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## *The Sovereignty of God in the Free Offer of the Gospel*

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The “free offer” of the gospel has been the subject of intense debate for many years. On one hand some have argued that if God has foreordained some men to eternal damnation from before the foundation of the world, then how could God sincerely offer his saving mercy to them? Others argue that if he truly desired to gather the rebellious children of Israel under his wing as a hen gathers her chicks, but the Scribes and Pharisees were not willing<sup>1</sup>, isn’t God expressing a desire of some sort to save those who are not elect? All too often one side latches on to the passages that affirm their favored view and then with the club of logic, beat all other passages into conformity to that doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, these are important questions that anyone who has seriously wrestled with the whole counsel of God has pondered<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of this discussion is to show from scripture that God does indeed sincerely and freely offer the gospel to sinners and that this desire for the salvation of sinners is not in any way in opposition to his sovereign election of some to everlasting life and damnation of the reprobate to everlasting destruction. The Sovereign God who has determined before the foundation of the world those whom he will redeem also sincerely and graciously offers himself to all sinners who hear the gospel. It is assumed that the reader is already familiar with the Biblical doctrines of election and reprobation. If not, there are many excellent works that serve this purpose.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Matthew 23:37

<sup>2</sup> The Protestant Reformed Church, for example, has resolved this dilemma by steadfastly maintaining that God does not actually desire all men to repent and believe as he commands them to do. David Engelsma writes, “That God is serious in the external call to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect, does not mean, or even imply, that he wishes all to be saved.” A little later he says that “...His purpose, will, and desire is to give life and salvation to the elect only.” [*Is the Denial of the Well Meant Offer Hyper-Calvinism?* (Protestant Reformed Theological Journal, April 1990) p24.] Dr. Engelsma charges reformed people with holding to an absurdity for believing that God could desire to save a person whom he has ordained to damnation. But merely denying God has any desire for the damned person to be saved does not relieve the dilemma. It only changes the dilemma. Under their scenario God now commands people to do what he doesn’t desire them to do. God commands all men everywhere to repent, but if one denies that God desires to save all men then one is also asserting that God doesn’t actually want people to do what he is commanding them to do.

<sup>3</sup> McMahon, C. Matthew, *The Two Wills of God: Does God Really Have Two Wills*, (New Lenox: Puritan Publications, 2005) has an extensive historical summary of how this issue has been handled.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* by Loraine Boettner, *The Atonement* by Gordon Clark, *The Plan of Salvation* by Benjamin B. Warfield, or *The Sovereignty of God* by Arthur W. Pink.

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### Definition of Free Offer

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The *free offer* or *well-meant offer* of the gospel as we will use those terms mean that in proclaiming the gospel, God is gracious to all hearers of the gospel and expresses a sincere desire for the salvation of all those who hear the gospel message.

The word *offer* is often misunderstood in this context as being analogous to receiving an offer from a neighbor to buy some property or an invitation for dinner – something that may be accepted or rejected with no further consequences. But this is not the case with the gospel. Those who obey not the gospel are destroyed (2 Thess. 1:6-8)<sup>5</sup>. The offers of the King of Kings and his ambassadors cannot be rejected without significant ramifications. Deuteronomy 20:10-13 provides an example of the word *offer* being used in this context.

Deuteronomy 20:10-13 When you come near unto a city to fight against it, *thou shalt offer it peace*. And if it answer thee again peaceably, and open unto thee, then let all the people that is found therein, be tributaries unto thee, and serve thee. But if it will make no peace with thee, but make war against thee, then shalt thou besiege it. And the Lord thy God shall deliver it into thine hands, and thou shalt smite all the males thereof with the edge of the sword.

The city could reject the offer of peace, but to do so resulted in destruction. This is also the sense in which it is used in the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF).

