

# Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

Topic 2 - The Doctrine of God  
Lesson 39 - The Attributes of God: Will (Part 3)

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# Spirit, Soul, and Body

- The Human Constitution: Body, Soul, Spirit, Heart, Conscience
- The body, our flesh, is that material part of us that constitutes the physical portion of our being.
- The soul refers to our existence as a living being - life has been breathed into us.
- The spirit, a word which means wind, or breath, is that immaterial part of us that constitutes our inner self and is the power of life that animates the body.
- The soul is included as an immaterial part of our being and the words spirit and soul are often used interchangeably in Scripture.
- The heart in this context is not the physical organ pumping our blood, but is the control center of a person and the seat for thoughts, attitudes, motivations, and actions.
- The conscience is the faculty of moral evaluation concerning right and wrong, good and evil.
- - MacArthur, pg. 416-421

# Mind, Will, and Emotions

- The mind, our intellect or thinking, involves us knowing and understanding things.
- The intellect shapes what we believe and love in our heart.
- Our will (volition, decision making, determination) desires what we love and repudiates what we hate.
- Our actions then accord with what we desire most.
- The mind shapes the affections, which shape the will, which directs the actions.
- Therefore, what we truly believe or desire will directly affect our thinking and behavior.

# The Providence of God and the Will of Man

- God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do. - Grudem pg. 317
- God works, or brings about all things according to the counsel of His will. - Eph. 1:11
- No event in creation falls outside of His providence in either causing or allowing it to occur.
- If God exercises providential control over all events are we “free” in any sense? Both Berkhof and Calvin defend the idea that we are free in some sense when it comes to our choices and actions. However, we are only as free in our decision making and desires as our nature allows.

# Free Will

- An absolutely free will would mean that we could do whatever we wanted to do. We know then that our will is not absolutely free because there are things that we can want to do that are simply impossible for us to do. No matter how badly and sincerely I want to jump off the roof and fly, without mechanical assistance or power from an source outside myself, I cannot fly. That is outside the realm of my nature (my natural abilities).
- Furthermore, being free can never be understood to be outside of the control of God, or of being able to make decisions that are not caused by anything. Our nature influences our will and sets boundaries for its exercise.
- Scripture is clear that we cannot do what is right or good without God's work and power in our lives.

# Free Will

- We do have the ability to make willing choices that have real effects.
- This is not free will, but will that is bound by our nature and essence, just as God's will is bound by His nature and essence.
- If we look at the Garden of Eden we see Adam and Eve with free will, but as they willfully decided to sin after the temptation they doomed all of their descendants by natural progression to being born with a will bound by a fallen, sinful nature.
- In that regard, Christ restores the free will of believers, as we are now by grace able to desire and to do what is right.

# Desire and Ability

- Romans 3:10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. <sup>12</sup> They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.” <sup>13</sup> “Their throat *is* an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit”; “The poison of asps *is* under their lips”; <sup>14</sup> “Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness.” <sup>15</sup> “Their feet *are* swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> Destruction and misery *are* in their ways; <sup>17</sup> And the way of peace they have not known.” <sup>18</sup> “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
- Phil. 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

# Luther - The Bondage of the Will

- Hence it follows that free will without God's grace is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondslave of evil. . . . What is ineffective power but (in plain language) no power at all? So to say that free will exists and has power, albeit ineffective power, is, in the Sophists' phrase, a contradiction in terms. It is like saying free will is something which is not free. (104).
- If anyone should tell you that a thing was free, which of its own power could go only one way, that is, the bad way-it could indeed go the other way, that is, the good way, but not by its own power, only with the help of another-could you refrain from laughing, my friend? For on these grounds I shall easily establish that a stone or a log has free will, because it can go up and down; though by its own power it can only go down, and can go up only with the help of another! (142-143).



# Luther - The Bondage of the Will

- I have often been resolved to live uprightly, and to lead a true godly life, and to set everything aside that would hinder this, but it was far from being put in execution; even as it was with Peter, when he swore he would lay down his life for Christ.
- I will not lie or dissemble before my God, but will freely confess, I am not able to effect that good which I intend, but await the happy hour when God shall be pleased to meet me with his grace.
- The will of mankind is either presumptuous or despairing. No human creature can satisfy the law. For the law of God discourses with me, as it were, after this manner: Here is a great, a high, and a steep mountain, and thou must go over it; whereupon my flesh and free-will say, I will go over it; but my conscience says, Thou canst not go over it; then comes despair, and says, If I cannot, then I must forbear. In this sort does the law work in mankind either presumption or despair; yet the law must be preached and taught, for if we preach not the law, then people grow rude and confident, whereas if we preach it, we make them afraid.

# Luther - The Bondage of the Will

- Saint Augustine writes, that free-will, without God's grace and the Holy Ghost, can do nothing but sin;
- Hence, we conclude in general, that man, without the Holy Ghost and God's grace, can do nothing but sin; he proceeds therein without intermission, and from one sin falls into another. Now, if man will not suffer wholesome doctrine, but condemns the all-saving Word, and resists the Holy Ghost, then through the effects and strength of his free-will he becomes God's enemy; he blasphemes the Holy Ghost, and follows the lusts and desires of his own heart, as examples in all times clearly show.
- Conclusion: If we believe that original sin has so destroyed us, that even in the godly who are led by the Spirit, it causes the utmost molestation by striving against that which is good; it is manifest, that there can be nothing left in a man devoid of the Spirit, which can turn itself towards good, but which must turn towards evil!

