

“Your Will Be Done” — Matthew 6:10

The annual “Parade of Homes” attracts thousands of visitors to model homes around our metropolitan area. For many it is an unusual opportunity to visit homes they would never live in — extraordinary homes costing over a million dollars. Charleen and I visited one of those homes. You know it’s expensive when you see the shoes lined up outside. The most expensive homes forbid shoes. While we heard other visitors “ooh” and “ah”, we also heard them wonder if they could really be happy living in such a house. They wondered if they could be comfortable in a place that isn’t supposed to get dirty and where no shoes are allowed.

I think we sometimes wonder the same thing about heaven. It seems like the kind of place where you can’t wear your shoes. It is reported to be a perfect place: no sin; no problems; no pain; no death. But could we be happy living in such a place? It would be nice to visit and have a look, but it’s hard to imagine living forever in a heaven that is so different from the earth that we call home. Perhaps that is part of the reason there may be hesitation in our voices when we pray, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Awhile back I was speaking at a conference in Ft. Worth, Texas. Participants were mostly doctoral students from across the United States and around the world. During a question and answer time a woman asked me where I would begin in communicating one message that America needs to learn. She insisted that I give a one-sentence answer. (It is a little irritating when people ask for a one-sentence answer to a seventeen-paragraph question!) I answered that the lesson I would like America to really learn is that “God is good.”

When we really understand and believe that “God is good” we will then be convinced that God’s will is the best. But many are not so sure that God is good and they truly wonder if his will is always the best. The Bible is the biography of God and it says in Romans 12.2 that God’s will is good, it is pleasing and it is perfect.

“Our Father in the heavens” created the heavens and the earth. He made us. He knows every in-

tricate detail of how our bodies are assembled and how our minds think. God has the universe’s only complete database. It contains all information. God knows everything.

God is not bound to time as we are. He knows and controls the past and the future as well as the present. He has everything figured out. And he loves us! He really, really loves us!

We all face practical decisions where we know we can’t handle the situations ourselves. When that happens we want to be sure that whoever decides is the best available.

Every time I get into an airplane I look into the cockpit to see if the pilots look like they know what they’re doing. If they don’t, I’m stuck. I certainly can’t fly the plane.

Several years ago I cut my left hand, severing most of the tendon and chipping the bone. In the hospital a man I had never seen before in my life told me he wanted to operate. Certainly I couldn’t do it myself. But how did I know if he was qualified? Maybe he flunked his way through medical school. Maybe he was a tree surgeon in disguise. So I asked the nurse (whom I had never seen before!) if he was board certified in orthopedics. She told me he was and that he was very good. So, I let him operate on my hand.

All of this is to say that the truly important decisions of life and death, time and eternity, heaven and hell are far beyond any of our abilities. We must trust someone smarter and stronger. And God is the very best. Read his credentials. Check his references with millions of satisfied customers. God is the best there is. And his will is the best.

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When we pray, “your will be done” we are really asking God to make his infinitely superior choices in our lives and in our world. We are admitting that he is far superior and that we are unable to make those decisions for ourselves.

One place where God’s will is always done is heaven. Angels and saints always do it God’s way. That’s what makes heaven so very different from earth. And that’s what makes heaven the perfect place it is.

When we pray “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” we acknowledge that heaven is a real place with lots going on. Heaven is not the fabrication of someone’s imagination, nor is it some collective fantasy of us all. Heaven is a real place with real people doing real things with real intelligence and emotions and personalities.

Heaven is different from our experience. It is so different that the Bible makes only minimal attempts to explain it because we cannot understand a utopia that has so little in common with our experience. But the Bible does tell us that heaven has no death, no sorrow and no tears. Heaven doesn’t have night and day as we experience it. Heaven is centered on God and good. It is beautiful and happy and wonderful.

But one of the greatest differences is that heaven has one will. Our earth is currently operating with over five billion wills. That is why we have wars between ethnic groups and fights within families. Different wills make different choices and go different ways. In heaven, God’s will rules. In heaven, God’s will is everyone’s will. It’s hard to find a comparison.

Those who have played team sports know those unusual moments when every member of the team works perfectly together. It’s the synergism of five basketball players smoothly moving the ball down the court for basket after basket. It’s the rhythm of a rowing crew skimming over the water. It’s the indescribable coordination of a World Cup soccer team. It’s hard to describe and tough to beat.

Maybe that’s a little of what heaven is like. It’s everyone on God’s team working together. It’s everyone pulling in the same direction. It’s everyone doing what is right and good. It’s everyone becoming a winner. It is God’s will done in heaven.

But God’s will is not always done on earth. When we pray, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” we’re acknowledging that God’s will is often not done here on earth. You probably didn’t need to be told that. Most of what happens in our world is contrary to God’s will. God does not will murder, incest, injustice, racism, child abuse, broken marriages, starvation or cancer.

