

The Doctrine of Christ

No House Divided Against Itself Will Stand: A Consideration of the One Will of God

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THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFESSING ONE WILL IN GOD

The inspired creedal imperative, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” is not merely an appeal to ethical monism—meaning that we Christians are to worship the one true God alone. The oneness of God in [Deuteronomy 6:4](#) speaks to the metaphysical reality that separates or distinguishes Him from idols and the false gods of the nations: [His simplicity](#). The Second London Confession of Faith elucidates this notion of God’s simplicity by writing, “The Lord our God is but one... without body, parts, or passions.” However, before we can understand what it means for God to be one or simple, we must first understand what it means to be a creature.

Creatures are composed of *what* we are (i.e., an essence) and *that* we are (i.e., our existence). However, the dilemma is that creatures cannot be the cause of their existence, for no essence can precede and be the cause of its existence (e.g., Lily did not bring herself into existence). Consequently, the cause of creaturely existence must be found outside the domain of creation, and its existence must not be caused—it must be the fount of existence. If one were to turn to philosophical demonstration to discover such a cause,

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one could postulate the existence of an uncaused transcending cause of all things whose existence is of itself (i.e., self-subsisting being). But of more sure footing for the believer, Scripture reveals that this simple or non-composed Creator, whose existence is from Himself and not another, is the One whom [Exodus 3:14](#) calls “I AM WHO I AM.” Or, as illustrated in the burning bush, it is I AM whose fire or existence does not depend on another but whose life burns from Himself.

2

Turning our attention to God’s will, its relevancy when considering His oneness lies in preserving monotheism. To highlight this concern, we must consider what establishes the ability to will. Put into question form: “What provides a person with the power to will compared to an inanimate creature like a rock?” The simple answer is its *nature*. A creature’s nature determines what powers it can exercise. For instance, a bird’s nature gives rise to the possibility of flying, unlike a human’s nature. Similarly, a creature possesses the ability to will if its nature provides the capacity of said power.

When considering the philosophical and historical articulation of the will, it has typically been distinguished between the sensible (or lower) appetite and the intellectual (or higher) appetite. The sensible will desires goods based on sensory perception (sight, hearing, taste, touch, etc.). For example, it is good for the nature of an animal to eat; thus, when said good is presented to it via the senses, the will is aroused and motivates the animal to pursue it.

In contrast, although man possesses these same sensible desires of the will as some other creatures, he also exercises dominion over these sensible desires by a higher power of the soul that distinguishes him from the rest of creation: reason. In other words, although all things are created in the likeness of God—because effects in some way reflect their cause—Scripture asserts that man is created in the image and likeness of God ([Gen. 1:27](#)), and what makes man in God’s image is his power or capacity to reason (i.e., the intellect). Consequently, for man, it is the intellect that guides the will. One could even say that every person has the power to will because every person possesses the power of intellect, which is able to perceive things as good in themselves, and, in turn, the will is drawn out to possess and rest in those goods.

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Furthermore, the intellect can distinguish between lesser and higher goods and choose the higher, although it may cause harm or difficulty. The preeminent example of man deferring the lower will's desire for a greater good was our Lord when He cried out in the garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done" ([Luke 22:42](#)). For our Lord, it was a good to preserve life, but it was a greater good to obey the will of His Father.

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Correspondingly, because God is an intellectual Being, this entails that He, too, possesses a will. In simpler terms, it is the nature of divinity to will. However, this does not entail that God wills as man does: that some outside good moves His will. If this were so, God would be susceptible to passions and mutability as man, thus consigning Him to the order of creaturely being as its chief Being. Moreover, neither can we say that God's will is a property of divinity, as it is a property that a person exercises; instead, following the maxim that "all that is in God is God," so, too, is God's will one with His essence.

At this juncture, we arrive at a difficulty after contrasting God's will with the creature's will. Specifically, how do we reconcile God's one will with the three divine persons? Or we could ask: "Does experience not testify that each person has their own will; hence, should not each divine person also?" To answer, we must first consider how each human person possesses their own will because each is an individuated instance of humanity: human nature, not personhood, gives rise to the power to will. However, this metaphysical sequence breaks down for the divine persons because each divine person is not a separate individuated instance of divinity. Instead, "A divine person is nothing but the divine essence . . . subsisting in an especial manner."¹ In other words, the Father is the principle or fount of divinity as the unbegotten One; the Son's divinity is from the Father as His begotten Word; and the Spirit's divinity is from the Father and Son as Love proceeding. Therefore, because each person possesses the entirety of the divine essence according to their particular manner of subsistence, each divine person also possesses the one will of God.

If one were to deny that each divine person possesses the one divine will according to their particular manner of subsistence by positing multiple wills in God (i.e., one will for each divine person), then what one would run the risk of is seriously undermining their commitment to monotheism. The reason is that, as shown above, the ability to will is rooted in nature. Hence, if there are multiple wills in God, this would metaphysically entail that there must be multiple natures. Consequently, if there are multiple natures because there are multiple wills, the best one could then conceive the Trinity as is a society of "Gods" in unison or bound by some overarching principle. However, Christians do

¹ John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 2:407.

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not believe the Lord to be one in unison of wills as a society of divine persons. Instead, we confess God to be one in Being and will, with each divine person possessing the one divine nature and will according to their particular manner of subsistence.

In conclusion, the consideration of the one will of God is a notion that safeguards Christians from practically inferring polytheism. Moreover, it is the one will of God that we can find our rest in because God is not like man that He should change His mind. In other words, because God's will is one with His essence, this entails that the very divine will that chose us, that redeemed us by sending God the Son to die for sinners such as us, and that promises to present us before Himself as holy and blameless in glory, is a will that cannot change. Therefore, with this blessed assurance that God's will for our salvation lies in His immutable nature, we can confidently strive on our journey to Zion above to follow our Lord's words and example, "Not My will, but Yours, be done" ([Luke 22:42](#)).

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