

# Does Man Have a Free Will? Free & Sovereign Grace In the Salvation of Sinners with Notes on Free Agency

*Ferrell Griswold Messages*  
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**Bible Text:** John 8:31-42; 2 Thessalonians 2:13  
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I'm happy to see each one of you and to welcome you back to school and to this first chapel service of the new beginning. Now, at the close of the message this morning, there is a very important matter that must be brought before the student body so I'll ask that you remain very quietly and give your fullest attention to what might be discussed.

Open your Bible, please, to the Gospel of John 8. Beginning with verse 31 of the Gospel of John 8, the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking to those who have opposed him and who despise him as the Son of God. He says beginning in verse 31,

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. 33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? 34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. 35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. 36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. 37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. 38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. 39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. 41 Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. 42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

And in verse 32, "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Verse 34, "Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin." In the last message prior to the holidays, we examined the subject of the sovereignty of God and in this we saw that God is sovereign in creation, having brought into existence the world, not out of any necessity on his part but because of his own sovereign free will. For God does not stand in need of creation, it is the creation that stands in constant need of God for it to be upheld that it not slip into non-being.

Then we saw that God is not only sovereign in creation but he is sovereign also in his government of that world he created. He did not turn the world lose as a big machine to run in its own time fulfilling the laws of nature, but to operate according to his own will for it is declared of God that he works all things, not some things, all things, not the best of things, all things, not most things after the counsel of his own will. We saw in this how that there can be no such thing behind fatalism resulting from cause and effect excluding God from behind the scene, setting up the various causes to produce the effects that he desires. We saw that with reference to our lives, there are no accidents. We do not operate by chance nor luck, whether it be good or bad luck, but that we operate in the context of the will and the purpose of God.

So we concluded without being able to introduce the next thought which we shall touch very lightly and that is that God is not only sovereign in creation and in providence and government but he is sovereign in the matter of salvation as well. This subject was introduced to us in our responsive reading from the book of Romans 9 where there the Apostle Paul declared that, "God will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy and that it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth but of God that showeth mercy." Therefore God must take the initiative in man's salvation or man would never move toward God seeking after his grace in the matter of salvation.

When we come to a subject of this nature, we must turn aside from human speculation. That human speculation includes even the thoughts and concepts of theologians who would set down their religious views without rooting and grounding those views in a "Thus saith the Lord." In other words, we must lay aside all our prejudices and arguments and come empty handed without our minds made up to the word of God and with a teachable attitude, "O Lord, what dost thou say on this subject?" and then when God speaks in his word, accept what he says in spite of what we have been taught, in spite of what we feel, in spite of what we may believe because the mind of man cannot be trusted except as the mind of man is brought unto the discipline of the word of God.

So I want you to turn to 2 Timothy 1 where we are shown that the subject of salvation originates with God and is the result of his grace and not the result of anything that we as creatures may do. In other words, salvation does not come from my being religious or having walked a church aisle and taken a preacher by the hand. By having made a decision to turn over a new leaf. By having gone into the baptismal waters to make a profession of faith of religion. Nor taking upon my lips some confession of faith. Or producing what the world considers as good works.

The word "grace" means "favor which you and I don't deserve." By nature, we deserve the judgment of God. By nature, we all deserve to go to hell. But in his grace, God shows favor in saving a people who are undeserving. Now, as long as you or I believe that God owes us salvation, as long as you and I believe that we are worthy of salvation, we will never be saved. The only people that are ever saved are those who come before the Lord as guilty sinners, taking upon themselves their guilt, saying, "I am worthy of the judgment of God but I plead thy mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, look at what Paul tells us and, you know, Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit and everything he said that's recorded in the Bible is the word of God. God speaking through this man without any error and without any mistake and so we must bow down to what the Bible says. Now, Paul is speaking about his own ministry, his own sufferings, his own imprisonment and he's saying to this young preacher, a very young man who had followed Paul and was now preaching the Gospel, "Don't you be ashamed of me and the testimony of our Lord. Don't be ashamed that my name is maligned. Don't be ashamed that I'm despised. Don't be ashamed that I'm persecuted and imprisoned and that men seek to destroy me." Then he turns his thought to the subject of salvation because having mentioned in verse 8 the Gospel which he preached and which he partook of, he says it is the power of God and then in verse 9, look at it there carefully, "God, who hath saved us."

