

Sunday, January 25, 2015

“The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are revealed belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we may do all the words of this law.*” (Deuteronomy 29:29)

These words were spoken shortly before Moses died. He had just presented the children of Israel the great blessings that would befall them if they hearkened unto the voice of the Lord, and the terrible curses that would befall them if they would not hearken unto His voice. He had presented the covenant of the Lord to them, and warned them of the great danger of idolatry and the consequences thereof, to wit:

**“And the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book: And the LORD rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as *it is this day.*”
(Deuteronomy 29:27-28)**

Here we learn about the secret and revealed wills of God. God had already determined that Israel was going to break this covenant. It was determined in His great wisdom and for His glory.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go *to be* among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our *God is not among us?*” (Deuteronomy 31:16-17)

God told them right up front that it was going to happen. You “will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers.” You “will forsake me.” You will “break my covenant.” It was a done deal. And of course, it did happen. And if anyone has any doubt about the sovereign hand of God in this matter, you need only read Romans 11.

“God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear.” (Romans 11:8)

And we get a little bit of insight into why God did this in that same chapter. It’s a mysterious thing, and we get some light on it, but only what God has been pleased to reveal to us.

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in...For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen.” (Romans 11:25, 32-36)

We know what God has told us, and we know no more. We must search the scriptures and pray for wisdom and understanding, and learn what God requires of us:

“All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

But we must not pry into the secret things beyond what He’s shown us. Those things belong to God! We must not follow the way of the man in Colossians 2, thinking that we can come up with all of the answers with our supposed great intellects:

“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.” (Colossians 2:18-19)

So, I say that God predetermined that Israel would break His covenant. All of the details involved in that eternal decree, beyond what He has told us, are none of our business. That is the secret will of God. The revealed will of God in this passage in Deuteronomy is that the children of Israel should obey His commandments. That is what is pleasing in His sight. That is the standard by which they will be judged. That is the standard by which they are held accountable and responsible. They have no excuse. They cannot blame God for their sins.

“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it *is* not hidden from thee, neither *is* it far off. It *is* not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither *is* it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word *is* very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments.” (Deuteronomy 30:11-16)

It is at this point that the majority of mankind (including most so-called “Christians”) will begin to level all manner of blasphemous accusations against God. “God is double minded.” “God is unjust.” “God is the guilty mastermind behind all crimes and sins.” And the list goes on. The key point of contention is “how can God decree that they would break His covenant, tell them not to break His covenant, and then condemn them for breaking His covenant?” Which is just another way of saying, “Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?” (Romans 9:19). The answer is already given to us:

“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” (Romans 9:20-24)

Another question raised is “how can God simultaneously will for something to happen and will for it to not happen?” But we are talking about the will of God in different senses. His secret will consists of His decrees, which cannot be frustrated, and which are according to His eternal plan. His revealed will consists of His precepts, which define how we ought to behave, and what our duty is. Arthur Pink has a good description:

“The secret will of God is His eternal, unchanging purpose concerning all things which He hath made, to be brought about by certain means to their appointed ends: of this God expressly declares ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’ (Isaiah 46:10). This is the absolute, efficacious will of God, always effected, always fulfilled. The revealed will of God contains not His purpose and decree but our duty, - not what *He* will do according to His eternal counsel, but what *we* should do if we would please Him, and this is expressed in the precepts and promises of His Word.”

Let’s consider the abomination of same-sex marriage which is making its way across this world. Has God decreed that this should happen? Absolutely. Otherwise, it would not be happening. Our God is an absolute sovereign, and everything He does is according to His plan:

“Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”
(Isaiah 46:9-10)

“And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to 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?” (Daniel 4:35)

“And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man... Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot... Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” (Luke 17:26,28,30)

It has to happen so it will be like it was in the days of Noah and Lot. But God says it's an abomination, and commands the people of this world to not do it. That is, it is the revealed will of God that men should not marry men, and women should not marry women. And they will be judged by that revealed will. God doesn't decree these things because He delights in sin; He decrees them because they are necessary for His glorious, predestinated plan.

Consider also your own reaction to this abomination. How many people sitting here today are outraged that these sodomites would corrupt that most blessed covenant of marriage? And how many of you simultaneously are overjoyed to see it happening, because you see parts of God's plan dropping into place? These two wills coexist in our own hearts, without contradiction. And it is certainly not a contradiction within God.

Despite the mocking, the blasphemy, and the hatred of the enemies of God towards this doctrine, it is a Biblical doctrine and that's all that matters. This is what God teaches us in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Whether we understand it or not, it's there, and we must believe it. I would like to spend the rest of this sermon going over just a few of the passages that support this doctrine, which will hopefully shed some more light, starting with the fall of Adam:

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:16-17)

That is the commandment. That is the revealed will of God: “thou shalt not eat of it.” Adam and Eve broke the commandment, and brought sin into the world:

“And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” (Genesis 3:6)

But we know that God foreordained the fall of mankind. He was not surprised by it. His counsel wasn't frustrated. We read that Christ, as a Lamb, “*verily* was foreordained before the foundation of the world.” (1 Peter 1:20). And He is called “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Revelation 13:8). If Christ was foreordained to be offered as the sacrificial Lamb of God, then is it not evident that God also foreordained sin to enter the world so that Christ would be offered up as a sacrifice for sin? If there was no sin, there would be no need for a sacrifice.