*Man, by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 42:6; Romans 3:20-21, Romans 8:3; Galatians 3:21), commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved (Mark 16:15, Mark 16:16; John 3:16; Romans 10:6,9; Gal 3:11), and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe (Ezekiel 36:26-27, John 6:44-45)<sup>6</sup>.*

Part of the confusion is that many of the “offers” of salvation are in the third person imperative in the Greek (e.g. John 7:37, Rev 22:17, Acts 17:27). Since English has no third person imperative, the force of the command is lost in translation, which is usually worded as “Let everyone...” As a result what is actually a command in the Greek comes across as a permissive in the English. I think a better term in our day would be the *imperative of the gospel* instead of the *free offer of the gospel*.

However, the underlying question about God’s sincerity is not affected in any way by which term one uses. One could just as easily speak of the command of the gospel without diminishing the force of the question in any way. Does God have a sincere desire for the salvation of all those he commands to repent? In other words, does God sincerely desire those whom he commands to repent to do as he

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 - Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

<sup>6</sup> WCF 7:3

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commands? If he does, then God has a desire that is not fulfilled in that all men are not saved. If he doesn't, then God commands people to do things he doesn't want them to do.

Determining which position, if any, is consistent with the scriptures will be the focus of this study. To begin, let us examine some of these offers or commands.

### The Free Offer in the Old & New Testament

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Numerous places in scripture invite or command sinners to repent. Frequently these very invitations are coupled with the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Man's responsibility to repent of his sin is juxtaposed with God's foreordaining all things that come to pass or man's inability to come to Christ apart from the grace of God.

#### John 11:27-28

**Doctrine:** (v27) All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, **and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.**

**Offer:** (v28) **Come** unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **Take** my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.

#### Acts 17:22-27

**Doctrine:** (v22) Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, ***him declare I unto you.***

**Offer:** (v27) That **they should seek the Lord**, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. (v30) **[God] now commands all men everywhere** to repent.

#### Acts 2:30 - 39

**Doctrine:** Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard *this*, **they were pricked in their heart**, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?

**Offer:** v. 38-39, Then Peter said unto them, **Repent, and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, **and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.** For **the promise** is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.

#### Acts 2:26 - 27

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**Doctrine:** (v26) For the king knows of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

**Offer:** (v27) King Agrippa, **do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.** Then Agrippa said unto Paul, **Almost you persuade me** to be a Christian.

### Rev. 22:16 - 17

**Doctrine:** (v16) I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, *and* the bright and morning star.

**Offer:** (v17) And the Spirit and the bride say, *Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And **whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*** (This a 3<sup>rd</sup> person imperative regarding those who are thirsty and those who will)

It could properly be argued that these commands are only to those who have been regenerated in that it refers to those who desire to come (John 6:44) and those who are thirsty (Matthew 5:6). But even so, this does not answer the other scriptures that are clearly universal (e.g. Acts 17:27).

### Other offers or commands

Romans 10:9 ... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God hath raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.

Isaiah 45:22, **Look unto me, and be ye saved**, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

Isaiah 55:1-2, **Ho, every one that thirsts, come ye to the waters**, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. **Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfies not?** Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is good*, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Isaiah 65:2ff, **I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people**, which walks in a way *that was not good*, after their own thoughts; A people that provokes me to anger continually to my face; that sacrifices in gardens, and burns incense upon altars of brick; Which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable *things is in* their vessels.

John 7:37, In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, **If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.** (3<sup>rd</sup> person imperative)

Luke 13:34, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which kills the prophets, and stones them that are sent unto thee; **how often would I have gathered thy children together**, as a hen *doth gather* her brood under *her* wings, and ye would not!

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Isaiah 55:3, **Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear**, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *even* the sure mercies of David.

John 6:57, Then said Jesus unto the twelve, **Will ye also go away?**

Psalms 45:10-11, **Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear**; forget also your own people, and thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he *is* thy Lord; and worship thou him.

