

# Submitting to God's good will

Text: Luke 22:42

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**Scriptures:** Psalm 40:1-8; Luke 22:39-46

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 353, 511, 195, 468, 40, 23

**Series:** Heidelberg Catechism (LD49 Q&A124)

**Theme:** In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faces an agonizing choice between His human will and the divine will of God and He willingly, yet painfully, submits Himself to the desire of His Heavenly Father.

**Proposition:** Jesus willingly answered the third request of the Lord's prayer by submitting Himself to the will of His Father in Heaven and taking the cup of suffering and judgement and drinking down all of its deadly poison on the cross.

## Introduction

What do you really want? Or in other words, what is your deepest desire? Or, what would you be willing to sacrifice everything else for? We can go through much of our lives not really knowing the answer to the question, 'what do you really want?', but there are times when answering this vital question is unavoidable.

For Christ, in the Garden of Gethsemane after He had met with His disciples for the last time in an upper room and before He had continued on His way to His death, this was the time when the man Jesus needed to answer the question "what do you really want"?

We'll look at our text this evening under three headings:

- a) The test of desire
- b) The human will
- c) The Divine will

### 1. The test of desire

Luke records that after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with His disciples, He went out across the brook Kidron to the Mount of Olives. Notice that Luke writes that he went there '*as was his custom*'. This place was an olive grove which Christ had frequented. He often met there with His disciples (John 18:2). The name of this location (as Matthew and Mark recount) was 'Gethsemane' which means 'olive press'. John describes Gethsemane as a garden (John 18:1). It was a place of retreat; somewhere quiet to rest and pray. But on this Passover night, it was to be a setting of great turmoil, distress, conflict, betrayal and abandonment.

Luke alone records that as Jesus prayed, he was in agony '*and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground*' (Luke 22:44). Christ was under intense internal emotional stress in the garden. Although it was night time and even though he was not engaging in vigorous physical activity, he was sweating profusely. Some think that the tiny blood vessels in his sweat glands were rupturing so that he was bleeding from the pores in his

skin. This is quite possible. There is a rare medical condition called hematohidrosis where this bleeding takes place as a result of acute fear, stress and intense mental strain. What we do know for certain is that Jesus had said to his disciples in the garden “*My soul is very sorrowful, even to death*” (Matt 26:28). Matthew describes His condition as being ‘*sorrowful and troubled*’ (Matt 26:37). Mark writes that He ‘*began to be greatly distressed and troubled*’ (Mark 14:33).

What was so deeply distressing for Jesus in the garden? He was not yet on the cross, not yet being scourged and mocked by the Roman soldiers, not yet being struck by an officer in the court of the High Priest, not yet deserted by all His disciples. The tranquillity of the garden had not as yet been disturbed by the arrival of a crowd of enemies including ‘*officers of the temple and elders who had come out against him... with swords and clubs*’ (Luke 22:52). There in the garden, Jesus suffered the agony of anticipating all that was yet to come, whilst the night was yet still and quiet.

He was alone with His Father in prayer as he knelt and said: “*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.*” (Luke 22:42) In the Old Testament, the image of the cup can symbolise God’s blessing; however, in the majority of references, the cup represents the Lord’s judgment and wrath on wickedness (e.g. Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:22). The ‘cup’ here is a symbol of both suffering and divine anger. “*Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering*” (Isa 51:17 – also ref. Eze 23:33, Jer 25:15-27).

There alone in prayer that night, Jesus faced the prospect of the cross where He would suffer the full force of God’s perfectly righteous judgement upon the sins of all those people in whose place He would substitute Himself. The ‘cup’ was like a vessel full of the deadliest poison – a single drop of which would kill a man. At Gethsemane the anticipation of drinking down to the last dregs this foul lethal venom, caused Jesus to recoil in horror and to desire to be spared the suffering and pain of being made to be sin and being utterly abandoned by His Heavenly Father who had loved Him from ‘*before the foundation of the world*’ (John 17:24).

