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The Will of God (1961, Vol. 7 No. 11)

From Food for the Flock, 1961, Vol. 7 No. 11. Parts of this piece could not be read in the scan.

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The Secret Will of God

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the believer, the secret will of God can only be understood by one of His. The revelation of His will for us comes to us in our daily experience through the medium of prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God has a gracious design for each of us and it is our sacred duty to seek it out. Our prayer should be, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). It is very easy to say glibly, "God willing, I will do this or that." There must be a holy exercise of heart before anything is undertaken for God. Much of our failure is due to our attempts to serve Him from fleshly impulse. It is not only the servant of God who leaves all to work on the secret will of God. It is for every one of us to know His will.

The Revealed Will of God

This aspect of the will of God is clearly discernible for it is found in His Holy Word. If we wish to know the will of God in this respect it is imperative that we read and study the Bible. All the great truths concerning our witness, walk, and worship are to be found there. How little we know of this! Let us now consider the will of God in relation to the Saviour, the Saint, and our Service.

The Saviour and the Will of God

The key-note of this beautiful relationship is the delight the Saviour found in doing the Father's will. Hebrews 10:5-7 reveals the complete agreement between God the Saviour at His birth, His incarnation. In the temple at Jerusalem, at the age of twelve, He confounded the wise of His day with His questions and answers. At that time He could say to His mother, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). At Sychar's Well, He reminded His disciples of His complete subjection to God when He said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work" (John 4:34). Then at the close of His earthly ministry, when the shadow of Calvary lay dark across His pathway, He raised His voice to His Father in those memorable words, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

So it is, whether at His virgin birth, in His boyhood years at Nazareth, during His earthly ministry and service, in His redemptive work on the cross, or in His triumphant resurrection and ascension, the will of God was paramount in Christ's life. What wonderful lessons we can learn for ourselves, if we but take time to study the Holy design of God in Jesus Christ our Lord!

The Saint and the Will of God

What is the will of God in relation to the saint? Galatians 1:4 tells us that He "gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." How precious! We are delivered, not only from the penalty of sin, but from its power, that we might live unto Him as a witness and light-bearer. In every phase of our lives, God's will plays

an important part. In I Thessalonians 4:3, the will of God is linked with moral purity in the life of the saint. I John 3, that beautiful chapter on love as a guiding principle in Christian experience, tells us that, "this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as He gave us commandment." And again in Ephesians, where our walk is so fully treated, we are reminded that God chose us before the foundation of the world, "according to the good pleasure of His will" (1:5), to walk circumspectly in light.

Not only should our behaviour and pattern of life conform to the mind of God, but it is His will that we should continue to "give thanks for everything" (I Thess. 5:18). Thus our prayer life comes within the compass of His holy design. Finally, Romans 1.2:14 [?] makes it clear that the extent of our devotion should serve to prove the "good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." How all this emphasizes the truth: we are created for the pleasure of the Father.

Service and the Will of God

This topic has been a problem to many, especially to young Christians. How do I know I am in the will of God? Take courage; even the beloved Apostle Paul was exercised about this vital question. Note Acts 16:7 where he planned to go to Bithynia, "but the Spirit suffered them not". At this time, the Apostle was guided by the Spirit, the vision, and the circumstances. When all these were taken into account, he came to a conclusion, "assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them" (vs. 10). Some contend that this was a special case where the

Apostle was called to take the Gospel to Europe for the first time. However, divine principles remain the same in every age.

The word here translated, "gathering" is translated "knit" in Colossians 2:1. Thus, there is the suggestion of a divine pattern. Prayer, the Word, and the circumstances should all be taken into consideration when contemplating avenues of service. The Psalmist says, "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way" (Psa. 25:9). Abraham's servant said, "I being in the way, the Lord led me." Surely there is a lesson in this for us. It requires a meek and humble spirit, yet a readiness to act and a preparation for the task. Self determination, in so far as it is the product of the flesh, can prove disastrous. On the other hand, availability may be proved by preparation.

Scripture contains guidance in the all important matters. In Acts 21 we see many circumstances operating before Paul saw his way clear to go to Jerusalem. In Romans one he made it a matter of prayer as to his journey to Rome.