John 5:6, When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time *in that case*, he said unto him, **Will you be made whole?**

In these passages sinners are repeatedly commanded to incline their ear and hear, to look to Christ and be saved, to come and drink, and to repent. They are asked if they desire to be made whole and if they would depart from Christ. They are invited with words like *whosoever will* and *if you* repent and believe you will be saved.

In light of these clear statements of scripture, to deny that God desires all sinners to repent requires either that God does not mean what he says, or that God commands people to do things that he does not desire (or want) them to do. Neither option is satisfactory. The first option can be dismissed immediately. No Christian denies that God always means what he says (i.e. that his word is true), even if that meaning is hard for us to grasp. But what about the second option?

### Does God Desire That Which He Commands?

This question is relevant not only to the gospel command to repent and believe, but to all the commands in scripture. Does God ever command people to do things that are contrary to what he desires them to do? For example, God commands all men to keep the Sabbath day holy and forbids them from killing others unjustly or committing adultery. Is it God's desire that all men do these things?

The scriptures answer this question with a resounding yes. The commands of God are always described as being his will. The scriptures never present the commands of God as being contrary to his will. It is always God's will (i.e. desire) that we do what he commands. Paul told the Thessalonians:

*For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will (θέλημα) of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: (1 Thess 4:2-3)*

*In everything give thanks: for this is the will (θέλημα) of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. (1 Thess 5:18)*

Peter tells us we should live the rest of our time doing what God desires, not what our sinful nature desires.

*That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will (θέλημα) of God. (1 Peter 4:2)*

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God's will or desire is that Christians should be sanctified. God's will is that Christians should die more and more to sin and live more and more to Christ. God's will is that we should abstain from fornication and always give thanks. God desires obedience which means he desires that we keep his commandments. John 9:31 shows that God desires this of all men.

*Joh 9:31 - Now we know that God hears not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, (θέλημα) him he hears.*

God does not hear sinners. Sinners are those who do not keep his commands. But he does hear those who do his will (i.e. what he desires). The obvious implication of this is that those who do not keep his commands, do not do what God desires. Samuel had the same message for Saul: God desires and delights in obedience.

*And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (1 Sam 15:22)*

On the other hand, when people do not do what God has commanded, he is displeased. Referring to the Israelites in Moses' day, Paul says that God was displeased with their sin.

*But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (1 Cor 10:5)*

*But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? (Heb 3:17)*

God's will is that all men do what he commands them to do, and he is displeased and grieved when we sin and do not obey his commands. Nowhere does scripture ever indicate that God is pleased when people do not obey his commandments. God is always displeased with those who disobey his commandments. God always desires that we keep his commandments and do as he commands. Since God clearly commands all men everywhere to repent, it is equally clear that God, in some sense, does desire all men to be saved.

### The Will of God

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But once we accept that God desires us to do what he commands us to do, we are brought face to face with a doctrine that, like the Trinity, is impossible for us to fully understand: God's will is immutable in one sense, but in another sense, it can be resisted. This inevitable conclusion is reinforced upon comparing the many scriptures that teach that his will cannot be resisted with the many other scriptures that speak of his will being resisted and the fact that his will is not always obeyed. Several passages that explicitly state that the will of God can be frustrated or resisted by those who disobey are:

Luke 7:30 - But the Pharisees and lawyers frustrated the counsel (βουλή) of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.

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Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Also Luke 13:34.

A number of additional passages implicitly teach that God's will is not always followed. We are told to pray that his will would be done on earth as it is already being done in heaven, implying that it is not always done on earth.

Matthew 6:10 - Thy kingdom come. Thy will (θέλημα) be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Luke 11:2 - And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will (θέλημα) be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

Jesus taught that not everyone who calls him Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of the Father implying that not everyone does the will of the Father.

Matthew 7:21 - Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will (θέλημα) of my Father which is in heaven.

He taught that those who do his Father's will are his brother, sister, and mother implying that not everyone fits those categories, and thus not everyone does his will.