Perhaps you have known a time when you were getting closer to having an examination at school, college or university, or maybe it’s a driving test or some surgery. If so, you may have experienced some anxiety, even fear. You may even have felt some physical signs like sleeplessness, trembling, feeling faint, stomach pains or a stress hives rash. Perhaps you may be feeling anxious about the uncertainties of the future in a world which seems more troubled now than ever.

Brothers and sisters, friends, Jesus Christ is able to sympathise with our weaknesses, He is a man of flesh and blood like us. On the Mount of Olives, He experienced a more intense agony of anticipation than we will ever know. Brothers and sisters, He suffered there in that garden to that we would not suffer the fear and anxiety of God’s wrath on the Day of Judgement. His pain is graciously our gain. Gethsemane was an agonising test of the human will of Jesus and revealed His deepest desire. This was His answer to the question ‘what do you really want?’. Which brings us to our second point:

## 2. The human will

The history of the New Testament church illustrates the many false ideas which have arisen and have then been corrected through careful study of the Scriptures. For example, the teaching of 'Monothelism'. This sounds like a complicated word, but it's easy to understand when we break it down. 'Mono' means 'one', 'single' or 'alone'. We use it at the start of many English words e.g. monocycle, monogamy, monologue, monopoly (exclusive possession of the trade in some commodity). 'Thelema' is the Greek word translated 'will' when Christ says, '*not my will, but yours be done*'. So Monothelism is the teaching that Christ has only one will. This idea began in Armenia and Syria around 629AD and continued to spread until the third Council of Constantinople in 680-681AD when it was condemned as heresy.

Our text clearly shows that Jesus, in His humanity, has a separate will from the will of God, His Heavenly Father. This is evident from the words of Christ '*not my will, but yours be done*'. This is also clear from His words recorded in John 6:38: "*For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me*".

Yet we also know that Jesus is Divine. For example: One of His names is 'Emmanuel' which means 'God with us'; He performed miracles where He showed complete control over this Creation; He forgave sins and accepted worship from people; He has equality with God the Father, being with God in the beginning (John 1:1).

Jesus is the unique God-man who has two natures. He is fully God (e.g. Col 2:9). He is fully man with a human body (e.g. Luke 24:39), a human mind (e.g. Luke 2:52) and a human soul (e.g. Matt 26:38). His two natures do not mix together, but remain distinct. They do not change one another. We read from the Westminster Confession of Faith earlier that '*two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person without conversion, composition or confusion*' (WCF8:2).

Christ has two natures which are united together in such a way as to be one person. This is what is called the 'hypostatic union' – the mysterious joining together of the divine and the human in the one person of Jesus. He has both a human and a divine will. This Biblical teaching is called 'dyothelism' – meaning two wills.

The intense pain which Jesus experienced in the garden of Gethsemane was an agony of anticipation, but also a battle of the wills: His own human desire and the Divine desire of God His Heavenly Father. There in the garden of Gethsemane, we especially see Jesus the human being and we see His human will submitting to the will of God the Father.

Consider the contrast between this and the will of our common ancestor, the first man, Adam. Just as the first garden in Eden had been a place where the desire of Adam was tested, so Gethsemane was where the desire of Christ was tested. For Adam, when presented by the very attractive fruit from the forbidden tree by his wife Eve, the question he had to answer was 'whose will will be done, the will of God or of man?' Would it be God's revealed will that He not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Or would it be Adam's will that he satisfy his desire for food from the tree which was '*a delight to the eyes*' and would '*make him wise*' (Gen 3:6)?

For Christ, when He was offered that repulsive ‘cup’ of suffering, judgement and death by His Heavenly Father, He had to answer the same question as the first Adam ‘whose will will be done, the will of God or man?’ Would He choose God’s divine will that He fulfil His mission to save a people, to keep the covenant which God had made and to be the means through which God would fulfil all His promises? Or would it be His human will that He be spared the suffering and death which would certainly come upon Him if He submitted to His Father’s will? Jesus Himself had earlier taught His disciples to pray the third request of the Lord’s prayer “*Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matt 6:10). In the garden of Gethsemane, the human will of Christ was agonisingly tested; far beyond any trial you or I will ever experience. The ‘stakes’ could not have been higher. So great was this battle of the wills that it weakened Him so much that it was necessary for an angel from heaven to come and strengthen Him (Luke 22:43).