Now, that's the first thing that is here stated, that it is God who hath saved us. Now, Paul did not say the church who hath saved us, did he? He did not say, mother and father who have saved us, did he? He did not say, baptism which has saved us, did he? He did not say, all of my good works accumulated and brought together and put on the scales outweighing my evil works hath saved us, did he? Now, all of these things are important. It's very important that a person be baptized. It's very important that a person profess religion. It's very important that a person produce good works. But he must look beyond these to God as the author of our salvation.

Now, look at the next statement. He has saved us how? "And called us with an holy calling." In other words, he has saved us by speaking powerfully through the Gospel to our minds and our hearts so that in this we heard over and above the preacher's voice or the teacher's voice which was the very voice of the Holy Spirit witnessing to our hearts that what the Bible says is true and that we are sinners and that we are lost and that we cannot save ourselves. Then we hear the Gospel of how Christ took our sins upon himself and died in our stead and we're saved through him.

But now look at what he says in the next statement, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works." Do you see that? Do you see that? He says God saved us with a holy calling, not based upon our works. He did not look down and see a good man here and a bad man there and save the good man. More than likely when God looks down, he finds the bad man and saves him so that he might manifest that salvation is not by works but by grace and if a man is good, God shows him his heart so that he sees if he's outwardly good, he's inwardly rotten as hell itself and so much to be saved by the grace of God.

Now, look at the next statement, but he saved us "according to his own purpose and grace." Do you see that? God didn't save us by accident then, did he? He saved us on purpose but whose purpose? His purpose. This means that God determined to save those who are saved. That he had a purpose to do it and the purpose was rooted in grace or unmerited or undeserved favor shown by God to those who had no claims whatsoever upon him.

But when did God purpose to save his people? When did he give them grace that they in time might be saved? Was it when they decided they would let the Lord save them? Well, let's see what he says in the next statement in verse 9 of 2 Timothy 1. "Which," and that refers back to grace and to purpose. Which grace and which purpose to save us "was given us in Christ Jesus," and underline the next words, "before the world began." Now, you see, since you weren't there before the world began and only God was there in the person of the Father and in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ, and in the person of the Holy Spirit, it had to be God's purpose and God's grace.

Well, how did he give grace to the saved in Christ before the foundation of the world? Well, this happened in terms of what we call the covenant of grace. It means that before the world was created, that God the Father chose a people that would be the receivers of his saving grace and he chose Jesus Christ his Son to be their Savior and he gave their salvation to Christ and in the fullness of the time, Christ agreed to come into the world to take a human nature, to obey the law that we had broken, go to the cross and die and on the third day the Father would raise him up and then in time call with an holy calling to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ those for whom Christ had received saving grace. So there it is spelled out very, very clearly.

Now, in verse 10, he says, "But is now," in time, in your lifetime, "manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ." All this that God purposed there as Paul said before the world began is now being manifested. Is now being shown to us by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world.

Now, time does not permit me to go through all these Scriptures that we could turn to but I do want to read another and then look at another aspect of the subject. Turn to 2 Thessalonians. Now, you might not like what Paul is here saying but you have to admit that at least he is talking here about the God of the Bible being the author and the initiator of man's salvation and that it's by grace. Now, if you don't like what Paul says, you'll have to argue with God because God is the one that revealed it to Paul and Paul is simply saying what God told him to write down.

Now, in 2 Thessalonians 2 where we are being warned of the end time with the coming of the man of sin, the rise of the antichrist powers and the apostasy in which men will despise the Gospel, that some will be deceived by God sending strong delusions upon them, that there is a hope that there will be a people who will not bow down to the antichrist, who will not be deceived. And who are they? Look at verse 13, "But we are

bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved." You are not among those that will go out after strong delusion and follow error.

And who are they that Paul is so thankful for? Well, look at what he says, "We always give thanks for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God," now underline the next three words, "from the beginning." From the beginning of what? Well, wherever you want to put the beginning. Go to Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God," and this has already taken place. Go back as far as your mind and Adam in eternity and say, "Well, that's the beginning." Wherever you put the beginning, what Paul here is talking about already happened. It had already taken place.