Matthew 12:50 - For whosoever shall do the will (θέλημα) of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Mark 3:35 - For whosoever shall do the will (θέλημα) of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

Matthew 21:31 - Whether of them twain did the will (θέλημα) of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

John 9:31 - Now we know that God hears not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, (θέλημα) him he hears.

1 John 2:17 - And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will (θέλημα) of God abides forever.

Hebrews 13:21 - Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, (θέλημα) working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 2:15 - For so is the will (θέλημα) of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

On the other hand there are numerous passages that teach that God's will cannot be frustrated.

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Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Isaiah 46:9 -10 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:

Romans 9:19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? (βούλημα)

Hebrews 6:17 - Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel (βουλῆ), confirmed it by an oath:

Act 2:23 - Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel (βουλῆ) and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

Pro 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turns it whithersoever he will.

Dan 4:35 - And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he [Jehovah] 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 are you doing?

Act 4:27-28 - 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 (βουλῆ) determined before to be done.

Ephesians 1:11 - In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel (βουλῆ) of his own will (θέλημα):

Psalms 33:11 The counsel of the LORD stands for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

1Samuel 15:29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.

To these could be added God's command to Pharaoh to let his people go and God's purpose expressed to Moses to harden his heart so that he would not let them go, or God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son and his immutable purpose that Isaac not be sacrificed, which was revealed when he prevented the sacrifice.

The task of harmonizing these two sets of passages is very similar to the task of harmonizing the passages that teach that God is one with the passages where God is simultaneously present in three persons or where the attributes, names, and works of God are equally attributed to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We say that God is one God in three persons who are the same in substance and equal in power and glory. But these are terms of ignorance. God is simple, not made up of parts, yet this simple one God exists in 3 persons. We can come up with no analogy or example to explain the Trinity that doesn't fall into a Trinitarian heresy of one sort or another.

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Many of these same types of statements can be said about the two wills of God. The only difference being that there is no simple consensus on terminology to distinguish between these different senses of God's will. Various terms have been used to describe these two wills, including

- the decretive will (his immutable counsel) and the preceptive will (the commands of God),
- the secret will (decretive) and the revealed will (perceptive),
- the will of *eudokias* (εὐδοκία) which correlates to the decretive, and the will of *euarestias* (εὐἀρεστος) which correlates to the perceptive
- the benepacit (decretive) and the signi (perceptive) wills

Turretin has probably articulated the doctrine of God's will the most consistently of all those that I have read. Much of what he says about the wills of God could also be said of the Trinity. He doesn't hesitate to refer to the *wills* of God (plural). But at the same time he also affirms that God's will is one.

*Although the will of God is only one and most simple, by which he comprehends all things by a single and most simple act so that he sees and understands all things at one glance, yet because it is occupied differently about various objects, it thus happens that in our manner of conception, it may be apprehended as manifold...<sup>7</sup>*

*God can will to precept what he does not will as to decree in as much as he wills to prescribe something to man, but does not will to effect it. <sup>8</sup>*

*...although these wills may be conceived by us as diverse, yet they are not contrary.<sup>9</sup>*

*There cannot be contrariety between these two wills because they do not will and nill the same thing in the same manner and respect. The will of purpose is the will of event and execution. The signified will is the will of duty and the obligation to it. Thus God willed the immolation of Isaac by a will of sign as to the perception, but he nilled it by a beneplacit will as to the event itself because he had decreed to prohibit that slaughter. Now although these two acts of the divine will are diverse ("I will to command Abraham to slay his son" and "I do not will that immolation"), yet they are not contrary, for both were true – that God both decreed to enjoin this upon Abraham and equally decreed to hinder the effecting of it. ... The whole will of God about this affair was not either only to command Abraham to make that sacrifice or [only] to hinder it, but ought to embrace those two diverse acts <sup>10</sup>*

Reams of paper have been consumed, gallons of ink, and hours of writing have been expended in a valiant but ultimately vain attempt to explain this mystery. Some insight has been gained in the process, but I think the best approach is to treat it as we do the Trinity and reach a consensus on terms of ignorance analogous to the terms used for the Trinity. By consistent use of these terms we avoid

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<sup>7</sup> Turretin, Francis. *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol 1, Translated by George Musgrave Giger, Ed. William Dennison (P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, New Jersey), 1992. p220

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p221

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p221

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p223 -224

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speaking of three Gods, speaking instead of three persons. Adopting similar language would allow us to speak of one will with two manifestations or aspects.

