

Your Will Be Done

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To interact with children is to come face to face with a strange phenomenon of nature. We stand amazed with this question on our lips, "How can such a huge, fierce will reside within that sweet, little person?" It comes from a deep place in us. It starts early. No, my way. Not your way, *my* way. I well remember the struggle over the toothbrush. For a few months, we got away with brushing his teeth for him. But soon enough, he wanted to wield the toothbrush. I let that happen once and noticed that those teeth weren't really cleaned. So I went back to taking control of the brush. A little hand powered by a ferocious will grabbed my wrist. "No, I do it! I do it my telf!" I understood. You're speaking the language of my own soul little buddy. I feel it all the time. No, I do it! I do it my telf!

The battle for the will is the most difficult struggle in the Christian spiritual life. Will I release control of my life to Christ my King? Will I yield the throne to him? Will I surrender? This is an internal battle of titanic proportions. My way or your way? My rights or your Lordship? And I will fight the God who made me over the silliest little things. I will bob and weave and try to retain some scrap of defiant independence, even as it makes me miserable. This King allows for no rebel territory in his realm.

Our Father prizes the human will. The pearl of great price to him is a human soul that freely chooses him above all else. The yielded heart is treasure to our God. For that is the deepest, truest sign of love. When we pray, "Your will be done," we are offering him the gift he prizes most. For we are saying, "I trust you. I give myself to you. I will go where you send me. Your way not my way is the best way for me. Your will be done."

Jesus taught his disciples to pray. But we have discovered that Jesus did not make up this prayer. The Lord's Prayer is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. And Jesus did not give his disciples a prayer that he would not pray himself. In fact, Jesus alone could pray this prayer perfectly. He was the one man who completely and perfectly yielded his will to his Father throughout his life. He led the way for us in yielding our wills to God's will.

In the book of Hebrews, we see some amazing connections being made between the Old Testament and the life of Jesus. Several times, the inspired writer puts words from the Psalms on the lips of Jesus. He shows how Jesus embodied the psalms, the prayer book of God's people, perfectly in his own prayers. In one example, we hear words from Psalm 40 placed in Jesus' mouth. When Christ entered the world, he said,

Then I said, Behold I have come
To do your will O God.
As it is written of me
In the scroll of the book.

Jesus understood he had come to do what no man had done before: to enact fully and faithfully the will of his Father. And he knew that he was obeying not just for himself. He would do the will of the Father on our behalf. He came to be the obedient Son on behalf of a rebellious human race. He would do what we could not: keep the law, serve the Father, and realize the joy of faithfulness: all for us.

Let's look at just a few sayings of Jesus that show that keeping his Father's will was his primary intent.

In John 4, we read of how Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman one noonday out by a well. His disciples went into the city to procure food while Jesus talked to her. When they came back, Jesus did not want the food they brought. He said, enigmatically, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." His poor disciples were baffled. It's not like there were convenience stores in the desert. Did Jesus have other friends who brought him food? Then he said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4: 34). He literally lived for doing his Father's work. Syncing his will to his Father's will was more nourishing to Jesus than bread.

Later in John, Jesus explains more. He says "I can do nothing on my own...because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 5: 30). "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6: 38). His passion was for his heart to beat in time with his Father's heart. He was motivated solely by love for his Father in his mission to bring redemption to us.

Of course that will was tested by temptation. Tested by the stark reality that Jesus had not only to do the positive works of the law to stay in his Father's will.

He had to bear the burden of our sins. Jesus had to take the negative consequences of our sins upon himself. So he had to have his heart broken. Jesus lived to please his Father. But to do his will completely, he had to experience the wrath of his Father against our sin. Jesus who had never sinned, had to become sin (2 Cor. 5:20) as he stood in for us. He had to feel his Father turn his face away from him. Jesus who lived for his Father's pleasure had to undergo the shame of his Father looking away. He knew it was coming and he shrank from it.

The struggle in Gethsemane was not just about the fear of facing physical torture. The worst was entering the darkness of no longer knowing his Father's favor. Jesus saw that he would become the ugliest, foulest, most heinous creature in the universe and he bore our sins. And he did not want to do it. The horror drove him down to his face. Father, take this cup from me. Three times, the beloved Son prayed to the Father he adored to be spared. The Father and Son had agreed on this plan of redemption before the world was made. The Son had come willingly. But when it came to enacting it, he did not want to enter this hell. His entire life of obedience screamed out that assuming our sin was wrong, just plain wrong. Only his will to do his Father's will could see him through. He had to choose against the deep revulsion in his heart.

We will never know, throughout endless ages of eternity, what it cost Jesus the beloved Son to say to his Father, "Nevertheless. Not my will, but your will be done." Make me sin that they might have my holiness. Make me the object of your wrath that they might be accepted. Send me to hell that they might have heaven. I will lose you, my beloved Father, so they may find you. The fate of humankind turned on his prayer. The stakes were eternally high. If Jesus had gotten up, walked away and saved himself, we would have been damned. If he had quit, we would have lost all. Creation would have stayed plunged into decay and death. The universe turned on the prayer of one man's will, face down in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Nevertheless. Not my will but yours be done."

