

# Will - Thelema (Greek Word Study)

**Will** ([2307](#)) (**thelema** from **thelo** = to will with the "-ma" suffix indicating the result of the will = "a thing willed") generally speaks of the result of what one has decided. One sees this root word in the feminine name "**Thelma**." In its most basic form, **thelema** refers to a wish, a strong desire, and the willing of some event.

**Spiros Zodhiates** says that **thelema** is the "Will, not to be conceived as a demand, but as an expression or inclination of pleasure towards that which is liked, that which pleases and creates joy. When it denotes God's will, it signifies His gracious disposition toward something. Used to designate what God Himself does of His own good pleasure." ([Zodhiates, S. The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament. AMG](#))

**Thelema** has both an objective meaning ("what one wishes to happen" or what is willed) and a subjective connotation ("the act of willing or desiring"). The word conveys the idea of desire, even a heart's desire, for the word primarily expresses emotion instead of volition. Thus God's will is not so much God's intention, as it is His heart's desire.

Most of the NT uses of **thelema** (over 3/4's) refer to God's will and signify His gracious disposition toward something. God's will usually refers to what He has decreed, but occasionally God's will refers to what He desires but has not decreed (Mt 18:14). Of the remainder of the uses of **thelema** twice refers to the will of the exalted Christ (Acts 21:14, Ep 5:17), once to the will of the devil (2Ti 2:26) and 12 times to human will most often in contrast to God's will (eg Lk 23:25, Jn 1:13, Ep 2:3). Paul was an **apostle** only because it was the **will (thelema)** of God - 1Cor 1:1, 2Cor 1:1, Ep 1:1, Col 1:1, 2Ti 1:1.

**W E Vine** - Man is able to resist the will, the thelema, of God, but whatever takes place God's determinate counsel, boulema, is never prevented from fulfillment. **Thelema**, when used of God, signifies a gracious design (cp. Ro 2:18; 12:2; 15:32); the similar word boulema denotes a determined resolve (see Ro 9:19). To do the will of God, then, is to yield ourselves to the accomplishment of His designs for us by obeying Him in all that He has revealed to faith, cp. Ro 1:17; He 11:3. But since neither the desire, nor the power, to do the will of God, dwells naturally in the believer, God works in Him "both to will and to work of His good pleasure," Php 2:13, cp. He 13:21 and 1Co 12:6. This, however, does not relieve the believer of his responsibility, for he is to "understand what the will of the Lord is," Ep 5:17, and understanding it, he is to do it from the heart, Ep 6:6. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Thayer** adds that **thelema** is "what one wishes or has determined shall be done (i.e. objectively, "thing willed")."

**Kenneth Wuest** distinguishes **boule** from **thelema** noting that "**boule** is a desire based upon the reason, but **thelema** is a desire based upon the emotions. God's will or desire here (Ep 1:9, 11), comes from His heart of love."

**Thomas Constable** - **Counsel (boule)** refers to God's purpose or deliberation. **Will (thelema)** denotes willingness. The idea contained in Eph 1:11 is that God chose a plan after deliberating on the wisest course of action to accomplish his purpose.

Stated another way, **thelema** conveys the idea of desire, even a heart's desire, for the word primarily expresses emotion instead of volition. Thus God's will is not so much God's intention, as it is His heart's desire. **Wuest** adds that in the context of Eph 1:9 "This will or desire is **according to His good pleasure**. The words "**according to**" (Ep 1:9) are **kata**, the preposition meaning "down" and suggesting domination. This desire on God's part is *dominated* by His good pleasure."

**Ellicott** says **boule** "solemnly represents the almighty will as displayed in action; **thelema** designating the will generally, **boule** the more special expression of it."

