

Dear friend,

In the third petition of the Lord's Prayer Jesus tells us to ask our heavenly Father: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." What is it that we are asking our Father to do in this petition? To answer that question we must first consider the two ways that "the will of God" is referred to in the Bible.

The first way the Bible refers to God's will is what is called his "will of command" or "his revealed will." Here are some examples from the Scripture which refer to this aspect of God's will. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God..." Ephesians 5:15-21, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

In each of these examples we can see that God's will relates to how we live our lives. He commands us to be sexually pure, to use our time wisely, to not get drunk but be filled with the Spirit, to be connected to the worshipping people of God, giving thanks to God for everything and submitting to one another. God desires that his people live in a certain fashion. There are things he wants us to do and things he does not want us to do. Therefore, when we ask God that his will is done on earth as it is in heaven we are asking God to so work that we and others live the way God wants us to live.

Every command of the Bible can be turned into a prayer for myself and for other believers, that is, all those who can call God their Father because they have been born again by God's Spirit. In addition we not only ask that Christians obey God but that we obey him like the angels do. That is, we obey with joy, not out of duty. We obey in dependence upon the Triune God, not depending upon our own strength. We obey so that God is glorified, not ourselves. This is a remarkable petition. Every time you hear a command from God in the Bible you should immediately turn it into a prayer that God would enable you and others to obey it like an angel would. Then, after you obey, you thank God that you obeyed because the only reason you or I ever obey is because God is the one who enables us to do so.

The second way that the will of God is referred to in the Bible is called, "God's will of decree" or "his secret will." Here are a few examples where this will of God is referred to in the Bible: Ephesians 1:11, "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will..." 1 Peter 4:19, "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." John 6:39-40, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." In these passages we are told that God is working all things

according to the purpose of his will. That means that everything in the universe is going in accordance with his perfect will. Two of those things that God controls are then stated in the other two passages. God wills how and when Christians will suffer and he wills that Christ save all the elect as they trust in Jesus. God does not tell us in advance what his will is in regard to these things. He doesn't tell me what the weather will be like tomorrow or when I will die and by what manner. He doesn't tell us who are those that he gave to Christ and who will therefore believe. We don't know these things until they happen. Yet all things are being worked by God according to his will. Therefore, when we ask that God's will be done we are also asking that we will submit to that will, no matter what it might entail for us. We are asking God to enable us to want his will more than we want anything else so that we, like Paul, "will be content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." We will be content because we know that God is working out his will perfectly and thus we have nothing to fear and can be secure and endure whatever God has determined is best for us.

So let us join our voices with those of the church through the ages in asking God to enable us to obey his revealed will and to gladly submit to his secret will.

Seeking to live like an angel,