

Have Thine Own Way Lord

We as a people like our independence. We like the idea of making our own decisions in every situation. In history, it is called popular sovereignty – on the important issues of the day, we vote for what we want and let the majority rule. The minority, who don't necessarily agree with the decision, quite often engage in civil disobedience. Often, it is peaceful protest against what is considered an unjust law. Sometimes it manifested itself in what history calls nullification. We simply don't follow the law. Nevertheless, we like to do things OUR way.

As Christians, we can't do things our way, unless, of course, it is in accordance with God's way. We make choices in all kinds of circumstances and quite often do what WE want, regardless of what God has said about it in His word.

In 1902, Adelaide Pollard wrote a hymn that we all have sung before—for many of us, on NUMEROUS occasions. The words tell of one asking God to take over their lives—their thoughts—their actions. Before Ms. Pollard wrote the song, she had found out she was not able to go into the mission field as had been her desire because of lack of funds. She went to a prayer meeting sometime later and overheard a personal prayer of an aged woman. The woman said something like this:

“It really doesn't matter what you do with us, Lord, just have your OWN way with our lives.”

This brought to mind a passage from Jeremiah 18 and the hymn was written. The passage?

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

Then the word of the LORD came to me. 6 He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

"Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.' But they will reply, 'It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; we will all follow the stubbornness of our evil hearts.'"

Of course the song is "Have Thine Own Way, Lord". We ask God to mold us and make us as he wants, not as we want. He is the potter—we are the clay. We ask Him to cleanse us "whiter than snow" formed in His image. We ask for His help as wounded, weary, and powerless people. We want to be healed. We ask him to "hold o'er (our) being absolute sway." We're asking God to take complete control of our lives, something we as a people are hesitant to do. Sometimes we even stubbornly refuse to be reformed.

The same could be said about the children of Israel that God, through His prophet Jeremiah, is warning in Jeremiah 18.

God will show them their favor, if only they will become and remain obedient to Him, allowing Him to mold them into His image. He can also destroy His creation because of disobedience. He has the right and the power to do so. He wants them to change, but he already knows what they will say. "We'll do things OUR way and take our chances." We will, as God prophesies to Jeremiah, "follow the stubbornness of our evil hearts."

Doesn't that sound a lot like many in the world today? They know what God expects, yet do what they want instead. They're told "God is gracious and loving and won't punish you for being the way you are and the way you act." Nothing could be further from the truth.

Paul, in Romans 9, is talking about God's selection of the Jewish race to be the people of God. He talks to them about God's punishment of people who resist His hand in their "molding" process. Many of that day, and this day as well, blame God for making them beings with free will. If they choose to sin, it's God's fault for allowing them the will to make that choice. What does Paul tell them?

But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?"

God created man with free will, all right, but He also gave us the power to overcome sin and be an example to others. All people, not just the Jews, were made the same way, with the same will to sin or be obedient. Their faith molds them into the people of God He wants them to be.

In Romans 11, Paul uses the example of ingrafted branches to illustrate the Gentile inclusion into the redemption and salvation process. By creating a tree with natural and ingrafted branches, God has made His people what he wants them to be. What if any branch, natural or ingrafted fails to produce fruit? It will be cut off. The same is true of us. If we choose to follow our own way, we too will be burned in the fire.

Paul ends the chapter with a doxology:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom
and [i] knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?” [j]

“Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?” [k]

For from him and through him and for him
are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

We're not smarter than God. When He sits down at the potter's wheel with a lump of clay, He knows what He wants to mold. We must, as the song says, wait, yeilded and still until he's done making us.

It is a work in progress. As we've all said to others about the mess that we are:

“Be patient, God's not finished with me yet!”

We are, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “being transformed into his **image** with ever-increasing glory...”

Adelaide Pollard's hymn is not the only one we sing that involves the giving of the control of our lives completely to God. Let me close with one other:

LET HIM HAVE HIS WAY WITH THEE

Would you live for Jesus
And be always pure and good?
Would you walk with Him
Within the narrow road?
Would you have Him
bear your burden
Carry all your load?
Let Him have His way with thee.

Would you have Him make you free
And follow at His call?
Would you know the peace
That comes by giving all?
Would you have Him save you
So that you need never fall?
Let Him have His way with thee

Would you in His kingdom find
A place of constant rest?
Would you prove Him true
Each providential test?
Would you in His service labor
Always at your best?
Let Him have His way with thee.

His power can make you what
You ought to be
His blood can cleanse your heart
And make you free
His love can fill your soul
And you will see
'Twas best for Him to have
His way with thee