### **Christ's Will Distinguished from the Father's Will**

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The two natures of Christ in the hypostatic union present us with another example where the will of God is expressed in a plural sense in that Christ's will as the second person of the Trinity is distinguished from the Father's will. Christ desires that the cup pass from him and prays to that effect. He said that he came not to do his will but the will of his Father. As respects his divine nature, Christ's will was the Father's will, saying I and the Father are one (John 10:30). But as respects his human nature, he prayed that God would take the cup from him, despite knowing (and teaching his disciples) that it was God's will that he came to die. His will as respects his divine nature and his will as respects his human nature are not contrary to each other, but they are distinct in the same way that his two natures are distinct from each other.

Luke 22:42 - Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, (θέλημα) but thine, be done.

Matthew 26:39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will (θέλω), but as thou wilt.

Matthew 26:42 - He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will (θέλημα) be done.

John 6:38 - For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, (θέλημα) but the will (θέλημα) of him that sent me.

John 5:30 - I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, (θέλημα) but the will (θέλημα) of the Father which hath sent me.

John 4:34 - Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will (θέλημα) of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

John 6:39-40 - And this is the Father's will (θέλημα) which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will (θέλημα) of him that sent me, that everyone which sees the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

### **God's Sovereignty is Consistent with Human Responsibility**

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A related but distinct question pertains to how God's sovereignty is harmonized with man's responsibility. Often these are seen as competing with each other in the same way the various senses of God's will are seen to be competing or in tension with each other. But as with the will of God, these two doctrines are both explicitly taught in scripture and live in complete harmony with each other both on the pages of scripture and in our ordinary experience.

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Our actions are simply the means through which God accomplishes his purposes. Prayer changes things not because it changes what God has decreed to do from before the foundation of the world, but because it results in a different outcome than if we had not prayed. The prayers of the saints, which are ordained by God like everything else, are the means by which God is moved to accomplish his purposes. In decreeing events, he has ordained the means and causes as well as the ends.

One often hears the admonition to drive safely because our safety is dependent on our alert obedience of the rules of the road. If we proceed through a red light into high speed on-coming traffic, we'll likely be killed. If we stop and only proceed when the path is clear, we'll live. This does not imply that God is not sovereign over our actions at traffic lights. Rather in ordaining the outcome at each traffic light, God also ordains the means through which he will accomplish those outcomes. Usually he uses our alert obedience of traffic rules. Occasionally he uses other means. But in neither case is either his sovereignty or our responsibility diminished. The important question is "Do our acts obey the law of God?"

### Conclusion

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Regarding the free offer of the gospel, Turretin concludes:

It is one thing, therefore, to will [i.e. desire] the salvation of men by will *euaestias* [i.e. to be pleased with it); another to will it by the will *eudokias* (i.e. to intend it). The latter is incompatible with reprobation, but not the former.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately this statement does not explain this mystery any more than the Trinitarian formulations explain the mystery of the Trinity because God is also said to be pleased to do all his holy will. Attempts to go further often result in either denying that God means what he says on one hand, or diminishing the immutability and irresistibility of God's will on the other.

God is known by his perfections. God is sovereign, God is just, and God is love. He is unchangeable in these perfections which means that his perfections never cease. In the exercise of his sovereignty, he is just. This was one of Paul's main points in Romans 9. In in the exercise of his justice he is loving. To be loving is his nature and he cannot deny himself.

