



Around the Word  
**BIBLE STUDY**  
Summer 2016

# Free Will Part 2

### Martin Luther on Original Sin:

For here the text applies that Christ and the Evangelists so often quote from Isaiah: "You shall indeed hear but never perceive." What else does this mean but that free choice or the human heart is so held down by the power of Satan that unless it is miraculously raised up by the Spirit of God it cannot of itself either see or hear things that strike the eyes and ears themselves so plainly as to be palpable?

*(On the Bondage of the Will; LW 33:98)*



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**Introduction:** Free will has always been a topic in both philosophy and theology. Especially when it comes to the place of man's will in salvation, the topic of free will is of highest importance.

Errors regarding free will are constantly pushing their way into the church's teaching. It was no different in the years after the death of Martin Luther. The theologians of the church gathered up the teaching of the Scriptures regarding our will and its freedom and powers. In this series of studies we will let them guide us to the Scriptures and its truth and comfort.

*The non-italicized portions of this study are excerpted (with slight amendments) from the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II:12-16. (Triglotta: The Lutheran Confessions, which is in the public domain. See [www.bookofconcord.com](http://www.bookofconcord.com) for more.) There are a lot of Scriptures in this study. The most important texts are marked with \*\*.*

*This is part 2 in a series of Bible Studies. Part 1 can be found at [www.whatdoesthismean.org](http://www.whatdoesthismean.org).*

### Opening: Psalm 80:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph | like a flock!\*  
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim,  
| shine forth.

<sup>2</sup>**Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Ma- |  
nasseh,\*  
stir up your might  
and come to | save us!**

<sup>3</sup>Restore us, | O God;\*  
let your face shine, that we | may be saved!

<sup>4</sup>**O LORD | God of hosts,\*  
how long will you be angry with your |  
people's prayers?**

<sup>5</sup>You have fed them with the | bread of tears\*  
and given them tears to drink in full |  
measure.

<sup>6</sup>**You make us an object of contention for  
our | neighbors,\*  
and our enemies laugh a- | mong  
themselves.**

<sup>7</sup>Restore us, O | God of hosts;\*  
let your face shine, that we | may be saved!

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\*  
and to the Holy | Spirit;  
as it was in the be- | ginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

### The Capacity to Accomplish Spiritual Things is Denied to Man's Will

Therefore the Scriptures deny to the intellect,

heart, and will of the natural man all aptness, skill, capacity, and ability to think, to understand, to be able to do, to begin, to will, to undertake, to act, to work or to concur in working anything good and right in spiritual things as of himself.

*See 2 Corinthians 3:5. What does Paul deny in this verse?*

*\*\*See Romans 3:12. In this verse and those before and after Paul has assembled the testimony of the Psalms concerning our sinfulness. Our condition is bleak. What words does this verse use to describe our sinfulness, and our capacity to do spiritual things?*

*See John 8:37. What place does the Word of Jesus have in the unbelievers?*

(The verses considered in part 1 of this study also fit into the argument here. Remember John 1:5 and 1 Corinthians 2:14.)

Much less will he truly believe the Gospel, or assent thereto and regard it as truth.

*\*\*Read Romans 8:7. Is the mind of the flesh subject to the Law of God? Can it be subject to God's Law?*

And, in a word, it remains eternally true what the Son of God says, "Without Me ye can do nothing," (John 15:5).

*How does this verse teach that our will has no capacity to accomplish spiritual things?*

And Paul writes, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure," (Philippians 2:13).

*Who is working in our willing to do good? Whose working is excluded?*

To all godly Christians who feel and experience in their hearts a small spark or longing for divine grace and eternal salvation this precious passage is very comforting; for they know that God has kindled in their hearts this beginning of true godliness, and that He will further strengthen and help them in their great weakness to persevere in true faith unto the end.

### **The Prayers of the Saints Are Also a Proof of Their Inability to Accomplish Spiritual Things Through Their Own Resources**

Here belong also all the prayers of the saints in which they pray that they may be taught, enlightened, and sanctified by God, and by this very act declare that they cannot obtain those things which they ask of God from their own natural powers; as, in Psalm 119 alone David prays more than ten times that God would impart to him understanding, that he might rightly comprehend and learn the divine doctrine.

*Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm. To get a taste of the Psalm, read 119:17-24. What things does David pray for in these verses? How do these prayers teach us that apart from the Lord's work, David is unable to learn and love the Lord's Word?*

Very many similar prayers are in the writings of Paul.

*Read Ephesians 1:17-18 and its context. What is Paul's prayer for the people of Ephesus? How does this prayer show that knowledge of God and understanding come from God?*

*Read Colossians 1:9 and context. Notice the things Paul is praying for, and remember that our prayers are also a confession of what we lack. We ask the Lord for the things that we don't need. What did the Colossians need?*

*Read Philippians 1:9. What did the Philippians need?*

These prayers and passages concerning our ignorance and inability have been written for us, not for the purpose of rendering us idle and remiss in reading, hearing, and meditating upon God's Word, but, first, that we should thank God from the heart that by His Son He has delivered us from the darkness of ignorance and the captivity of sin and death, and through Baptism and the Holy Ghost regenerated and illumined us.

And after God through the Holy Ghost in Baptism has kindled and effected a beginning of the true knowledge of God and faith, we should pray Him without ceasing that through the same spirit and His grace, by means of the daily exercise of reading and practicing God's Word, He would preserve in us faith and His heavenly gifts, strengthen us from day to day, and keep us to the end. For unless God Himself be our schoolmaster, we can study and learn nothing that is acceptable to Him and salutary to ourselves and others.

### **Closing Hymn: Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice (st. 3-4)**

Martin Luther, 1523 (TLH 387)

3. My own good works availed me naught,  
No merit they attaining;  
Free will against God's judgment fought,  
Dead to all good remaining.  
My fears increased till sheer despair  
Left naught but death to be my share;  
The pangs of hell I suffered.

4. But God beheld my wretched state  
Before the world's foundation,  
And, mindful of His mercies great,  
He planned my soul's salvation.  
A father's heart He turned to me,  
Sought my redemption fervently:  
He gave His dearest Treasure.



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