**John Eadie** - **Thelema** therefore, is will, the result of desire—voluntas; **boule** is counsel, the result of a formal decision—propositum. Here (Ep 1:11) **boule** is the ratified expression of will—the decision to which His will has come. The Divine mind is not in a state of indifference, it has exercised **thelema**—will; and that will is not a lethargic velleity, for it has formed a defined purpose, **boule**, which it determines to carry out. His desire and His decrees are not at variance, but every resolution embodies His unthwarted pleasure. This divine fore-resolve is universal in its sweep—"He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." The plan of the universe lies in the omniscient mind, and all events are in harmony with it. Power in unison with infinite wisdom and independent and undeviating purpose, is seen alike whether He create a seraph or form a gnat—fashion a world or round a grain of sand—prescribe the orbit of a planet or the gyration of an atom. The extinction of a world and the fall of a sparrow are equally the result of a free pre-arrangement. Our "inheritance" in Christ springs not from merit, nor is it an accidental gift bestowed from casual motive or in fortuitous circumstances, but it comes from God's fore-appointment, conceived in the same independence and sovereignty which guide and control the universe. ([Commentary](#))

**Ralph Earle** - Salmond says: "The distinction between boule and thelema is still much debated, scholars continuing to take precisely opposite views of it." Nevertheless he concludes: In a connection like the present it is natural to look for a distinction, and in

such cases the idea of intelligence and deliberation seems to attach to the *boule*. This appears to be supported by the usage which prevails in point of fact in the majority of NT passages, and particularly by such occurrences as Mt. 1:19. Here, therefore, the will of God which acts in His foreordaining purpose or decree, in being declared to have its *boule* or "counsel," is set forth not arbitrarily, but intelligently and by deliberation, not without reason, but for reasons, hidden it may be from us, yet proper to the Highest Mind and Most Perfect Moral Nature (Earle, R. Word Meanings in the New Testament).

**Wayne A Detzler** writes that "in ancient secular Greek the word **thelema** had another meaning. Homer used it to speak of "readiness," "inclination," and "desire." When one was ready for an event, or inclined to undertake a course of action, **thelo** (root verb form of thelema) was used. Later the word also gained a sexual meaning, as when a man has his "will" with a woman, or vice versa. In the writings of Plato the word came to speak of intention or desire." (Wayne A Detzler. New Testament Words in Today's Language)

**NIDNTT** says that the root verb **thelo** in classic Greek ...

originally and especially in Homer and in early Attic inscriptions with the following meanings

(a) to be ready; to prefer, to be inclined;

(b) to wish, to desire (e.g. "he desired to see", Homer, Od. 11, 566; also in the sexual sense, Homer, Od. 3, 272);

(c) to have in mind (Homer, Il. 1, 549);

(d) to will, both as determining and coming to a decision; and in particular (e) to will, in the sense of compelling, and overbearing the will (Homer, Il, 14, 120; 19, 274; Plato, Phdr. 80d).

The noun **thelema**, derived from **thelo** and attested from Antiphon the Sophist onwards, but used very rarely in secular Greek, correspondingly denotes intention, wish, and then chiefly will.

**Thelema** - 62x in 58v - Mt 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; 21:31; 26:42; Mark 3:35; Luke 12:47; 22:42; 23:25; Jn 1:13; 4:34; 5:30; 6:38, 39, 40; 7:17; 9:31; Acts 13:22; 21:14; 22:14; Ro 1:10-note; Ro 2:18-note; Ro 12:2-note; Ro 15:32-note; 1Cor 1:1; 7:37; 16:12; 2Cor 1:1; 8:5; Gal 1:4; Ep 1:1-note, Ep 1:5-note, Ep 1:9-note, Ep 1:11-note; Ep 2:3-note; Ep 5:17-note; Ep 6:6-note; Col 1:1-note, Col 1:9-note; Col 4:12-note; 1Th 4:3-note; 1Th 5:18-note; 2Ti 1:1-note; 2Ti 2:26-note; He 10:7-note, He 10:9-note, He 10:10-note, He 10:36-note; He 13:21-note; 1Pe 2:15-note; 1Pe 3:17-note; 1Pe 4:2-note, 1Pe 4:19-note; 2Pe 1:21-note; 1Jn 2:17; 5:14; Rev 4:11 [note](#). **NAS** = desire(1), desires(1), will(57).

**Thelema** is one of those words that is best understood from how it is used in Scripture. I would suggest reading the preceding NT passages (in context if you have time) and making notation of what you learn about thelema. Here are a few examples to illustrate this approach...

