

## THE WILL OF GOD

Ephesians 1:3-14

October 12, 1980

L. Dwight Custis

Take your Bibles and turn to Ephesians 1. The will of God as we have already been able to see this morning in the music that we have heard applies to the greatest issues of the world and it applies to the most insignificant details of our lives. And no consideration of the attributes of God would be complete without something being said about the will of God. And yet like a broken record I am repeating myself this morning that it is impossible, I am sure in a lifetime to exhaust all that could be said and should be said about the will of God. And I trust that you understand that. I hope that these times together on Sunday morning are just whetting your appetite to investigate in the Scriptures on your own for more information and more that God has revealed concerning these different characteristics of God. I want you to look this morning with me at least to begin with at the 11th verse of Ephesians 1, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." On Saturday mornings I have the privilege of meeting with some of our councilmen and eventually hope to meet with all of them. We have divided our studies up into small groups so that we can have more time with discussion. But yesterday I read a statement to the men, I may have used it in some of my messages here at the church. I would like to just refer to it though I don't have it is a statement made by Robert Haldane in his commentary on the book of Romans in which he says that the doctrines of Scripture are so interrelated with each other that you can't be wrong on one without being wrong on the others. Perhaps the same thing could be said about the attributes of God with respect to their interrelationship. You can hardly touch one without touching the others. And it is difficult to be wrong with certain, in certain respects about the characteristics of God without having your whole picture of God distorted. Now this verse gives us an excellent picture of the way in which the attributes of God are interrelated with each other and I would like for you to see this as we begin this morning. You have in this verse the wisdom of God, the power of

God and the will of God. Now the wisdom of God is seen in the expression council. "Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the council of his will." The power of God is expressed in the word worketh. "According to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the council of his will." And there are three expressions in the verse which speak of the will of God. One is the word predestinated, second is the word purpose and the last is the word will. "Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the council of his own will." Stephen Charnock a Puritan has written a very exhaustive and in some respects exhausting book on the existence and attributes of God. I say that because of its length. And he makes the following statement with respect to this particular verse. He says the knowledge of God regards a thing as possible and as it may be done. The wisdom of God regards a thing as fit and convenient to be done. The will of God resolves that it shall be done. The power of God is the application of his will to effect what it hath resolved. Or we could state it in such a way that with reference to these three attributes especially God's wisdom, God's will and God's power. He says His will orders, His wisdom guides and his power effects. Now if you were noticing as we read through this passage thinking particularly about the will of God that there is a reference to the will of God in verse 9 as well as in verse 11 where the Apostle Paul says "having made known unto us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself and then it is also mentioned in verse 4 having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will." So I want to consider with you this morning the will of God especially as the Apostle Paul refers to it in this passage but before I do that I want to just give you some other passages of Scripture that will help us to see the place that the will of God has in the purposes of God. Now what we mean by the will of God when we are talking about this great subject is that God in His infinite wisdom has determined what He will do throughout the course of time and into eternity. And that He is doing it. And this determination is not being made as time goes on.

But it was made before the foundation of the world. Now you and I have to make some adjustments when we talk about this because we make up our minds perhaps hundreds of times per day, what we are going to do, what we are going to say, where we are going to go. All of these things enter in and we adjust our words to our circumstances which can so easily arise. But God was sovereign over men, over all of creation, over the whole universe and is never found in a place where He has to make adjustments. He has determined from the very beginning what His ultimate objectives will be. And the Word of God makes it very clear that He is accomplishing these things. So that when we look at the human scene and we see what the people of all ages have done because they have chosen to do certain things, it is very difficult for us to see many times as Dr. Lockwood expressed in his solo this morning, there are many times that we trust the will of God and trust the purposes of God even when we can't see what the outcome is going to be and we don't understand what the Lord may be doing with us at this present time. This is the reason it is so extremely important to get some of these truths in our hearts. Now the best way that I know to learn about these truths in fact the only way that I know is to go to the Scriptures and read what the Word of God has to say. And I am going to read several passages this morning and perhaps we will read them too quickly for you to be able to turn to them so I suggest if you want to keep a record of it you just jot the references down and then you can read them later on when you have the time. One of the greatest examples of a passage dealing with the will of God has to do with a man who learned it the hard way. And I am referring to King Nebucudnezer. You remember that God had to humiliate Nebucudnezer and He made him eat grass like an ox, his hair grew until it was like eagles feathers and his nails were like birds claws. This is the way he is described in Daniel 4. And in these two verses that I want to read to you, Daniel 4:34 and 35 you have these words from Nebucudnezer amazingly where he says, "I bless the most high and I praised and honored him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom is from generation to generation and all the inhabitants of the earth are repudated as nothing and he doeth his will in the army of heaven and

