

# **BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED**

*What God's Word teaches about*

## **FREE WILL**

**Gordon Lyons**

**KJV Edition**



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### *Special Acknowledgement*

I must acknowledge a genuine debt of gratitude to the work of Dr. Charles Hodge. The writings of this theologian from a previous generation have helped considerably in preparing this work. On a number of occasions—as will be seen when reading these studies—I have cited or alluded to Dr. Hodge's remarks in his three-volume *Systematic Theology*. These references have been acknowledged in the footnotes to the study text.

# Free Will

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## Part 1

### ***Synopsis: Free Will***

When God created man, he created him originally righteous and with complete freedom of the will. Adam had perfect liberty to choose between good and evil, and the ability to implement that choice. Indeed, since at this stage, Adam did not have a fallen sinful nature, and since he had no inward tendency to sin, it was as easy—if not easier—for him to choose good than evil. Because of the Fall, however, and the resulting corruption of his nature, Adam—and all mankind—lost the ability to do that which was good in God’s sight. In his or her fallen state, no one has the ability to live righteously. For the same reason, no one has the ability to exercise saving faith in Christ of his own free will. Unless, by the free and sovereign grace of God, the Holy Spirit draws a sinner to Christ, that person cannot be saved. Salvation, therefore, is not of man’s desire or effort, nor of man’s free will, but of God’s sovereign grace and mercy.

### **Note 1**

#### **Mankind’s Freedom of Choice**

God made man in his own image. Included in this is the idea that man is a fully rational and intelligent being, with a moral nature and conscience that tells him right from wrong. In addition, God created man with complete freedom of the will, together with the ability to exercise his mind in making rational and intelligent choices. Man could choose, therefore, between good and evil, right and wrong. However, in choosing evil, Adam and Eve brought upon themselves and all their descendants (i.e. the whole human race) the corruption of their entire nature—including their free will. As a result of this corruption of his nature, man’s free will is now permanently averse to choosing good and much more inclined to choose evil. Furthermore, man’s corrupt nature renders him spiritually powerless; or, rather, spiritually dead. Consequently, mankind cannot live righteously, or in a manner acceptable and pleasing to God. Nevertheless, although insufficient to secure acceptance with God, fallen mankind can still perform a certain degree of moral (as opposed to spiritual) good.

#### **Scripture References**

##### ***The Exercise of Free Will in Doing Evil***

Genesis 3:6

<sup>(6)</sup> And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Matthew 17:12

<sup>(12)</sup> But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

***The Powerlessness of Free Will in Living Righteously; Even after Regeneration or The New Birth***

Romans 7:18

<sup>(18)</sup> For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not.

Galatians 5:17

<sup>(17)</sup> For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

***The Exercise of Free Will in Yielding to Our Old Sinful Nature***

Romans 7:25b

<sup>(25b)</sup> ...So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

James 1:14-15

<sup>(14)</sup> But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. <sup>(15)</sup> Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

**Note 2**

**Man is Responsible and Accountable to God**

We must not imagine, however, that the corruption of man's free will, and its permanent tendency toward evil, means that men and women can now claim an excuse for their inability to choose good. Their inability is a result of the misuse of their own free will—not only of Adam's sin. They have wilfully chosen to ignore God, or to reject him and his Son, instead of responding to God's command to repent and to seek his mercy. Notwithstanding their moral inability, all those who genuinely seek God's mercy will find God's mercy. Although a person is spiritually dead until regenerated by the Holy Spirit, he can—whenever the Spirit convicts him of his sin and need—still appeal to the Lord for deliverance. Thus, mankind has no excuse for failing to exercise his faculties in seeking the Lord. All men and women have some degree of free will remaining to them: sufficient indeed to render them fully responsible to God, and wholly accountable for all their attitudes, thoughts, words and deeds.

**Scripture References**

***Call To Exercise Free Will In Repentance***

Acts 3:19

<sup>(19)</sup> Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Acts 17:30-31

<sup>(30)</sup> And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: <sup>(31)</sup> Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

### **Call To Exercise Free Will In Responding By Faith**

Isaiah 55:1

<sup>(1)</sup> Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

John 7:37-38

<sup>(37)</sup> In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. <sup>(38)</sup> He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