In Genesis 22, we read of the tempting of Abraham:

“And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of... And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here *am* I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son* from me.” (Genesis 22:2, 10-12)

Abraham was ordered by God to offer his only son up as a burnt offering. This was a direct commandment from God, and it would have been a sin for Abraham to disobey Him. But His secret will was that Isaac would not be slain. God had a greater purpose to accomplish, one that was not known to Abraham until the angel appeared and stayed his hand.

Then we have that great wickedness that the brothers of Joseph did to him in selling him as a slave. But God, secretly working through His providence, had intended it for good:

“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.” (Genesis 50:20)

Make no mistake here – his brothers had evil intentions, and this was a great sin on their part. But God's intention for the whole event was good, even though it necessarily involved the evil of his brothers.

We have the case of Pharaoh. God sent Moses to him to say “let my people go.” But before Moses ever stepped foot in front of Pharaoh, God said, “but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.” (Exodus 4:21). Pharaoh was required by the command of God to

let His people go, but he sinfully and willingly disobeyed and would not let them go. Paul talks about the decree of God in this matter in Romans 9:

“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.” (Romans 9:17-18)

Likewise, God hardened the hearts of Sihon and the wicked tribes in the land of Canaan, all of whom were under an obligation to make peace with the children of Israel because it was no secret that God had promised that land of Canaan to His people.

“And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying, Let me pass through thy land: I will go along by the high way, I will neither turn unto the right hand nor to the left... But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as *appeareth* this day.” (Deuteronomy 2:26-27,30)

“There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all *other* they took in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, *and* that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.” (Joshua 11:19-20)

Moving on to the wicked sons of Eli, we have a very interesting story:

“Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled *at* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for *it is* no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD'S people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.” (1 Samuel 2:22-25)

The reason I say this is interesting is because the word translated “would” in “would slay them” is the same word that is translated “pleasure” in Ezekiel 18:23, 32 and 33:11. These are the verses that say that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked:

“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11)

So in the one case, God decreed that the wicked sons of Eli would not listen to their father because it was His pleasure to slay them. In the other case, it says that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather that they repent. I’ve always been troubled by these verses in Ezekiel because I didn’t understand them. I didn’t understand how a sovereign God, who kills and makes alive, wouldn’t be pleased. I still don’t have a full understanding, but it makes sense to me to consider the verse above in 1 Samuel 2 to be His secret, sovereign decree, and the verses in Ezekiel to be His revealed will. By His decretive will, He is pleased in the death of the wicked; otherwise, He would not slay them. By His revealed will, He commands all men everywhere to repent. Everyone is supposed to repent. Everyone is obligated to believe in Jesus Christ, and thereby avoid eternal death. Those are His commands; you’re supposed to do that. When people disobey Him and don’t follow His commands, that is displeasing to Him. Another verse to consider on this topic is:

**“And it shall come to pass, *that* as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.”
(Deuteronomy 28:63)**

One more example of this doctrine of the secret and revealed wills of God from the Old Testament:

“Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give *them* unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.” (2 Samuel 12:11)

Who will argue with the notion that adultery is a sin in God’s eyes? He commanded, “thou shalt not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14). Yet we have God, in His sovereign wisdom, decreeing that very thing to punish David. And when Absalom fulfilled this prophecy in 2 Samuel 16:22, who will argue that he (Absalom) was guiltless in that abomination? He was absolutely responsible for that sin, and did it with great pride and glee.

In the New Testament, we have the most compelling example in all of the scripture of the secret vs. revealed wills of God, and that is the death of Christ. The most heinous sins in the history of mankind occurred there, yet there is no question but that it was ordained by God. We have the betrayal by Judas, Herod’s contempt for Christ, the Jews demanding crucifixion, Pilate giving in to the Jews, scourging, cruel mocking, and death. They killed the Son of God!

Please consider the following passages:

“And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22)

“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” (Acts 2:23)

“For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” (Acts 4:27-28)

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted... Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” (Isaiah 53:4,10)

**“For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”
(Hebrews 2:10)**

We learn this same doctrine from the preaching of Christ:

“Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe *unto him*, through whom they come!” (Luke 17:1)

He preaches that people must “repent, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15) – that is His revealed will. But He preaches that it would be hidden from some people – that is His secret will:

“And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them.” (Mark 4:11-12)

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” (Matthew 11:25-26)

Finally, certainly it is a sin for the kings of the earth to enter into allegiance with the Antichrist, but this is exactly what will happen, because God will put it in their hearts to fulfill His will:

“And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.” (Revelation 17:16-17)

I will close with a quote from Jonathan Edwards: “It implies no contradiction to suppose that an act may be an evil act, and yet that it is a good thing that such an act should come to pass...As for instance, it might be an evil thing to crucify Christ, but yet it was a good thing that the crucifying of Christ came to pass.”

I love you. Amen.