

FREE WILL

Rom. 9:16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

The teaching with regard to *free will* has caused many a row! John Welsey, - in his sermon on *Free Grace*, - gave a scathing attack on the doctrine of grace. He said that “the doctrine of predestination is not a doctrine of God” and he called it a “blasphemy”. He caused trouble for men of his day like George Whitefield and Augustus Toplady. He hated the doctrines that are central to our *Baptist Confession of Faith*. He held stringently to *Arminianism*, - that form of doctrine that teaches that any person can choose the opportunity, the means, and the time that they themselves want to be saved. Salvation is – to the Arminian, - a work of God’s grace accompanied by man’s freedom to choose. God cannot make the sinner choose for Christ, - it is totally up to the sinner whether he himself takes the offer or leaves it. ... God’s plan is totally dependent on what man will decide!

John Chrysostom (347-407) held to this opinion, “All is in God’s power, but so that our free-will is not lost . . . It depends therefore on us and on Him. We must first choose the good, and then He adds what belongs to Him. He does not precede our willing, that our free-will may not suffer. But when we have chosen, then He affords us much help . . . It is ours to choose beforehand and to will, but God’s to perfect and bring to the end.” ... Salvation is of God and of man!

Such a devilish heresy is Arminianism. It is not merely a false doctrine ... it is far worse. It makes a person believe he has had ‘a hand’ in his own salvation. It makes the sinner believe in a God Who is powerless to work unless man allows him to. It makes man suitable to claim some of the glory for himself! The Puritan John Trapp wrote about them, “The friends of free will are the enemies of free grace”.

Through the historic Creeds of the Church, including the Reformation, the predominant Biblical and orthodox view was, - as Augustine had taught, - the Doctrine of Grace is based upon Divine Election.

So it is to one of the old *Confessions* we turn, - the *Baptist Confession of Faith*, - to consider the subject of *free will*. The *Confession* has been the stabilising standard for approaching 320 years, and it shares this same truth with other ancient documents ... but most importantly of all, it is derived from God’s holy and infallible Word.

FREE WILL IS A DOCTRINE OF NATURAL MAN

* “I have the right to choose and to make my own decisions. No-one can make me decide against my will. ... I do only what I want to do. If I choose for Christ, no outside influence or cause will make me choose. It is *me* who chooses, ... and *me alone!*”

* Immediately you notice there is a rebelliousness and a pride in the tone ... *I* will do it. You will not make *me*! This is *my* decision. *I* will take it if *I* decide and when *I* choose to decide.

* They tell you that God looked down through His so-called telescope of time and He saw those who would choose for Him.

* Friends, in such a way of thinking ... who gets the glory?! What does it make God? Surely it makes God out to be like the wee boy standing outside the door feeling pathetic and knocking on the letterbox trying to get the sinner’s attention!

* It’s a doctrine where the sinner ‘calls all the shots’ and makes all the decisions and planning ... and God just has to follow along behind!

* It is a doctrine of thieves because it *steals* from God. It discredits God. It demotes him to a position of being nothing better than a ‘lapdog’, - He can only ‘serve’ us if and when we allow Him.

* But think about it, if a man could will himself to be saved, he could just as easily change his mind and will himself to become unsaved

* But, you see, that hypothesis is so far from the mark because ... and this is tremendously basic ... the Bible says we were born dead in sin (cf. Eph. 2:1), - that means *dead* (lifeless, insensitive, unresponsive, inactive, closed to all that is going on around us ... dead!) ... What have you ever see a dead person do?! Nothing!

* Since we are born dead to God ... surely there is absolutely nothing of ourselves that we can do to respond to God! ... What can a dead person do to make them undead?!

* A person dead in their sin is as dead as dead can be towards God and death binds the faculties of the person.

* There is no way that fallen man, - the sinner, - can choose of his own free will because (1) a dead man has no will ... for he is dead spiritually!

* And (2) even if he did have some kind of a will (which is preposterous) it is the will of a dead man ... it amounts to nothing, - there’s nothing you can do with such a will, it’s powerless, useless.

* When sin entered into the man and woman in the Garden they fell from God’s grace. They fell with such a crash they ‘died’ (spiritually speaking)

- * ... and when they fell they never rose again to the plain on which they once stood.
- * And when he fell ... has man ever stopped himself falling? When man fell because of his sin, has he ever been able to do anything about it?
- * If he had been able to do something about it ... then Jesus wouldn't have needed to die; God wasted His time planning for Calvary.
- * Here is how 'free' the will of man is: man's will is 'free' only to keep on falling. He is totally and absolutely unable to stop himself because his will is in bondage to sin. (Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*.)
- * Basically, when man fell in the Garden ... in the process that would lead to his death, ... his body began to grow older, his eyesight began to dim, his hearing, his heart, his liver, his kidney ... his body began the process of failing/dying.
- * And when man fell in the Garden, it not only affected him on the outside ... it also affected his mind, his brain, and his will. It affected his thoughts, his purposes, his aims, his future; it affected everything about him. ... A free will never brought anyone to Christ ... because there is no such thing, because the human will has been so mortally disfigured and marred by sin that it is naturally at enmity with the grace of God.
- * So, if you have a Biblical view of sin and the fall of man you will discover there is no such thing as a free will.

Okay ... if the Bible says we cannot choose for God, that places us in a terrible predicament! Yes, it does! [Jn. 6:44 No man can come to me](#), says the Bible, but then it continues, [except the Father which hath sent me draw him](#). Paul said to Titus, [3:3 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.](#) [4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,](#) [5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;](#) [6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;](#) [7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.](#)

How does it work then that God saves the sinner? Some people say ...