No, Jesus never asked us to pray anything he would not pray. He prayed for his Father's will in the depths of his being. Through the centuries, theologians have realized that in consecrating his will all the way to the cross, Jesus was remaking humanity. He was the new Adam. The first Adam lived in the Garden of Eden. In paradise, he chose to do the one thing that was forbidden him. He ate the fruit. Jesus, on the bleak hill called the Skull, with wrath pouring upon him, chose to obey the Father unto death. He turned the orientation of the heart from self to God. He lived to the end a life of faithful obedience. Now he is the firstborn of a new creation. He is the beginning of a new humanity. Man reborn. When we are

joined to Jesus, we get transferred from the old Adam to the new Adam. We get our hearts remade. We regain the possibility to say Yes to God.

That's all so beautiful. So why do I resist this so much? I know that when my mind is set on my selfish will and fleshly desires, it leads to death. It is no life at all. But still I hold back. I say, "I do it. I do it my telf!" It may be over the tiniest thing. I want to keep a bit of territory for myself. I don't trust God to fulfill me with his will. So I hold onto a little token of my own choice. This little clinched fist of self, though, pollutes the rest of my life. It clouds my communion with God. How small a rope can keep a mighty ship stuck in the port. How tiny a thread of silk can keep a great bird from taking off and flying. One little heart-sin can wreck our joy. One unyielded area of life taints all the rest.

Surrender is so hard! We recoil from it. Remember a couple months ago I told you about having a conversation with a woman on a plane? I usually follow the airplane code and never speak to the people around me. But Maria and I had a rather amazing spiritual conversation. She mentioned how hard surrender is for her. When she thinks about it, she feels trapped, and panicky. But she also knows she can't do life by herself. Surrender is essential. So a few weeks ago, she sent me some prayers she uses to assist her in surrender. These prayers by Don Ruotolo are written in the voice of Jesus to his disciples, urging them to trust him completely. The voice of Jesus is followed by words for us to pray in return:

O Jesus, I surrender myself to you,
Take care of everything.

The prayers sheets ask us to repeat that line 10 times, *O Jesus, I surrender myself to you, take care of everything*. Now the repetitious part of Catholic spirituality does not usually appeal to me. But I thought I'd try it. I began to see the reason for the repetition. The first couple of times I was just saying it. I couldn't get my heart to follow the words. But repeating the words calmed my rebel heart. The words started to seep into areas of my life I hadn't yielded. They calmed me and opened me to God's will. I spoke the phrase in particular situations I was facing, *O Jesus I surrender myself to you. Take care of everything*. I surrender myself to the one who surrendered himself for me. Jesus yielded his will so I could have a new heart. He consecrated himself so I could know the freedom of being recreated. And he urges me to keep living from him, to keep drawing on him so I can yield more and more life to him.

Consciously surrendering has had an amazing effect the last weeks. I've seen Christ enable me to turn from anger and speak and act in love. I've seen Christ give me peace when the pace of life threatened to overwhelm me. He's helped me live one moment at a time instead of being swamped by the list of all I have to do. I've arrived on my pillow at night and realized, "You got me through. You showed up all day!" I've seen the effect of the unseen hand of God that moves in our lives. The more I pray for his will, not mine, to be done, the more I discern how much he is at work.

Seeing the results of surrender motivates me to yield more. But still I have to struggle with what someone has called the gravitational pull of my own will. There is a downward tug that always tells me, "Do what you want. Be free. Don't let God crush the life out of you." That, of course, is a lie. God's will gives life and freedom. I know that. But how do I counter that powerful force of my will?

The answer is so simple, it slaps you in the face. We ask for help! We ask the Holy Spirit to create the ability to yield our wills to his will. Psalm 143:10 gives us a perfect daily prayer,

Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God!
Let your good Spirit
Lead me on level ground!

When we became believers, the dear Holy Spirit came to reside in us. He has made us new creations in Christ. And he is working in us to make us more and more like Jesus. He is there to assist us. He delights to empower us. He takes the least prayer of faith and turns it into his great work in us. Teach me to do your will. Teach me to want your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground. Enable me to surrender. Make me want to want to do your will!

Your will be done is the heart of our salvation. Jesus lived that prayer and accomplished our salvation. We pray that prayer and get joined to Christ our savior. We continue to pray that prayer and invite his daily work in our lives. Then we go on to pray that prayer not just as individuals, but as a community of faith. We pray it as a community not just for our church but for the world. Let your will and way hold sway in this sad and broken world. Drive back the dark. Advance your gospel.

May the world know what we know in our heart of hearts. We learned it from a man who had a mighty struggle with his own will before he yielded. Young Augustine loved his wine and he loved his ladies. He loved his learning and he loved being elite. But he did not know peace. He did not know love. He did not know God. Until his mother's prayers were answered. He gave his heart to Christ. He yielded his will to God's. And so he could pray,

In your service is perfect freedom. You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. In your service is perfect freedom.

O Jesus I surrender myself to you. Take care of everything. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.