lost, thus needs to be saved (Luke 19:10). He is unrighteous, and needs to be declared righteous (Romans 3:10; 4:5). He is dead, and needs to be made alive (Ephesians 2:1).

What the sinner needs, salvation, righteousness, and life, are all met in Jesus Christ for He is salvation (Luke 2:30; Acts 4:12), righteousness (I Corinthians 1:30), and life (I John 14:6; Colossians 3:4).

The need of the sinner, met in Jesus Christ, is offered on the basis of "gift." Thus, we find, "For by grace are ye saved...and that...the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Also, "the gift of righteousness" (Romans 5:17), as well as, "the gift of God...eternal life" (6:23).

But, here is the bottom line: The need of the sinner, met in Christ, and offered on the basis of gift, are all secured by the unmodified verb believe. Thus, "believe...be saved" (Acts 16:31). Again, "the righteousness of God...upon all...that believe" (Romans 3:22). And, "believeth...life" (John 3:36; 6:40,47). This means, according to Christ, "is the will of him that sent me," where the unbeliever is in view.

Your need is clear. God's remedy is a finished work in Jesus Christ. And "as many (including you) as received him...even them that believe on his name...were born of God." (1:11-13). Praise God for His matchless grace.

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