Sometimes when terrible tragedies strike we hear people say, “It’s God’s will that this happened.” It’s as if God chose for a drunk driver to kill a 3-year-old child or as if God planned for a father of four to be electrocuted on the job. That’s not the

way it is in heaven and it’s not the way God wills for it to be on earth.

This raises some very tough questions. For example, if God is God, how can these things happen if they are contrary to his will?

It may be helpful to think in terms of God’s permissive will and God’s perfect will. God permits people to hate him and sin against him. He permits sinners to lie, steal, cheat, murder and pursue a million other thoughts and deeds that God hates. But that is not what God wants. That is not God’s perfect will.

This is a concept that almost every parent understands and practices. You have a will for your son or daughter — about clothes and school and health and habits and friends and jobs, about marriage and church and a lot more. You love your child and even if he or she has long been an adult you still want the very best. But you permit her to make her own choices. You permit him to do what is wrong. True, you tell you son or daughter the right way, you may pressure and even punish, but you still permit many things you know are not perfect. And your heart is broken when the one you love chooses to do wrong.

“Our Father in heaven” does the same thing with us. He tells and pressures and punishes to get us to do his perfect will, but he still permits us to choose. And his heart is broken when we choose to do wrong.

Another question might be, If God is God, why doesn’t he make everybody do what is right? It is the question of every mom or dad with a prodigal son or daughter. It’s the question of every husband or wife whose spouse has walked out when you wanted him or her to stay. It’s the question of every pastor whose heart is heavy over people who continue to sin.

The answer is probably too complex for anyone but God to adequately answer. In its simplest form, God does not make people do what is right because God has granted us the right to exercise our own will. We are not robots. We do not have to do it God’s way. We can do it right or wrong, God’s good way or any bad way. It’s up to us.

Sadly, the wrong choices of others can severely injure those who choose to do what is right. Sin is a terrible thing that harms even the innocent.

While this prayer assumes that God’s will is not being done on earth, it also assumes that it could

be! “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

When we dare to seriously and sincerely pray this prayer, we are saying that we choose God’s will and not our own. This gives a whole new perspective to prayer. Most prayers ask God to change his will to do it our way. Jesus told us to pray for us to bend our wills to choose God’s way.

We are saying that God’s will comes first in our lives. Whatever God wants is what we choose. We are convinced that God is good and God is right. So we submit! No argument — whether we experience joy or sorrow, happiness or heartbreak. This is a radical prayer! It is never to be prayed lightly!

We are prone to promote our kingdoms. We want to be in charge. We want everyone to do it our way. “Control” is very important to many of us — in our marriages, our families, in our homes, in friendships and at church. We become angry when others try to control us. Then we pray “they kingdom come”. This anticipates a radical change.

We are also prone to our will. We want to make our own choices without letting others make theirs. We may quit jobs, dissolve marriages and friendships, switch churches and alienate family members if they choose differently. Then we start praying that we will not have our way. Instead we pray, “thy will be done.” That’s radical!

This is a hard prayer to pray. Do you know why it is so difficult for us to accept God’s will? It is because deep down inside we believe that we know better than God. We believe that if we had his power and resources we could do a better job than he has done. We believe that if we could have everything our way, we would be truly happy. Only when we are honest enough and humble enough to admit that our wills are inadequate and our ways are worse can we truly trust God and pray “your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Asking for God’s will assumes that we want to know God’s will. The only way to be sure that we are not making up God’s will is to read the Bible. This is God’s will written out. It gives us all the principles and all the specifics we need to choose and to live God’s way.

On one occasion Abraham Lincoln went to a slave market and witnessed the auction of human

beings to the highest bidders. A young woman was put on the block. Her eyes broadcast absolute hatred for everyone around her. She had been used and abused in unspeakable ways. She truly was one of the victims of other’s greatest sins.

When the bidding began, Lincoln offered a price. The calls went higher but he exceeded every bid until she was sold to him. As he approached her she looked at him with vicious hatred.

“You’re free,” he said to her. She knew all the tricks and was not about to let herself hope or be hurt anymore. So she asked, “Free for what?” Lincoln said, “Free, just free.” She said, “Free to say whatever I want to say?” Lincoln said, “Free to say what you want to say.”

“Free to do what I want to do?” “Free to do what you want to do.”

“Free to go wherever I want to go?” “Yes, free to go wherever you want to go.”

And suddenly she realized that he meant it. This man was unlike the others. She replied, “Then I’m going with you!”

Christians are those who have been slaves to sin by our own choice. God has paid the debt for our sin through the death of his own Son, Jesus. We are free to say, to do and to go wherever we will. But we say to this indescribably good God, “I’m going with you!”

“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!”

We do not have to do it God’s way. We can do it right or wrong, God’s good way or any bad way. It’s up to us.

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