



Around the Word
BIBLE STUDY
Summer 2016

Free Will Part 5

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:48-56. (Triglotta: The Lutheran Confessions, which is in the public domain. See www.bookofconcord.com for more.) There are a lot of Scriptures in this study. The most important texts are marked with **.*

This is part 5 in a series of Bible Studies. Parts 1-4 can be found at www.whatdoesthismean.org.

Opening: Psalm 80:1-7

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

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

³Restore us, | O God;*
let your face shine, that we | may be saved!

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

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

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

⁷Restore 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.**

How Man is Converted to God

We shall now relate from God's Word how man is converted to God, how and through what means (namely, through the oral Word and the holy Sacraments) the Holy Ghost wants to be efficacious in us, and to work and bestow in our hearts true repentance, faith, and new spiritual power and ability for good, and how we should conduct ourselves to-

wards these means, and how we should use them.

It is not God's will that any one should be damned or perish, but that all men should be converted to Him and be saved eternally.

See Ezekiel 33:11. According to the text, what does the Lord not have pleasure in? What is His pleasure?

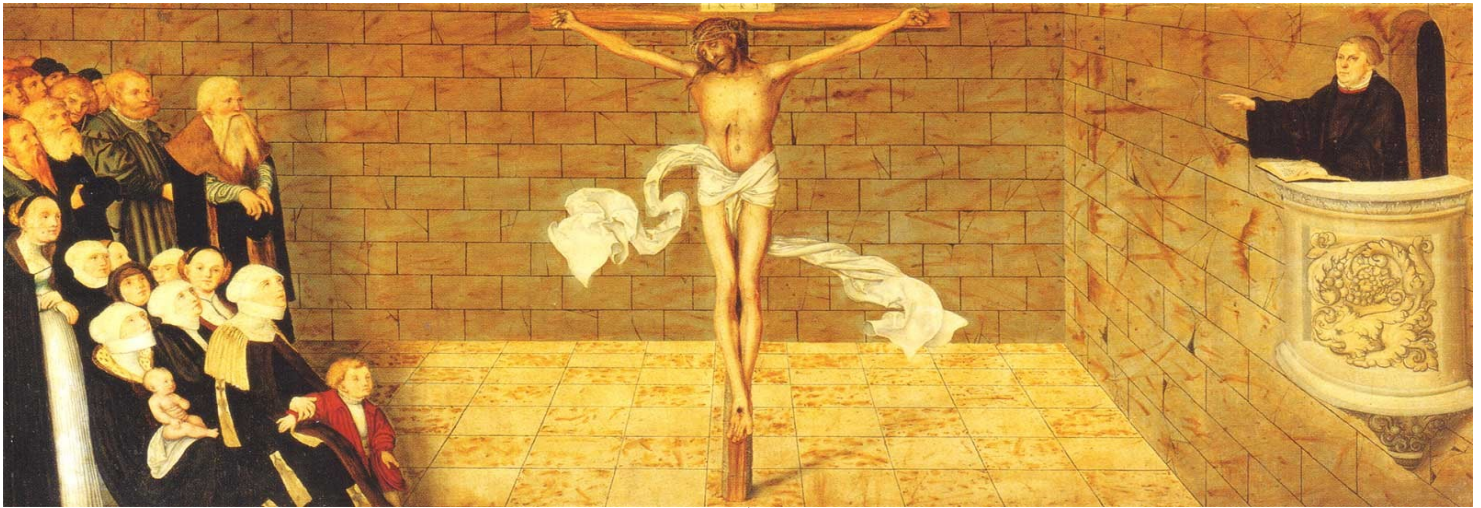
****Read John 3:16. Who does God love?**

Therefore God, out of His immense goodness and mercy, has His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan concerning our redemption, namely, the holy, alone-saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, publicly preached; and by this preaching collects an eternal Church for Himself from the human race, and works in the hearts of men true repentance and knowledge of sins, and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And by this means, and in no other way, namely, through His holy Word, when men hear it preached or read it, and the holy Sacraments when they are used according to His Word, God desires to call men to eternal salvation, draw them to Himself, and convert, regenerate, and sanctify them.

****Read 1 Corinthians 1:21. According to the text, what does the Lord use to save?**

See Acts 10:5-6. How does this text teach that the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the Word of God to create and sustain faith?

****Romans 10:17. How does faith come?**



****John 17:17 and 17:20. How does the Father sanctify us? Through what do we believe in Jesus?**

Therefore the eternal Father calls down from heaven concerning His dear Son and concerning all who preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name: "Hear ye Him," Matthew 17:5.

Why is the command to hear the preaching so important?

Now, all who wish to be saved ought to hear this preaching of God's Word. For the preaching and hearing of God's Word are instruments of the Holy Ghost, by, with, and through which He desires to work efficaciously, and to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and to do.

This Word man can externally hear and read, even though he is not yet converted to God and regenerate; for in these external things, as said above, man even since the Fall has to a certain extent a free will, so that he can go to church and hear or not hear the sermon.

Through this means, namely, the preaching and hearing of His Word, God works, and breaks our hearts, and draws man, so that through the preaching of the Law he comes to know his sins and God's wrath, and experiences in his heart true terrors, contrition, and sorrow, and through the preaching and consideration of the holy Gospel concerning the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ a spark of faith is kindled in him, which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and comforts itself with the promise of the Gospel, and thus the Holy Ghost (who works all this) is sent into the heart.

Read Galatians 4:6. What does this text say about the Holy Spirit? From where is He sent? To where is He sent? What is the result?

Now, although both, the planting and watering of the preacher, and the running and willing of the hearer, would be in vain, and no conversion would follow it if the power and efficacy of the Holy Ghost were not added thereto, who enlightens and converts the hearts through the Word preached and heard, so that men believe this Word and assent thereto, still, neither preacher nor hearer is to doubt this grace and efficacy of the Holy Ghost, but should be certain that when the Word of God is preached purely and truly, according to the command and will of God, and men listen attentively

and earnestly and meditate upon it, God is certainly present with His grace, and grants, as has been said, what otherwise man can neither accept nor give from his own powers.

For concerning the presence, operation, and gifts of the Holy Ghost we should not and cannot always judge from feeling, as to how and when they are experienced in the heart; but because they are often covered and occur in great weakness, we should be certain from, and according to, the promise, that the Word of God preached and heard is truly an office and work of the Holy Ghost, by which He is certainly efficacious and works in our hearts.

See 2 Corinthians 2:14-17. What two fragrances does Paul talk about in the text? What is this image preaching and teaching to us?

See 2 Corinthians 3:5-6. What ministry is given to the apostles? What is the result?

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.

Painting: *Martin Luther Preaching* (1547) by Lucas Cranach.

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