



Around the Word
BIBLE STUDY
Summer 2016

Free Will Part 3

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)



This Bible Study is brought to you by Issues, Etc. Listen on demand at www.issuesetc.org.

Issues, Etc.



Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio
www.issuesetc.org

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:17-24. (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 3 in a series of Bible Studies. Parts 1-2 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.**

Our Will is Opposed to God's Will

God's Word testifies that the intellect, heart, and will of the natural, unregenerate man in divine things are not only turned entirely away from God, but also turned and perverted against God to every evil; also, that he is not only weak, incapable,

unfit, and dead to good, but also is so lamentably perverted, infected, and corrupted by original sin that he is entirely evil, perverse, and hostile to God by his disposition and nature, and that he is exceedingly strong, alive, and active with respect to everything that is displeasing and contrary to God.

Read Genesis 8:22. How is man's heart described?

Read Jeremiah 17:9. Again, how is man's heart described?

Read Romans 8:7. What is at enmity with God?

Consider Galatians 5:17. What is the relationship between the flesh and the spirit?

See Romans 7:14, 18, and 23. What two things are at war with one another? What does this teach us about our intellect, heart, and will?

Now, if in St. Paul and in other regenerate men the natural or carnal free will even *after* regeneration strives against God's Law, it will be much more obstinate and hostile to God's Law and will *before* regeneration. Hence it is manifest that the free will from its own natural powers, not only cannot work or concur in working anything for its own conversion, righteousness, and salvation, nor follow, obey, believe, or assent to the Holy Ghost, who through the Gospel offers him grace and salvation, but from its innate, wicked, rebellious nature it resists God and His will hostilely, unless it be enlightened and controlled by God's Spirit.

On this account the Holy Scriptures also compare the heart of the unregenerate man to a hard stone, which does not yield to the one who touches it, but resists, and to a rough block, and to a wild, unmanageable beast; not that man since the Fall is no longer a rational creature, or is converted to God without hearing and meditating upon the divine Word, or in external, worldly things cannot understand, or of his free will do, or abstain from doing, anything good or evil.

Martin Luther on Our Sinful Condition, and Our Fitness for Freedom

Doctor Luther says regarding Psalm 90:

"In worldly and external affairs; which pertain to the livelihood and maintenance of the body, man is cunning, intelligent, and quite active; but in spiritual and divine things, which pertain to the salvation of the soul, man is like a pillar of salt, like Lot's wife, yea, like a log and a stone, like a lifeless statue, which uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart. For man neither sees nor perceives the terrible and fierce wrath of

God on account of sin and death resulting from it, but ever continues in his security, even knowingly and willingly, and thereby falls into a thousand dangers, and finally into eternal death and damnation; and no prayers, no supplications, no admonitions, yea, also no threats, no chiding, are of any avail, yea, all teaching and preaching is lost upon him, until he is enlightened, converted, and regenerated by the Holy Ghost, for which, indeed, no stone or block, but man alone, was created. And although God, according to His just, strict sentence, has utterly cast away the fallen evil spirits forever, He has nevertheless, out of special, pure mercy,

willed that poor fallen human nature might again become and be capable and participant of conversion, the grace of God and eternal life; not from its own natural, active or effective skill, aptness, or capacity (for the nature of man is obstinate enmity against God), but from pure grace, through the gracious efficacious working of the Holy Ghost."

And this Dr. Luther calls "capacity" (not active, but passive), which he explains thus:

"When the Fathers defend the free will, they are speaking of this, that it is capable of freedom in this sense, that by God's grace it can be converted to good, and become truly free, for which it was created in the beginning."

Before Conversion, The Heart of Stone

But before man is enlightened, converted, regenerated, renewed,



and drawn by the Holy Ghost, he can of himself and of his own natural powers begin, work, or concur in working in spiritual things and in his own conversion or regeneration just as little as a stone or a block or clay. For although he can control the outward members and hear the Gospel, and to a certain extent meditate upon it, also discourse concerning it, as is to be seen in the Pharisees and hypocrites, nevertheless he regards it as foolishness, and cannot believe it. And in this respect he acts even worse than a block, inasmuch as he is rebellious and hostile to God's will, unless the Holy Ghost is efficacious in him, and kindles and works in him faith and other virtues pleasing to God, and obedience.

In summary, what do the Scriptures teach about our will before we are converted?

How does this give us comfort? (Consider, especially, how faith and trust in the Gospel are the works of God and not the results of our efforts.)

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: *Lot's Wife Turning to Salt*. Painted by Raphael (1483–1520) St. Peter's Basilica; The Vatican, Rome

ABOUT THE AUTHOR Rev. Bryan Wolfmueller is pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Aurora, CO (www.hope-aurora.org), editor of *Around the Word*, and co-host of *Table Talk Radio*.