So he says that God from the beginning has chosen you, what, to service? To works? The Jewish nation? No, he's talking to a bunch of Gentiles here in Thessalonica, saved out of the worst kind of paganism and he says, "God, from the beginning, has chosen you to salvation," that you might be saved, "through sanctification of the Spirit," that is in time being set apart by the Holy Spirit to "believe the truth." You see, we don't know who God has chosen, that's why we preach the Gospel to every man. We're commanded to preach the Gospel to every man. But God knows who he has chosen. Those names are written upon the breastplate of the Lord Jesus Christ as our high priest and the way we find out who they are that God has chosen to salvation is that in time they believe the truth. Therefore any person who receives the Gospel and believes the truth is among what we call the elect of God for you see the word "elect" and "election" that appear time and again throughout the whole Bible is the same word as the word "to choose" here because all in the world election means is to choose. And just as the Bible says that we love him because he first loved us, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "You have not chosen me but I have chosen you," that we may say that we choose him because he first chose us.

That's the order of things. God takes the initiative. This is why salvation is said to be a birth and man did not choose his own birth. It's said to be a resurrection and man must be raised from the dead by the power of God. And, my dear friend, when you take this right and this power away from God to be sovereign and supreme in his world and in the matter of salvation, you do not have any God. All you have is a projection of the imagination. A god created in the image of man. A god that is limited and so a god who cannot act apart from the decision of man and if God must wait on the decision of man rather than man being dependent upon the power of God, does that not make man God's god rather than God being man's God? My dear young people, whoever calls the shots, whoever makes the final decision, whoever has the supreme power in the matter of decision is God. If it's man who has that power, then man has made himself a god. We must worship God. One of the first acts of God in subduing us and bringing us under his authority is causing us to bow down our knees to his will. "Not my will but thy will be done."

Well, at this point the question is raised and only naturally so because this truth should be next in line of consideration: does man have a free will? Now, Dr. James Kennedy of Fort Lauderdale, Florida raised this question: does man have a free will or is he merely a puppet moved around by the forces of fate? It seems to be a contradiction that an all

sovereign God and a free creature could exist in the same universe. It would seem that if man is free, then God does not control all things. Now, with that question raised, let's turn aside and look at the subject of free will and let me point out first of all that when we come to the freedom of man, the problem is not man's freedom but man's ability. Now, underline that in your thinking. The problem that we face is not the problem of man's free will but of man's ability to do that which he wills.

Now, look at John's Gospel where the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking and certainly you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ always spoke the truth, don't you? Because the Lord Jesus Christ is God and he cannot lie. Now, in John's Gospel, chapter 6 and verse 44, the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking and he says, look at it now, "No man can come to me, except," except that he makes up his mind to do so and walks a church aisle. Is that what it says? It says, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him," pull him, opening his understanding to the truth, showing him his own condition and then putting desires in his heart to come to Christ, no man will ever come.

Now, you see the word "can" there is the word of ability. Now, you and I about lost the distinction between can and may but certainly in some parts of your study of English you bumped into the distinction. For example, if you were to come to me and say, "Brother Griswold, can Mr. Smith move that 9 ½ foot piano there?" I'd say, "Well, I don't know. I don't know whether he can or not. He'll have to give it a try and then we'll see." Because, you see, the word "can" always has reference to ability. But now if you come and say, "May Mr. Smith move that piano?" I would say, "Certainly, he may move it and I'll get someone to help him," because, you see, that's asking permission.

Now, Christ does not say, "No man may come to me," talking about permission because all men without exception who desire to come to Christ are permitted to come. They are invited to come. But man does not have the "can" to come, the ability to do so. The reason for that is there's something wrong with him and that which is wrong with him is his nature.

But now this raises another aspect and that is that man then, if free, does he do what he wants to? The answer to that is emphatically yes. Man unless constrained by a power greater than himself always does what he wants to. In other words, when you got up this morning there were certain decisions laid before you where eventually no matter how much you might have been opposed to it in the beginning, you came to school and you made that decision and you wanted to because you had to.