Obedience to God's will in service, may bring upon us reproach or even suffering. This is the subject of Peter's words in I Peter 4:12-19. If we are called upon to suffer for righteousness sake and the Gospel, happy are we, but if we suffer for our own folly, there can be no praise in it. How careful we should be to see that any reproach or suffering that befalls us in serving Him is according to His will, and not the result of our own false pride.

In relation to those in authority, Scripture teaches us to pray for them, and even to give thanks, for this is "good and acceptable in the sight of God" (I Tim. 2:2).

We have by no means exhausted this topic. The relationship of the will of God to the Nations, to the Church, and to the Kingdom could be explored with profit. Then, too, much might be said about the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:5), the mystery of His will (v. 9), and the counsel of His will (v.11), but space forbids. These are, indeed, water to swim in.

We close this study with the words of the poet:

"I bow me to Thy will, O God, And all Thy ways adore, And every day I live I'd seek To please Thee, more and more.

"He always wins, who sides with God. To him, no chance is lost. God's will is sweetest to him, when It triumphs at his cost.

"Ill that God blesses is our good, And unblest good is ill; And all is right that seems most wrong If it be His sweet will."

The Last Days (June 1961)

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The Epistle of Jude is small, but very important in its content and message for the days in which we live. Its subject is similar to that of second Peter, but the message is different. Second Peter deals with doctrinal departure; Jude with moral depravity. Of course, denial of the person and work of Christ is automatically followed by a break-down of moral standards. Man becomes a law unto himself. Are not the signs of such conditions evident today'?

In the New Testament Canon, the Epistle of Jude precedes the Book of the Revelation. This suggests a spiritual, moral, and significant order. The conditions described in Jude are those which will prevail in the world immediately preceding the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. No sober-minded Christian can help but observe the moral looseness everywhere, even in the Church herself.

It is against this background that we shall consider some important truths which should strengthen our faith and witness, as the chosen of God.

First, let us consider the writer. He opens with these words, "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ." His name is derived from Judah, meaning praise. A careful study of the Gospels reveals he was of the family of the Lord Jesus, but in stating his relationship, he says, "The servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James." He places the ties of grace before those of nature, thus revealing the spirit of humility.

Surely, here is a lesson. Too many believers want a place of importance. They aspire to the executive branch of the Kingdom of God instead of being content to be a servant. Let us remember the words of our blessed Lord, “Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth labourers into His harvest” (Matt. 9: 38).

No higher title can be conferred upon a believer than, “A servant of Jesus Christ.” Think of Job. The Lord said, “Hast thou considered My servant Job?” Think also of Moses; the Lord said of him, “Moses My servant,” an expression that occurs about twenty times in the Old Testament. This title “Servant” is applied to God’s Son about five times in Isaiah; for example, “Behold My Servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high” (Isa. 52:13).

The Epistle of Jude rests upon two strong pillars of truth, one at the beginning, “Preserved in Jesus Christ;” the other at the end, “Presented by Jesus Christ.” Moreover, we find mercy at the outset and mercy at the close. It is because God is a God of mercy that we are preserved and not consumed. He is called, “The Father of mercies.”

The writer, Jude, uses statements in triplet form. No fewer than eight such groupings occur in his letter. The first embraces the expressions: “the called,” “the beloved,” and “the preserved.”

The Calling

It has been said, “We always remember our blessings and gifts, but forget our calling.” The calling in the Gospels is largely the outward hearing of the Word of God; in the Epistles, the inward response of mind and

heart to God's message. In Romans, Paul defines this as "Obedience to the faith" (Rom. 1:5). In other places it is expressed as being an "heavenly" calling, a "high," and a "holy" one.

In Romans 8:28-29, the divine call is linked with the divine purpose, that we should be like Christ. At this point let us distinguish between the purpose of God and the will of God. The former embraces things set in order, completed to the pleasure of God. This can never be frustrated. Alas, to our sorrow, the latter can be hindered.

The divine fellowship of our calling is brought before us in 1 Corinthians 1:9. We are called into this fellowship that we might enjoy Christ. John reminds us that our fellowship is "with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

Peter, likewise, tells us that we are called "unto His eternal glory (1 Pet. 5:1) in order that we might be with Christ.