among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay his hand or say unto him what doest thou." Now second passage is in the book of Job, I happen to be reading this in my own devotional time. Job 23:13-14 where Job says concerning God, "He is in one mind and who can turn him and what his soul desireth even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me and many such things are with him." Now Job evidently believed that the sufferings he was going through were divinely appointed for him even though when you read at the beginning of the book of Job you see that Satan was the one who was instrumental in bringing these things upon him. Later on in the book of Job in the 40th chapter and the 8th and 9th verses God has some things to say to Job and He asks him some very significant questions. He says, "Wilt thou disannul my judgement, wilt thou condemn me that thou mayest be righteous. Hast thou an arm like God or canst thou thunder with a voice like him." Or there are many passages in Isaiah's prophesy in which he deals with this. I would like to read from Isaiah 14:24-27. "The Lord of hosts hath the sword saying surely as I have thought so shall it come to pass and as I have purposed so shall it stand, this is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed and who shall disannull it. And His hand is stretched out and who shall turn it back." Or take some more familiar passages for example Psalm 37:23 and 24. And here we move from God's work with the nations of the earth to God's work with the psalmist and God's work with you and me as individual believers. Because the psalmist says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delighteth in his way, though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." Psalm 115:3 "But our God is in the heavens, he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." Psalm 118:22-23 and you will recognize as I read this that this has to do with our Lord Jesus Christ, "A stone which the builders rejected is become a headstone of the corner, this is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes." So that even in the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ and what God did in overruling what men were able to do the psalmist sees in this that this is the doing of the Lord. And even in the next verse in Psalm 118:24, a verse

that we sing as a chorus many times speaks of this very thing. "This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it. " It's a verse which expresses God's sovereign hand not only in this day in which he was speaking in Psalm 119 but it applies to all the days as we come and go. If we were to move into the New Testament, Peter declared this truth when he was preaching in Jerusalem in Acts 2 and what a change had come over the Apostle Peter because he was able to point out the fulfillment of the sovereign eternal will of God and yet without in any way excusing man for the responsibility of what he had done, his sin in crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ but this is what he said, "Him, speaking of Christ, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain him." The will of God stands behind those great verses in Romans 8, verses 28 through 31. You know them well and I am sure if you have known the Lord very long you have gone to these passages many times for encouragement and blessing. Paul says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." If you have the New American Standard you will find that it reads something like this, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son that he might be the firstborn among many brethren, moreover whom he did predestinate them he also called and whom he called them he also justified and whom he justified them he also glorified." And on the basis of this he asks two questions, "What shall we then say to these things, if God be for us or since God be for us, since He's demonstrated the fact by all of these things that He is for us and His will is being accomplished who can possibly be against us." Romans 9 Paul indicates that people responded to His teaching often with a statement "for who hath resisted his will." And his answer to them is simply another question "Nay but oh man who art thou that repliest against God." That is verses 19 and 20 of Romans 9. Now this is only a small fraction of the many passages that could be cited this morning. That God has predetermined what His will is, that He has a plan, that He has a purpose involving all things and all men