Choosing the will of God above your own can be the hardest decision that a human being ever makes, yet it is always the right option. The next time you are faced with a choice between what you know to be God’s revealed will and what your human desire wants, remember the agonizing choice that Jesus made in Gethsemane so that you could be strengthened, not by an angel, but by the Holy Spirit to make the right decision. Jesus said ‘*Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness*’. That’s what He did in the garden, as He willingly submitted to the will of God.

He fulfilled the prophetic words of Psalm 40:7-8 *Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart"*. Let’s look at the will of God now.

### **3. The Divine will**

In understanding the doctrine of ‘dyothelitism’ we have seen that Christ Jesus has two distinct wills: the human and the divine which are ‘*inseparably joined together in one person without conversion, composition or confusion*’.

The divine will of God is a single intention which He works out perfectly and exactly according to what theologians call the ‘Divine decrees’. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines these ‘decrees’ this way: ‘*His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass*’ (A7). In Ephesians 1:11 we read that God ‘*works all things according to the counsel of His will*’. Whilst there is only **one** will of God, only one plan which He executes, nevertheless there are two aspects to the single will of God:

- The will of God which is concealed from us
- The will of God which has been revealed to us

These two dimensions to the Will of God, whilst separated in Scripture and are not in conflict. One verse which succinctly states this truth is Deut 29:29. *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law"*.

The secret, concealed, will of God is not known to man. You and I do not know in detail what the Lord has in store for each one of us during our lives on this earth. It is for this reason that we must live by faith, not by sight, because we do not know what tomorrow will bring. Part of

God's will was concealed from Christ, in His humanity. For example, the timing of His own return at the end of this age. Jesus said, *"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only"* (Matt 24:36).

However, Christ, in His humanity, knew the will of God in so far as His Heavenly Father's will had been revealed through Scripture and by direct communication from God the Father to God the Son in His humanity. Jesus knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well. He came to earth not to overturn the previous revelation of God, but to fulfil all that had already been revealed in God's Word (Matt 5:17). Jesus knew that He was Himself, the fulfilment of many promises, patterns and types in the Old Testament. For example Luke records His words just before He went to the Mount of Olives: *"For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfilment"* (Luke 22:37).

Jesus knew that it was His Father's will for Him to be *'delivered over to the Gentiles, be mocked, and shamefully treated, spat upon, flogged and killed and that on the third day he would rise'* (Luke 18:32). These details of God's divine decrees were revealed to Christ in His humanity. The overriding desire of our Lord Jesus was that His Father's will be done. He had explained this to his disciples in these words which John records *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work"* (John 4:34). When we pray in the Lord's Prayer *"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matt 6:10), the Heidelberg Catechism (answer 124) explains that we are asking God to: *Help us and all men to reject our own wills and to obey your will without any back talk. Your will alone is good. Help everyone carry out the work he is called to as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.* Jesus rejected His own human will when He willingly submitted Himself to obey the will of His Heavenly Father, saying in Gethsemane *"not my will, but yours, be done"*.

Jesus helps people like you and me to willingly and faithfully carry out the work we are called to in the following ways:

- a) He shows us that submitting to God's revealed will may at times be extremely difficult and painful and that God's plan for us in this life will involve suffering and loss.
- b) He has sent (together with God the Father) The Holy Spirit to strengthen us when we struggle with conflict between our human desires and God's revealed will.
- c) He has given to us the means of grace to nourish our faith so that we trust in the perfection of God's will more and more.
- d) He has submitted Himself to the will of His Father in Heaven and has drunk down the fullness of the cup of God's wrath against the sins of all His people. This means that when we fail to submit to God's will, there is a pathway back to blessing through repentance and recommitment to desire the will of God above our own desires.

It is evident from all of Christ's life, but especially clear on that night in the garden of Gethsemane, that what He really wanted above all else was that the will of His Father in Heaven be done.

How about you? What do you really want? Are you willing to submit yourself to God's good will, even though it may mean suffering and pain for you?

Christ was willing to do this for us, brothers and sister, so that we would be spared the wrath to come.

AMEN