We are to pray for God's **thelema** (before we pray for our will!)

**Matthew 6:10**-note 'Your kingdom come. Your **will** be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

**Comment:** Compare also the value of praying in His thelema or will (1Jn 5:14), the importance of doing His will and prayer (Jn 9:31), Jesus' example of submission to God's will in prayer (Mt 26:42, Lk 22:42), Jesus as the God Man doing His Father's will and His submission and obedience giving us an example to follow (Jn 4:34, Jn 5:30, 6:38, He 10:7, 9)

We can and should wrestle in prayer for each other to do God's will...

**Colossians 4:12**-note Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant (*doulos*) of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring (*agonizomai*) earnestly for you in his prayers (*proseuche*), that you may stand perfect (*teleios*) and fully assured in all the **will** of God.

**Comment:** Epaphras wanted the Colossians to be mature ("full grown" spiritually, not "babes") and fully convinced in regard to the will of God.

Not doing God's **thelema** identifies an unbeliever (regardless of whether they claim to be a believer or not!)

**Matthew 7:21**-note Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the **will** of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

**Comment:** Compare Lk 12:47; See also the converse or "positive" side of doing God's will as indicative of a true believer in Matthew 12:50, 1Jn 2:17)

Jesus refers to doing God's thelema and in essence is saying that we won't really know the Bible unless we are willing to obey the

Bible. Or stated another way, we won't really know God's will unless we are willing to obey God's will.

**John 7:17** If anyone is willing (verb **thelo** = the idea is a purposeful decision not a passive acquiescence! So to purpose to do God's Will, to take pleasure in it, to be fond of doing it, to take delight in it) to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.

The man who does God's will is he who will be the man after God's own heart (clearly Luke is not speaking of perfection but of direction of one's heart)...

**Acts 13:22** "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My **will**.'

Note that God even gives us the ability to do His will and this is something we should pray for (cp Col 4:12)...

**Hebrews 13:21**-note (Prayer for the God of peace to) equip you in every good thing to do His**will**, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen

God's will is most clearly revealed in His Word...

**1Thessalonians 4:3**-note For this is the **will** of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

**1Thessalonians 5:18**-note in everything give thanks; for this is God's**will** for you in Christ Jesus.

**Eph 5:17**-note So then do not be foolish, but understand what the **will** of the Lord is. (**Which he goes on to clearly state**) **Ep 5:18**-note And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, (See also 1Pe 2:15-note)

The Scriptures were not written by the will of man but through God's will...

**2Peter 1:21**-note for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human **will**, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

It was God's will to create all things...

**Revelation 4:11**-[note](#) Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your **will** they existed, and were created."

**Thelema** - in the **Septuagint (LXX)** translated as "desire", "delight", "favor" - 2Sa 23:5; 1Kgs 5:8ff; 9:11; 2 Chr 9:12; Esth 1:8; Job 21:21; Ps 1:2; 16:3; 28:7; 30:5, 7; 40:8; 103:7, 21; 107:30; 111:2; 143:10; 145:19; Eccl 5:4; 12:1, 10; Isa 44:28; 48:14; 58:3, 13; 62:4; Jer 9:24; 23:17, 26; Dan 4:35; 8:4; 11:3, 16, 36; Mal 1:10. Here is a good prayer...

Psalm 143:10 Teach me to do Your **will (thelema)**, for You are my God; Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

In Isaiah we see God's sovereign omnipotent will exercised through a human king in order to bring His people Israel back from Babylonian exile...

**Isaiah 44:28** "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My **desire (thelema)**.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

**Daniel 4:35** (**King Nebuchadnezzar** came to understand God's sovereign, omnipotent **will**) "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His **will (thelema)** in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

The **Antichrist** exerts his will in...

Daniel 11:36 "Then (This important time phrase marks a dramatic shift in this prophecy vaulting forward into the future describing an evil king like the world has never seen) the **king** (the Antichrist) will do as he pleases (**according to his will** = thelema), and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation (~time of Jacob's trouble, the 3.5 year period Jesus called the Great Tribulation at the end of Daniel's Seventieth Week) is finished, for that which is decreed will be done.