and he is accomplishing just exactly what He willed to be done. Now these passages show that the will of God is a doctrine which involves the nations of the earth, He puts down one king and He sets up another and you and I are to believe from this that as we look at the world today and the governments that are in power today that things are just exactly as God has planned that they should be. This does not mean that everything in every government is pleasing to Him. In fact probably most things in all governments are displeasing to Him. But the point that I want you to see this morning is that as far as these great truths are concerned God is not wringing His hands, God is not wondering what He is going to do. God is not hoping that the prophetic word that we have in Scripture is ultimately going to be fulfilled. God knows what He is doing. And God is accomplishing what He set out to do and whether you are looking at the nations of the earth, whether you are looking at the salvation of His people or whether you are looking at our personal joys and sorrows, even to the very steps that we take you can see the hand of God. You can expect the accomplishing of His will. Now when we begin to talk about a theme like this there are always people who are inclined to say and perhaps this has been the reaction with most of us well if you believe things like that we are just robots. If all of that is true. Now I looked up the word robot because I hear that word every once in a while and I found out that a robot is a mechanical man who acts and works mechanically, he's not really a man at all. He is just something that looks like a man who's been manufactured to function somewhat in the same way that a man does. It can walk, it can move his arms. Perhaps he is rigged up so that he can speak but the secret of his activity lies in a computer. Now in responding to this I would say two things. One is that you and I know that life is not like this. We live, we act, we make decisions, we are responsible for the decisions that we make. We make bad decisions, we get bad results and we benefit if we happen to make good decisions. And the Bible is not contradicting that in any way. In fact the Bible is the most true to life book that you will ever read. We can't understand ourselves really unless we do have the Word of God. And the Bible does not ignore the fact that we are responsible human beings

living every day, making all of these decisions that we make and facing and dealing with the problems that are ours in this world. But what the Bible does say is that as we look at these passages of Scripture that behind all of this and in all of this the hand of God can be seen. Now there is not a person that I know and there is certainly no book that I have ever read that has been able to explain this to our satisfaction. But you see if God were not sovereign over the affairs of men and over the affairs of nations prophecy would be absolutely impossible. The image that was shown to Nebucadnezer, the picturing of the four great world empires. The moment that was made known, God was indicating that He was sovereignly at work in the lives of those nations so that in succession you have the Babylonian empire, you'd have the MedoPersian empire, you'd have the Greek empire, you'd have the Roman empire and history testifies to the fact that God is sovereignly working so that His will is being accomplished. The greatest example of course that we have is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the minute way in which Matthew for example goes back and he picks up Old Testament prophecies and He points out various things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ where He was born, how He was born, the way He lived, the works that He performed. All of those things were uttered prophetically hundreds of years before the Lord Jesus Christ came and the moment those were uttered God was making known the fact that He was responsible to see that ultimately those prophecies would be fulfilled and they are. You and I think about the coming of the Lord and the things that are yet future, whether we have ever stopped to think about it or not when we read the book of Revelation, when we see how things are to shape up in the end times as God has revealed them in the Word. You see this is all an expression of the Will of God and God has committed Himself, God has made these things known and you and I knowing that we have the sovereign God who has been faithful to every promise that He has ever made is going to be faithful to those promises too. This is our hope. God is working out His purposes. But now let me mention a second response to the objection that I mentioned. Let's go to the Scriptures and let's go to the passage that we read together this morning and let's see what the Apostle Paul taught about this. Now

I am sure that I am on good ground this morning, I know most of you, some of you I don't but most of you I do, I feel that I am on good ground when I say that the Apostle Paul faced the difficulties of life as none of us have ever had to face them. And yet he is the one with all the decisions and with all of the problems and with all of the obstacles and with all of the hatred and with all of these difficulties that he faced. He's the one who has been pleased to teach us that behind the human scene and in the human scene is the sovereign hand of an almighty God. Our text this morning says that He's working. He's an all wise God, it is according to the counsel of His will and He's working all of the circumstances out in human history in accordance with that will. Now what does Paul teach about it. Could you say as you read through a passage like this that this teaching was distasteful to him. Could you say that it depressed him. Could you say by any stretch of the imagination that it made a fatalist out of him, that he would say well God is going to do what He wants to do so I am just going to sit back and watch him do it. How then can you account for the fact that the Apostle Paul who teaches these things so clearly was willing to suffer so terribly and work so constantly in order that the Gospel might be preached throughout the Roman world. This truth does not mean the death of evangelism, this truth does not mean the death of missions, this truth does not render Christian service unnecessary. In fact this truth is what gives meaning and significance and hope to all of those things. Because we know that God has a purpose and a purpose that no man, no nation can stand against. And you have the story in Scripture that when a mighty nation like the nation Egypt, I heard a man speaking about it on the radio this morning. Egypt would stand up and defy God and Moses went to Pharoah and said to Pharoah God has sent me to tell you to let His people go and Pharoah said, No, no, no. I will not let them go. And he would make a compromise when he got backed into the corner and then he would give up on that and he just stood in the way and you see in the book of Exodus right at the beginning of your Bible what happens to a nation when they stand against a sovereign holy God when God says, Let my people go and Pharoah says, No I won't let them go and you know the outcome as well as I do. Pharoah was no match whatever