SINCE THERE IS NO FREE WILL, IS MAN BASICALLY A ROBOT?

* "Man has no thoughts or feelings of his own. God, - as it were, - clicks a button and brings about his salvation. Is that what you're saying? Surely ... the way you describe it ... man ceases to be a real person in his own right!"

- * Well, the Bible plainly teaches that man has a responsibility for his actions before God.
 - * Joshua, before the people of Israel, [Josh. 24:15](#) choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (i.e. = *my* choice!)
 - * The Lord Jesus wept over the city, [Mt. 23:37](#) O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, *and ye would not!*
- * On many occasions throughout God's Word man in his sin *naturally* rejects God's offer of salvation. You see, the people had chosen the natural thing to do which was to reject God; when the unbeliever unbelieves ... he is simply doing what comes naturally from his heart.
- * A.W. Pink wrote, "The will is not free ... the affections love as they do and the will chooses as it does because of the state of the heart and [Jer. 17:9](#) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.
- * And man is anything but a robot! He has feelings and emotions and leanings and desires, - a robot doesn't have those; he has opinions and beliefs, - a robot doesn't have those either.
- * When man is confronted by God he does the natural thing ... he rejects, he doesn't want to hear anything more about God.
- * When he hears the Gospel or when he is confronted with the Gospel ... he's not a robot; he is responsible for what he does ... and what he does comes from his sinful nature ... for what he does is the most natural thing, - he rejects God and God's salvation.
- * Here is yet another aspect that is tied up in all this.

SINCE THERE IS NO FREE WILL NOT ALL WILL BE SAVED

- * "You say that there is nothing the sinner can initiate within himself to bring about his salvation? ... "Yes, that's right ... otherwise he would be participating in the work of his own salvation ... and taking away some of the glory from God".
- * "Well, then, if God does not come to them and save them ... they will never be saved? Is that right? ... Is that fair?!"
- * Looking at it the way you and I do, I can't honestly say it is fair. With our feeble intelligence, it is true that God makes a difference that doesn't seem to be fair ... but that's the way the Bible tells it. It began at the very beginning: God chose Abel, He rejected Cain; God chose Jacob, He rejected Esau; ... yes, that is the way of it, not all will be saved.

* What did the Israelites ever do that God should choose them over (Deut 7:1) the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites? And yet God said through Moses, v.7 The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: 8 But because the LORD loved you.

* Why did He love the Israelites and not those other nations? I don't know! Could He not have loved them both? His love is so vast, why couldn't He do for them what He did for Israel?

* Why does He love His Church and give His Son to die for it? I don't know *except* ... is it not a marvel of God's grace that He even decided to save any of us?! Why did God save anyone?!

* When Jesus had come to Jerusalem for the last time, prior to His crucifixion, He was surrounded by all the Pharisees and unbelievers; here is what the Bible says, Jn. 12:37 But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: 38 That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? 39 Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, 40 He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

* These are terrible words! ... yet, does God *owe* us that He should save us?! No, He doesn't! He owes us nothing, - He doesn't owe it to us to save us.

* Our will is not sovereign, - His is. We don't *direct Him* ... We were born sinners, born at war with God, ... strangers. In the days of Noah He wiped out whole generations; why doesn't God do the same all over again? Why does He save any of us at all!?

* You see, this is grace that He ever worked the plan of eternal salvation! What God does to save His people is this, ... as the *Confession* says, "When God converts a sinner, and brings him out of sin into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage to sin, and, by His grace alone, He enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good."

* Just so that He gets all the glory ... He begins a work in you that He started in the Council meeting in Heaven.

GOD'S WILL 'COVERS' THE WILL OF THE UNBELIEVER

* Dead in sin ... how can you ever believe then? Your will is bound with the ropes of Hell's domination; how can you ever break free to be alive in Christ?

* You can't do it, but God can. J.N. Darby, "If Christ came to save that which is lost, free will has no place". As the *Confession* says, all the emphasis is upon Him and what He did ... He came along and He untangled the shackles that bound you, He reached down and He lifted you out in His strong arms of salvation, He called your name and so forcefully He called your name that you, - even though you were dead, - you heard His voice and came to Him, even as Lazarus in the grave!

* Even consider how Jesus called Lazarus' name *only!*

- * You would never have heard His call ... had He not unblocked your ears.
- * You would never have come to Him ... had he not breathed into you new life and you were born again.
- * The moment He called you, - He didn't need to *plead* with you, - He *called* you ... and the moment He called you He had already done such a work in your heart that as He called ... you heard and you cried out for Him to save you.
- * Yes, you called out ... that's because of the new life He breathed into you! ... No longer dead, but made to be alive in Christ.
- * God had done His work of grace in your heart and from the innermost depths of your being you cried to Him to be saved!
- * You cried out, - not as a robot would, - but you cried out as a sinner seeking Christ!
- * You see ... you love Him, but because He first loved you. You called out to Him, but because He first called out to you. You found Him, but only because He first found you.

* Now, tell me, Who gets all the glory? In such a work of Divine grace, how much of it do *you* deserve? Does the church, or an evangelist deserve any of it? Is it because of *your* free will you initiate this salvation?

* No, don't you see that all your free will has you doing is falling even further and deeper away from God?

CONCLUSION

* Here then is the only salvation that is all of God's grace. He has done absolutely *everything necessary* to save you ... even when you come to Him to repent and believe, - He has all the glory for that too.

* ... And the *Confession* finishes on this grand note ... to which every saint awaits, "It is not until man enters the state of glory that he is made perfectly and immutably free to will that which is good, and that alone."