# Edwards - The Freedom of the Will

- Edwards makes a distinction between “moral ability” and “natural ability.” Natural ability has to do with what we are physically capable of doing. We can walk; but we cannot fly. Moral ability has to do with what a person can or cannot do of their own volition. Edwards says for example that a drunkard may not be able to stop drinking, just as a wife of noble character simply cannot cheat on her husband.
- Human beings, as responsible moral agents, always choose to do what they are most strongly inclined to do at that time. It is impossible for them not to do what they are most inclined or disposed to do. Edwards argues then that our “volition will be determined.” But lest we think that Edwards is a mere fatalist, he will also argue that because this choosing is according to our own strongest inclinations, it is also completely consistent with liberty. We freely choose what we want most. For this reason, Edwards has been called a “compatibilist” as he demonstrates that human liberty is logically compatible with divine sovereignty.

# Edwards - The Freedom of the Will

- The Determination of the Will, supposes an effect, which must have a cause.
- The plain and obvious meaning of the words Freedom and Liberty, in common speech, is The power, opportunity, or advantage, that any one has, to do as he pleases. Or in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect as he wills.
- A person, whose strength is no more than sufficient to lift the weight of one hundred pounds, is as truly and really unable to lift one hundred and one pounds, as ten thousand pounds; but yet he is further from being able to lift the latter weight than the former; and so, according to the common use of speech, has a greater Inability for it. So it is in moral Inability. A man is truly morally unable to choose contrary to a present inclination, which in the least degree prevails; or, contrary to that motive, which, all things considered, has strength and advantage now to move the Will, in the least degree, superior to all other motives in view: but yet he is further from ability to insist a very strong habit, and a violent and deeply rooted inclination, or a motive vastly exceeding all others in strength.

# The Compatibilist View - CARM.ORG

- The compatibilist view is the position that a person's freedom is restricted by his nature as is described in Scripture and that his free will is consistent with God's foreordination. In other words, he can only choose what his nature (sinful or regenerate) will allow him to choose.
- “Libertarian free will” says that the person's will is not restricted by his sinful nature and that he is still able to choose or accept God freely. Two subdivisions of libertarian free will would be "open absolute free will" (Open Theism) which says that man's choices are not knowable by God until they occur and "non-open absolute free will" which would state that God can know man's choices but he cannot determine them (foreknowledge, but a skewed view of foreknowledge as involving only knowing facts as they will happen).

# The Compatibilist View in Scripture

- 1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.
- Romans 3:10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. <sup>12</sup> They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”
- Romans 6:16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

# The Compatibilist View in Scripture

- Anyone who believes does so because God has granted that he should believe.
- Phil. 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,
- John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
- 1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
- 2 Thess. 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth

# The Compatibilist View in Scripture

- Romans 9:16 “So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy....18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”
1. Every man is spiritually dead and dead men need life (“come to Me that you may have life”).
  2. This life is found only in Christ (“come to Me”).
  3. There is life in Jesus Christ only for those who come for it (one must “come”).
  4. No one by nature ever will come (“you are not willing to come”).



# Jesus on Coming to Him

- John 6:<sup>35</sup> And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. <sup>36</sup> But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup> This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. <sup>40</sup> And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

# Jesus on Coming to Him

- John 6:43 Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. 44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. 47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

# Jesus on Coming to Him

- John 6:3 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. 65 And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” 66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. 67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” 68 But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 70 Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” 71 He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.

# Conclusion

- God chooses first, and only the ones He chooses will come, no more and no less. But God uses a process. First He chooses the elect. Then in their life, at His appointed time, He begins to call them to salvation. He sends His Word and His Holy Spirit, to open the eyes and ears and heart of the sinner. He supernaturally allows them to see their sins, and the beauty and loveliness of the Savior, He gives them the gift of faith to believe, repent and submit, and they go running after Jesus, begging for salvation. Yes, they did this with their will, but only after God made them able to see and believe by the gift of faith. And God clearly tells man it was a free gift and not to boast (Eph. 2:8-9). - MacArthur
- And I will go as far as Martin Luther, in that strong assertion of his, where he says, If any man ascribes any of salvation, even the very least, to the free-will of man, he knows nothing of grace, and he has not learned Jesus Christ aright. - Spurgeon
- Free-will doctrine-what does it? It magnifies man into God. It declares God's purposes a nullity, since they cannot be carried out unless men are willing. It makes God's will a waiting servant to the will of man, and the whole covenant of grace dependent on human action. Denying election on the ground of injustice, it holds God to be a debtor to sinners. - Spurgeon
- I do not come into this pulpit hoping that perhaps somebody will of his own free will return to Christ. My hope lies in another quarter. I hope that my Master will lay hold of some of them and say, "You are mine, and you shall be mine. I claim you for myself." My hope arises from the freeness of grace, and not from the freedom of the will. - Spurgeon

# Resources

- What is Free Will? RC Sproul - [https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/chosen\\_by\\_god/what-is-free-will/](https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/chosen_by_god/what-is-free-will/)
- Sovereignty and Freedom - John MacArthur - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TczzcYdhdo>
- God's Sovereignty and Free Will - Alistair Begg - <https://vimeo.com/52872378>