for a sovereign God and the Bible is full of this wonderful truth. Now let me point out some things from Ephesians 1 that I hope will be a blessing and encouragement to you, even though all of us have questions regarding the outworking of the will of God especially when it comes to our frailties and our sins and our difficulties but nevertheless you see the hand of God working out in all of these things. When we look at this passage of Scripture this morning we have to say because of what Paul is talking about in this passage that he is speaking primarily of salvation. When he says "we are predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." If I leave this in its context the all things that he is talking about are the all things that have to do with salvation. Now from the other verses that I have read to you you can see that while this passage may deal with salvation yet there are other passages which deal with the nations of the earth and deal with God's purposes as far as those nations are concerned. But here is the simple testimony that God with regard to salvation is working all things out according to the counsel of His will. Now he says this in spite of the fact that his generation and the next generation and all succeeding generations down to our generation and our generation included, we would have to say with respect to all of these that there has never been a generation but what the church has failed God grievously and repeatedly. You read through church history and that's one of the greatest impressions you get, how could God ever accomplish anything with the instruments that he's had to work with. Don't you feel that way about yourself, I certainly do about myself. You think of the tremendous purposes of God if they rested upon us why they would have had to have been abandoned long ago. But this is one of the greatest encouragements and incentives that we have for serving the Lord. Because in spite of our weaknesses, in spite of our sin, in spite of our discouragement, in spite of our unbelief, I can stand before you this morning and tell you that the work of God is on schedule and that God is accomplishing His work and His will through us but He can do and does do His work often without us if He needs to. Now that shouldn't be hard for us to understand because you know the Lord's gotten by a long time before you and I ever appeared on the scene and it's not very likely

that the work of God is going to stand or fall depending upon you and me. He's the One Who is at work and oh what a privilege it is when He sees fit to use us and how many times have we seen God at work when we haven't been prepared or when our hearts have not been right or when we failed Him in one way or another and yet we see God marvelously accomplishing His purposes. I have been able to say the things that I have said this morning because of another fact that you find in this passage of Scripture, it's in verse 9 will you look at it, and it emphasizes what I have just mentioned.

"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself." Now what does this mean. This means that the accomplishing of the will of God rests ultimately upon God alone. Now He uses us and He blesses us and most of us I am sure here this morning know what that is but you see the will of God cannot fail because of the fact that the execution of His will rests upon God Himself. He's doing exactly what He set out to do, using us, working throughout us, sometimes when we run ahead of Him like Moses did God works in his heart for forty years and then brings him back and puts him in the same position and accomplishes what He originally intended to accomplish through him. It's marvelous as you read the testimony of Scripture. The testimony of Scripture is not a testimony of the successes of men, but the testimony of Scripture is the testimony of the successes of God often in spite of the failure of men. How many of you would have trusted Peter after Peter denied with oaths that he even knew the Lord Jesus Christ yet God works in his heart and he stands before that mob in Jerusalem and says, "With your wicked hands you took him and you crucified and slew him," and that same Apostle Peter previously didn't have the courage to stand before a maiden and acknowledge that he was one of the Lord's disciples. What amazing evidence of the greatness and the goodness of the will of God.