The Creed

Jude exhorts that we contend for the faith. What is our faith, our creed? The word "creed" comes from the latin "credo" meaning, I believe. This is the faith once delivered unto the saints (vs. 3). For this we must contend. In these days of shallow thinking as to the revelation of God concerning Christ, we must hold fast to that which we believe. Departure from these precious truths is a mark of the last days.

How necessary that we not quail before the enemy!

Not only has the faith been delivered to the saints to hold; it has been declared from the Word, and

demonstrated in the lives of devoted men of God. The importance of laying hold of these things is amply emphazied in Paul's letters to Timothy. Twelve times he warns that young man about following after the things of God and of standing fast in the faith. The Bible reminds us that the day will come when men will deny the faith. Are these days not already upon us?

The Conduct

Creed and conduct go together. Jude has something important to point out: the danger of neglecting to feed our souls on the Word (vs 20); the danger of leaning on our own understanding and failing to consult God; he urges us to pray in the Holy Spirit (vs 20); the danger of harbouring a hard spirit, without love (vs. 21); the danger of failing to show mercy to those who have fallen by the way (vs 22-23).

Jude shows from sacred history the three companies and the three persons with whom God had to deal because of spiritual departure. First, there was Israel, the angels, and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 5-7); then there was Cain, Balaam, and Core (vs. 11).

Cain refused divine righteousness. He offered a sacrifice of his own choice, but ended with murder. Balaam sought a reward; he was covetous. Core raised his hand in rebellion against God's Word. All received their desserts. God's judgment is surely directed against self-righteousness, covetousness, and rebellion.

Jude lays twelve charges against teachers who have apostatized from the truth. Four may be mentioned:

They are waterless clouds (vs. 12). Clouds in Scripture symbolize the divine presence, protection, and pathway.

Such was the cloud that led the Israelites through the wilderness. God said from the cloud on the Mount of Tranfiguration, “This is My beloved Son, hear Him” (Luke 9:35). Those who digress from God’s way have not the Spirit of God, and are none of His (Rom. 8:9).

They are called fruitless trees. What a contradiction! Judges 9:8-13, records the parable of the trees: the fig, the olive, and the vine all were for God’s glory and man’s pleasure. A fruitless tree is a disappointment. The Lord Jesus teaches a lesson in the fig tree without figs; it was left to wither (Mark 11:21). According to John’s Gospel the vine is only for fruitbearing. That is what God expects of His own.

They also are likened to restless waves, symbol of the world in which there is no peace. The wicked are like the troubled sea (Isa. 57:20), Constantly the waters toss in endless agitation.

Finally, they are likened to wandering stars, stars out of orbit, unable to reflect light. Stars have two functions, to shine, to direct. Such men can do neither. They know not God who gives light to all men, and they have no place where to direct a weary soul.

These people will fill the earth just before the Lord returns. Do we not see their ilk today? Their presence presses upon us the imminence of our Lord’s return.

From this dark picture Jude turns away to treat of what we are and have in our blessed Lord. We are called by God the Father, beloved by Jesus Christ, and preserved by the Holy Spirit, that we might show mercy to the fallen. Let us not forget the warning of 1 Corinthians

10:12, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Two Old Testament characters: Moses, the Man of God, and Enoch, the Prophet of God, are mentioned in that order, a moral order. Moses talked with God face to face and Enoch walked with God side by side. Let us in like manner cultivate these two holy exercises for if we do, we shall be well pleasing to the Lord.

The Consummation

The Lord Jesus is not only coming for His own, but He is coming in order to present them to His Father. There are three aspects of the believer being presented to the Father. First, the presentation of the saint himself (Rom. 12:1-3). This should be the experience of every true child of God, “That ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Second, the presentation of the servant and his work (Col. 1:28). It is the desire of every servant of Christ to present the believers matured and not babes tossed about by every wind of doctrine. Finally, there is the glorious presentation by the Saviour. Jude states, “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (vs. 24). We are to be presented faultless, or without blemish, and, as one writer expresses it, with exuberant joy.

The writer to the Hebrews similarly pictures the Lord saying, “Behold I and the children which God hath given Me” (Heb. 2:13). Paul, too, in speaking of the presentation of the Bride must have had this wonderful scene in mind as he wrote, “That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle,

or any such thing” (Eph. 5:27). Oh, what a day! Our hearts would join with the aged John and exclaim, “Amen, Even so, come Lord Jesus!”