Now, I want you to turn to the book of Acts and let's see that man's freedom is always in the context of the decree or the will of God just like I'm free to drive an automobile within the context of certain boundary lines on a highway and within certain restrictions of law. If I get outside of those boundaries, I lose my freedom altogether. Alright, let's look at a tough verse of Scripture, I mean a tough one, Acts 2, where it's talking about the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. In verse 23 it says of Christ that he, "being delivered by the determinate counsel," now, that determinate counsel means the counsel determined by

God, a purpose God has determined, "and foreknows you have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Now, let me ask you a question: when that mob stood outside Pilate's hall and the emaciated form of the Lord Jesus Christ was presented to them after he had been scourged and beaten and tortured, Pilate said, "Ecce homo, you look at the man." They said, "Crucify him!" He said, "Let me spare him and turn him loose on this day." They said, "We'll have him dead!" They led him out the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha's hill and there they nailed the spikes fast and hung him up until he died. Were they doing what they wanted to? You know they were. They were acting out their hatred and venom against the Lord Jesus Christ. Not one person in that crowd said, "Well, you know, in the Old Testament it's prophesied that the Messiah should be crucified. We want to do the will of God. Let's go crucify him." No, they never even questioned the will of God and yet we're told in the Bible that Christ before the foundation of the world was the Lamb slain. He was ordained to die that death. Those men did what they wanted to do and because of their motive and because of what they wanted to do, they went out and crucified Christ but they didn't frustrate God's will. They still fulfilled his purpose.

Well, turn over if you think that's tough and look at chapter 4...of the will will ever be made in favor of God therefore before the will acts, there is always a decision made in the mind. First of all, the mind has an influence upon the affections: what you love and hate. Then once the mind has an influence on the emotions, the will comes along in a decision not contrary to the mind but in keeping with the mind.

So let me now turn very hurriedly to point out what then is meant by free will and to answer this I will raise another question: does man have the ability to choose whatever he wants? The answer to that is yes, he has the ability to choose whatever he wants but he does not have the ability to put it into effect. Just as the men in the crucifixion wanted Christ dead, they chose to crucify. Just as any person who is not saved willfully rejects the Lord Jesus Christ because he wants to reject the Lord Jesus Christ. No person in hell can ever say that they are there against their will. They went there because they didn't see anything in Christ that they wanted.

Now, the will then is always motivated by what the understanding or the mind conceives to be either best for the person in a long range goal or a short range goal. For example, if you should come to me and say, "Listen Pastor, I have a friend out here and he wants to cut off one of your legs." Well, do you think I would say yes to that? Do you think I would make a decision in my will for that? Why, you know better. You know I'd fight him back to save my leg and if I had to cut his off first to keep him from cutting mine off, I'd do it. Oh, but let one of the colleagues of Dr. Collier here come to me and say, "Listen, you have tuberculosis of the bone and if your leg is not amputated immediately it's going to mean your death," now my mind understands something differently, doesn't it? It understands now that I must sacrifice my leg in order to preserve my life and with the same mind and with the same will, I now agree and give myself freely into the hands of a man to cut my leg off. Do you see what I'm talking about? Your will is enslaved to

your understanding. If your understanding is straightened out, there won't be any problem with the will. You won't have any arguments against God about your will.

Let me share something with you. Dr. John G. who is a professor in a seminary in Pittsburgh writes that it is impossible to force the will of man. To have a forced free will would be contrary to the meaning of the word. He illustrates this by saying that if he could place a book in your hands, put a gun to your temple and say, "You'll read this book," we might have to try this some time, "You'll read this book or I'll splatter your brains all over the wall." That would still not force your will because you would then come to the place of making a decision. Your mind would feed certain facts to your conscious emotions and affections as to how much you love or didn't love your life. Quite likely you would come to the decision to read the book. Dr. James Kennedy writes, "Under other circumstances with things more significant than merely reading a book, there have been Christians who have come to other conclusions. In effect, Nero said to millions of Christians, 'You will renounce Jesus Christ and blaspheme his name or you will wish someone would blow out your brains. You'll be peeled, boiled, fed to the lions, put in sacks with snakes and vipers.' Faced with such a choice, hundreds of thousands of Christians made a decision. Their minds fed them certain facts about this life and eternity and most thought it was better to lose this life and gain eternal life. Their affections went out to Jesus Christ whom they loved more than life itself. Their decision was, 'Bring on the lions.'" That was their choice. It wasn't forced. Without exception, man does whatever he pleases in light of the facts and feelings involved.

