

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 8: Our Free Will

Last time: *God is in control of all things. He doesn't just foresee the events; he is in control. Rather than being bad news, this is essential to our hope in a good end of all things.*

Our Free Will
WCF 9

- 1. God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil.*
- 2. Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it.*
- 3. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.*

The question of the freedom of our will cannot be answered apart from a full understanding of the sinfulness of humanity. Scripture teaches that sin is not just our bad deeds, it is the corruption of our nature. This sinful nature disables us from wanting to choose any spiritual good.

Paul Althous, The Theology of Martin Luther

Without such a rebirth, man's will remains enslaved and bound. Man stands as under the inescapable necessity of sinning in everything that he is and does. This, however, does not remove his responsibility and guilt. A man is not forced to sin against his own inner will. Rather it is in his will that he experiences the inescapability of sin. He is necessarily a sinner but he is also a sinner voluntarily.

"We do not sin against our will but rather according to our will... we are not able to sin involuntarily." Man is, however unable to change his basic will. And he himself is bound within it as a person. He cannot handle his lack of freedom to do good and his subjection to the evil as though it were his fate or a natural condition of his existence that could be separated from himself as a person. His will is bound, but it is and remains his will. He repeatedly and voluntarily acts according to it. For this reason, the inescapability of sin does not cast doubt on the fact of man's guilt. Luther always asserted both at one and the same time.

Thomas Boston illustrates man's condition by comparing an unconverted person to a man in a pit. He can only get out of the pit by grabbing hold of the rope of the gospel let down by Christ and be pulled out of his misery. Yes, he may decide to pull himself up by the rope of the gospel, but there is one problem. The unconverted man is dead in the pit.

- **Eph. 2:1,4,5** - *"you were dead in your transgressions and sins....But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved."*

- **I Cor. 2:14** - *"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."*

WCF 9.4. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by his grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.

5. The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone, in the state of glory only.

When we take seriously the effects of sin, predestination is not bad news; it is the only news that can give us hope.

What value is there in knowing about God's election?

In one sense, the answer is "none." We shouldn't speculate about who is chosen by God or not. We do not have God's plans. It can leave Christians feeling unwarranted anxiety about themselves or others.

In another sense, it is of great encouragement and can lead to healthy confidence in God.

How does the doctrine of predestination affect evangelism?

Two of the greatest evangelists in Christian history held opposing views.

John Wesley's Objection to the Doctrine of Election in Relation to Evangelism:

If this be so then is all preaching vain: it is needless to them that are elected; for they, whether with preaching or without, will infallibly be saved. Therefore, the end of preaching to save souls is void, with regard to them. And it is useless to them that are not elected; for they cannot possibly be saved; they, whether with preaching or without, will infallibly be damned. The end of preaching is therefore void, with regard to them likewise. So that in either case our preaching is in vain."

George Whitefield's response:

O dear Sir, what kind of reasoning, or rather sophistry is this! Hath not God, who hath appointed salvation for a certain number appointed also the preaching of the word, as a means to bring them to it? Does anyone hold election in any other sense? And if so, how is preaching needless to them that are elected; when the gospel is designed by God himself, to be the power of God unto their eternal salvation? And since we know not who are elect, and who reprobate, we are to preach promiscuously to all. For the word may be useful, even to the non-elect, in restraining them from much wickedness and sin. However, it is enough to excite to the utmost diligence in preaching and hearing, when we consider that by these means, some, even as many as the Lord that ordained to eternal life, shall certainly be quickened and enabled to believe. And who, that attends, especially with reverence and care, can tell but he may be found of that happy number?

... it is the doctrine of election that mostly presses me to abound in good works. I am made willing to suffer all things for the elect's sake. This makes me to preach with comfort, because I know salvation does not depend on man's free will, but the Lord makes willing in the day of his power and can make use of me to bring some of his elect home, when and where he pleases.

What was Whitefield's motivation in evangelism?

1. Whitfield was motivated by his trust in God's power working in the gospel to save.
 - **Rom. 1:16** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*
2. Whitfield was motivated by his love not for the "lost" generally, but for the lost of God's sheep, those who are the elect but do not enjoy the privileges.
 - **2Tim. 2:10** *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*
3. Whitfield's confidence in the efficacious power of the Holy Spirit to effectually call those God has prepared for salvation.
 - **Eph. 2:1** *And you were dead in the trespasses and ... 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved...8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*

How should God's sovereignty in salvation lead us to greater boldness in sharing our faith?

A Doctrine that Leads to Praise

WCF 8.8. *The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.*

"Men treat God's sovereignty as a theme for controversy, but in Scripture it is matter for worship." J.I.Packer

In the Bible, when Paul begins to explain the challenging doctrine of predestination, he frequently pauses to praise God.

Romans 8:30–33 “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. [31]What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Covering the same topic in **Romans 11:33–36**, he writes:

[33] Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

[34] *“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”*

[35] *“Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”*

[36] *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory
forever. Amen.*

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: God gives us free will. Our sinful nature, however, corrupts that will. God’s predestination is hopeful news to those who cannot save themselves. It doesn’t discourage us from evangelism; it gives us confidence in its effectiveness.