There is one significant difference between the Trinity or the hypostatic union and the matter of God's will. The mystery of God's will is only a temporal issue. Eschatologically, when all God's enemies are put under his feet and all God's people are made perfect in holiness and not able to sin, these two aspects of God's will converge. God's will, will be done on earth even as it is done in heaven. That which is resisted by sinful men today will then be perfectly obeyed so that everything that happens according to his decretive will, will be in perfect accord with his revealed will.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p389

## Reference – The Use of βουλή (boulē) and θέλημα (thelēma) in Scripture

Act 13:36 - For David, after he had served his own generation by the will (βουλή) of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

Luk 23:51 - (The same had not consented to the counsel (βουλή) and deed of them;) he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.

Act 5:38 - And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel (βουλή) or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

Act 27:12 - And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised (βουλή) to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.

Act 27:42 - And the soldiers' counsel (βουλή) was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

1Co 4:5 - Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels (βουλή) of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

2Ti 2:26 - And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (θέλημα)

2Pe 1:21 - For the prophecy came not in old time by the will (θέλημα) of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

1Pe 4:3 - For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will (θέλημα) of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

Mat 18:14 - Even so it is not the will (θέλημα) of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Luk 12:47 - And that servant, which knew his lord's will, (θέλημα ) and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, (θέλημα ) shall be beaten with many stripes.

Luk 23:25 - And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will. (θέλημα)

Joh 1:13 - Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will (θέλημα) of the flesh, nor of the will (θέλημα) of man, but of God.

Joh 7:17 - If any man will do his will, (θέλημα) he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

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Act 13:22 - And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will. (θέλημα)

Act 21:14 - And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will (θέλημα) of the Lord be done.

Act 22:14 - And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou should know his will, (θέλημα) and see that Just One, and should hear the voice of his mouth.

Rom 1:10 - Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will (θέλημα) of God to come unto you.

Rom 2:18 - And know his will, (θέλημα) and approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

Rom 12:2 - And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will (θέλημα) of God.

Rom 15:32 - That I may come unto you with joy by the will (θέλημα) of God, and may with you be refreshed.

1Co 1:1 - Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will (θέλημα) of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

1Co 7:37 - Nevertheless he that stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, (θέλημα) and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.

1Co 16:12 - ( ) As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will (θέλημα) was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.

2Co 1:1 - Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will (θέλημα) of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:

2Co 8:5 - And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will (θέλημα) of God.

Gal 1:4 - Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will (θέλημα) of God and our Father:

Eph 1:1 - Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will (θέλημα) of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Eph 1:5 - Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (θέλημα)

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Eph 1:9 - Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, (θέλημα) according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

Eph 1:11 - In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel (βουλή) of his own will: (θέλημα)

Eph 2:3 - Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires (θέλημα) of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Eph 5:17 - Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will (θέλημα) of the Lord is.

Eph 6:6 - Not with eye service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will (θέλημα) of God from the heart;

Col 1:1 - Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will (θέλημα) of God, and Timothy our brother,

Col 1:9 - For this cause we also, since the() day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will (θέλημα) in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Col 4:12 - Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, salutes you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will (θέλημα) of God.

1Th 4:3 - For this is the will (θέλημα) of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

1Th 5:18 - In every thing give thanks: for this is the will (θέλημα) of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

2Ti 1:1 - Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will (θέλημα) of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus,

Heb 10:7 - Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, (θέλημα) O God.

Heb 10:9 - Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, (θέλημα) O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

Heb 10:10 - By the which will (θέλημα) we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Heb 10:36 - For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will (θέλημα) of God, ye might receive the promise.

1Pe 3:17 - For it is better, if the will (θέλημα) of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

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1Pe 4:2 - That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will (θέλημα) of God.

1Pe 4:19 - Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will (θέλημα) of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

1Jn 5:14 - And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, (θέλημα ) he hears us:

Rev 4:11 - Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure (θέλημα ) they are and were created.