The third thing that I want you to see about the will of God and I must hurry because time is slipping by. You have this in verse 8, "Wherein he hath, now notice the words abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." Now sometimes we make plans, maybe plans for our lives, a young person may start out to prepare for a certain profession

and he gets into it and he finds out that it's not after all what he wants to do so he changes. Or we do things that we make plans that we discover are not altogether wise. Sometimes in the handling of our families we are this way and we have to back up and we have to reevaluate and we have to start over but notice what this verse says about God. Now we have been learning that God is infinitely wise. God has a perfect record. He has never done a single thing that is foolish. He's never had a foolish thought. He's never had a plan made that He's had to change, never. And when Paul describes the wisdom that God has put in the counsel of His will he says, "He has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." So this means not only that the plan, the will of God in this passage as it relates to salvation is wise but it is infinitely wise, it is abundantly wise. God Himself and I say this reverently, God Himself could not have come up with anything wiser or better in the way of salvation than that which He has devised and that goes to all of the plans and purposes that God has for you and for me. You remember we sang this morning about how often a child of God sees that the very desires that we have and the things that we would like to see accomplished are accomplished through what He ordains in our lives. And you may be praying for blessing and it seems that everything goes wrong and yet you begin to realize that the Lord has that way of dealing with you so that He can eventually give you the very blessing that you want. I wish I could express adequately what's in this verse. It ties in well with Isaiah 55, those two great verses, "God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and God's ways are not our ways as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts and our thoughts and his ways than our ways." And oh how wonderful it is to see God working in our lives and we make our plans and the Lord showing us that that's not just what He wants. And He works in our hearts and He works in our circumstances to bring us to the place where He sees what His will is and we see how infinitely wise He is in all that He does. More than that look at verse 5. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, look at the last part of the verse, according to the good pleasure of his will." What does this mean. It means that as God has established His will as it relates to my life and your life He has done the things that has given Him the

greatest delight. We often think about the will of God as something that God has designed to make us miserable. Paul says at the end of Romans 12:1-2 you remember that we may "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." So this is the way Paul describes His will, it's the good pleasure of His will. If when God was considering all of the possibilities of what He could do for you and for me He chose the very best and it's given Him the greatest degree of ~~the~~ pleasure to do what He has done for us in salvation. More than that I see in this passage that He has done that which has brought Him glory and honor and you have that in three passages. I won't take the time to read them this morning but you have it in verse 6, you have it in verse 12 and you have it in verse 14. Let me close this morning but pointing out two things that come to us from the third verse, the first verse of our text. Where he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." And I want to just point out the two words bless or blessed. He is blessing God because God has blessed Him and because God has blessed all of us who are in Christ. And when you link this to the will of God it simply means that the will of God has not only brought to us all of the blessings that are mentioned from verse 3 down through verse 14 in the passage of Scripture but there are many other blessings that could be included in this and you and I have all of these blessings because God in His infinite wisdom and according to His good pleasure has designed his will in such a way that these works of salvation, the circumstances of our lives all of these things that concern His will are ultimately designed to bring us blessing. I said last Sunday morning and I say it again that when you consider what the Word of God has to say about God's dealings with us, about His will, about His sovereignty in our lives there really isn't anything bad that can happen to a child of God because God takes all of those circumstances, the things that would be bad in themselves and He works them together according to Romans 8:28 so that the result is our good and blessing.

But the other thing that I wanted you to see in this verse is what is Paul doing here in this passage of Scripture, how would you classify verses 3 down through verse 14. Well you can see from verse 3 that this is an expression of praise. This is the overflow of the heart of an Apostle who seems to lack the words to express what is in his heart and he acknowledges first of all that all of these spiritual blessings have come and he's praising, he's worshipping, he's adoring God for what the will of God in God's infinite wisdom and according to God's omnipotent power, what the will of God has brought to him as far as salvation is concerned. And I say that as far as the will of God is concerned you don't need to limit it, to salvation itself. This is of course the greatest of all the things that God has done for us and you can be sure that if God has done this in salvation then He is going to give us all of the other things that are necessary to bring His blessing upon our lives. But to see this salvation is something that God in His infinite wisdom has determined shall be His will. He has chosen the very best, He's poured out these blessings upon us. And instead of causing the Apostle Paul to give up in despair or to feel that nothing has significance, this means that everything has meaning and we find the Apostle Paul simply lifting his heart in praise and adoration that God has predestinated him according to the counsel of His will and He is working all of these things out in his life according to His own good pleasure. Is this your response to it. Is it any wonder that the Apostle Paul follows this by praying that the eyes of the Ephesian believers would be opened so that they would know the things that God has done and not only know them but be able to walk in the light of these truths and to rejoice in all of the wonders and marvels of God's perfect and holy will. I trust that this is your response too this morning as we have looked into these wonderful truths.