So, you have short end goals which might make you go contrary to the will of God for immediate pleasure or long range goals that will make you sacrifice much as you do in schooling to accomplish that which ultimately you seek to be best for it. This, however, does not mean that man is free to do what he ought to do. Man is commanded to love God but he doesn't love God. To repent of his sins but he won't repent. To receive Christ as his Savior but he refuses Christ. To be holy but he lives in sin. The reason for this is man is not free to rise above his own nature. In other words, you can't ever be anything but a human being and you're going to act in your life as a human being in one phase of personality or another. You'll never become an angel. You can't rise up into a higher form of life than that which you are because God has created everything to act according to its nature. Just as water will go downhill and seek it's own level, you cannot tempt a buzzard with a dish of ice cream with all your power of persuasion.

Why? Because nature is involved and man has a fourfold state of nature. First of all, when God created man in the Garden of Eden, he created him perfect and without sin so that Adam was the only free individual that has ever lived because he was given the freedom of contrary choices. Adam could sin or could not sin according to his own decision. He could obey God. He could disobey God. He had that freedom but he chose to disobey God and fell from his state of righteousness into a state of sin. And now from that passage of Scripture we read in John 8 where our Lord speaks of us being the servant of sin, we see now that we have fallen into sin, that we are the servants of sin and our nature is that of the natural man, the sinful man and we will always do that which is according to our nature until that nature is changed.



If you have any small brothers and sisters in your home or if you have children of your own, you know that education begins negatively with, "Don't do this and don't do that." Have you ever had to be taught to do what was wrong or did you just do it naturally? But when it comes to doing right, over and over again we have to be told, "You cannot do that. You must not do that. This is what you must do." Why? Because we have a nature that is at enmity with God and that is bent on sin.

Did you know that in Proverbs 21:4 it says that even the plowing of the wicked is sin? Do you think that as man goes out here and plows his garden and plants his seed that it's sin? If he's a lost man it is. There is nothing innately wrong with plowing but if he's a lost man, why? Because, first of all, he will not acknowledge that earth to belong to the Lord. Secondly, he will not return to God his tax, his tax of a tithe for that which God gives him out of the earth. Then, thirdly, he'll grow food to further strengthen himself that he might further rebel against God. There is nothing wrong with a man giving a million dollars to the church for the furtherance of the Gospel unless he gives it to have a plaque put on the wall to be praised of men that So-and-so gave a million dollars to the church go be seen of men, then it becomes sin. We have wrong motives. If our motives are not right, then it makes everything we do wrong.

We are at enmity with God and furthermore we are told that the natural man cannot please God. Not only will not, he cannot. Why? Because he loves his unrighteousness, his darkness, his sin. It means then that man does not have the ability to choose to do good until there is the supernatural work of God the Holy Spirit wherein man who is dead in trespasses and in sins is quickened into spiritual life and being quickened into spiritual life is brought to receive the Lord Jesus Christ in saving faith as his own Lord and Savior. When he does that, he is a new creature and all things become new and then he's in the state of grace wherein he does evil but he's also able to do good.

Then there is the final state when Jesus Christ comes again to receive his people unto himself and we're glorified in that state of glory. We will not be able to sin, but bear only to do good. Only to do good.

*Our Father, we thank thee for thy word, for it's emphasis upon the glory of our God with whom we have to do. Take these words and speak them to our hearts that we might be conformed to thy truth through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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Reformation's regulative principle of worship or what is sometimes called the scriptural law of worship commenting on the words of God which I commanded them not, neither came into my heart, from his commentary on Jeremiah 7:31 writes, "God here cuts off from men every occasion for making evasions, since he condemns by this one phrase, 'I have not commanded them,' whatever the Jews devised. There is then no other argument needed to condemn superstitions, than that they are not commanded by God: for when men allow themselves to worship God according to their own fancies, and attend not to his commands, they pervert true religion. And if this principle was adopted by the Papists, all those fictitious modes of worship, in which they absurdly exercise themselves, would fall to the ground. It is indeed a horrible thing for the Papists to seek to discharge their duties towards God by performing their own superstitions. There is an immense number of them, as it is well known, and as it manifestly appears. Were they to admit this principle, that we cannot rightly worship God except by obeying his word, they would be delivered from their deep abyss of error. The Prophet's words then are very important, when he says, that God had commanded no such thing, and that it never came to his mind; as though he had said, that men assume too much wisdom, when they devise what he never required, nay, what he never knew."