Revelation 22:17

<sup>(17)</sup> And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

### **Command To Exercise Free Will In Choosing Obedience to God**

Deuteronomy 30:19

<sup>(19)</sup> I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

1 Kings 18:21

<sup>(21)</sup> And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

## **Note 3**

### **Man's Free Will Not Independent of God's Sovereignty**

The Bible always closely connects man's free will with man's responsibility, and with God's sovereignty. A person cannot exercise his free will independently of either of these—although he may desire to do so. Nevertheless, although God exercises sovereign control over his entire creation, he does not thereby prevent men and women from making their own choices—for good or bad. Ultimately, God could, and sometimes does, override, thwart or hinder the evil intentions of men and women. He may do this to prevent or curtail the suffering of others, or for some other reason consistent with his infinite wisdom and glory. God must ever remain in sovereign control of his creation. However, he permits mankind to make full use of the faculties he has given him. Usually, God does this without intervening directly. Yet, mankind cannot exercise his faculties or abilities apart from God's full knowledge. Nor can mankind do anything that God's will prevents. At all times, God retains the right and the ability to exercise his sovereign power over mankind's actions. Ultimately, God's concern is for his own glory, and for his church comprising his redeemed and holy people. By his almighty hand, therefore, God guides all events in creation—including the actions of men and nations—toward the fulfillment of his sovereign and eternal purposes for his redeemed children.

## Scripture References

### ***Free Will Cannot Be Exercised Independently Of Man's Responsibility or Of God's Sovereign Purposes***

Acts 2:23

<sup>(23)</sup> Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God [*God's sovereignty*], ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain [*man's responsibility*]:

Acts 4:28

<sup>(28)</sup> For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done [*man's free will governed by God's sovereignty*].

### ***Man's Free Will In Repentance and Faith Cannot Be Exercised Independently Of God's Sovereign Grace in Election***

John 6:37

<sup>(37)</sup> All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

John 6:44

<sup>(44)</sup> No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:65

<sup>(65)</sup> And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

Romans 9:16

<sup>(16)</sup> So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

## Part 2

### **Summary of Free Will**

We may summarise man's free will (or liberty) as follows:

1. Before the Fall, man's free will was accompanied by the ability either to sin, or not to sin. In other words, it was as easy—if not easier—for him to obey God and live, as it was to disobey and die.
2. Since the Fall, man's free will gives him the ability to sin, but not the ability to do good in a manner pleasing to God. Fallen man finds it easy to sin: but he finds it impossible to live in perfect obedience to God.
3. The glorified believers in heaven have the free will *and the ability* to do good, but not to do evil. Their old sinful natures no longer exist. They have been perfected in holiness; i.e. glorified.<sup>1</sup>

### **Free Will and Ability**

#### **Loss of Ability**

If we are to understand properly the teaching of the Bible concerning man's free will, man's responsibility, and God's sovereignty, then it is very important that we recognise the distinction between free will and ability. Fallen man has *free will*, but he does not have the *ability* to exercise free will in obeying God perfectly. Mankind's ability to do good in a manner that is acceptable to God, and to live righteously at all times, was lost by the Fall. If this point—the loss of ability to live righteously—is not fully understood, then there will be some degree of misunderstanding of the Scriptures, or misinterpretation of certain passages.

Concerning man's loss of ability to live righteously, the Scriptures say:

Psalms 14:2-3

- <sup>(2)</sup> The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and seek God.* <sup>(3)</sup> They are all gone aside, they are *all together* become filthy: *there is none* that doeth good, no, not one. (See v.1; cf. Rom. 3:10-18)

Ecclesiastes 7:20

- <sup>(20)</sup> For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Ecclesiastes 7:29

- <sup>(29)</sup> Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Isaiah 53:6

- <sup>(6)</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (See vv.4,5)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1977 reprint] p.292.



## Part 3

### ***Mistaken Beliefs Regarding Man's Ability***

Many people find difficulty in grasping the point that fallen mankind has *lost the ability* to live righteously; i.e. to live in a manner pleasing to God, and that earns God's approval and blessing. Because of this fundamental misunderstanding, very many people—particularly, among the unregenerate—believe that they can merit God's favour by good works, 'upright' living or 'righteous' acts. However, the Scriptures make it abundantly plain that our sin, and sinful nature, contaminates even our best works or endeavours. All our righteous acts are vile in the sight of God. To this end, God's Word says:

Isaiah 1:4-6

- <sup>(4)</sup> Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.
- <sup>(5)</sup> Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. <sup>(6)</sup> From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is* no soundness in it; *but* wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. (See vv.1-9)

Isaiah 64:6

- <sup>(6)</sup> But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (See v.7; cf. Phil. 3:4-9)

Fallen man lacks the ability to do good in a manner acceptable to God. This is one of the reasons why salvation must be by grace, and not by works of merit or righteousness. As God's Word says:

Titus 3:5-7

- <sup>(5)</sup> Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; <sup>(6)</sup> Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; <sup>(7)</sup> That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (See vv.3-4)

### **The Holy Spirit Must Effectually Call**

People sometimes believe or teach that—in some way or another—a person can co-operate in effecting his or her redemption. However, before the Holy Spirit regenerates a person, that person has neither the desire nor the ability to co-operate. The Holy Spirit must first create this desire for salvation within a sinner's heart; i.e. God's Spirit must cause that person to thirst after righteousness. However, even after God creates this spiritual thirst within a sinner's soul, the sinner lacks the ability to satisfy that thirst. God must impart to the sinner the 'water of life' (i.e. the Holy Spirit in regeneration) before that person's inward spiritual thirst can be quenched.

Concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling, the Scripture says:

John 3:3-5

<sup>(3)</sup> Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

<sup>(4)</sup> Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

<sup>(5)</sup> Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (See vv.1-8; cf. v.5 with Eph. 5:25-27; Titus 3:5)

John 4:13-14

<sup>(13)</sup> Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: <sup>(14)</sup> But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (See vv.4-26)

John 7:37-39

<sup>(37)</sup> In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. <sup>(38)</sup> He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. <sup>(39)</sup> (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) (Cf. v.38 with Isa. 12:3; 44:3)

### **Even Believers Lack Ability to Live Perfectly**

Some Christians believe that they can attain to perfection during this life. However, if they are honest with themselves, every believer must be acutely aware that they lack the ability to live perfectly. This ability will not be fully restored until God finally completes our sanctification in glorification. Until that time, we will always need to resort to the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness and cleansing. Concerning these things, God's Word says:

Philippians 3:12

<sup>(12)</sup> Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. (See vv.13-16)

1 John 1:8-10

<sup>(8)</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>(9)</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>(10)</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 John 2:1-2

<sup>(1)</sup> My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: <sup>(2)</sup> And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.





## Part 4

### ***Without Ability, Free Will is Powerless***

Many people suppose that a sinner can exercise free will in accepting Christ as his Saviour. However, this is contrary to the teaching of God's Word. The Scriptures make it very plain that man exercises free will in practising his sin. However, in relation to salvation, sinful and spiritually dead men and women are totally helpless to achieve for themselves any spiritual advantage. Without ability, free will is powerless to lead anyone to God.

### **Morally Helpless and Spiritually Dead**

A man cast into the middle of an ocean is totally unable to save himself from eventual drowning. The distance is so great that he cannot possibly hope to reach the shore by his own efforts. Nor, if he has been long exposed to the elements, is he able to assist in his rescue—if it comes. In his physically weakened state, he is entirely dependent on the help and strength of others. He may desire earnestly to be rescued, but the exercise of his free will cannot effect that rescue. In his helpless condition, he *lacks all ability* to save himself or to co-operate in his rescue.

What applies in the physical realm, applies also in the moral and spiritual realm. In our unregenerate state, we had been cast, as it were, into an ocean of sin and moral corruption; i.e. we were by nature morally depraved human beings. Our sin placed us at such a great distance from God that we had no hope of reaching the safety of God's salvation by our own efforts. Though, physically, we may have been strong; yet—while we remained outside of Christ—we were morally weak and helpless.

However, besides our *moral weakness* and helplessness, we were *spiritually dead* in our trespasses and sins. In every respect, therefore, we were totally without strength; indeed, we were dead spiritually, and therefore wholly incapable (i.e. *without any spiritual life or ability whatever*) to save ourselves or to assist in our deliverance.

Ultimately, and at the right time, Christ came to deliver us. However, the credit for our deliverance does not rest in whole or in part with our desire or effort. The exercise of our free will could not save us. It was wholly the work of God's Son and God's Spirit, and none of self.

### ***God Effects a Sinner's Salvation***

#### **Scripture References**

Concerning the fact that—from beginning to end—God effects our salvation, the Scripture says:

Romans 5:6

<sup>(6)</sup> For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5:7-8

<sup>(7)</sup> For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. <sup>(8)</sup> But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (See vv.9,10)

Ephesians 2:1

<sup>(1)</sup> And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins. (See vv.2-3)

Ephesians 2:4-9

<sup>(4)</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, <sup>(5)</sup> Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by (grace ye are saved;) <sup>(6)</sup> And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: <sup>(7)</sup> That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. <sup>(8)</sup> For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: <sup>(9)</sup> Not of works, lest any man should boast. (See v.10)

Romans 9:14-16

<sup>(14)</sup> What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

<sup>(15)</sup> For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. {*Exodus 33:19*}

<sup>(16)</sup> So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. (See vv.6-18)

What applies to us, applies to all mankind. For—outside of Christ—all mankind is lost and destined to perish, unless, in grace and mercy, the delivering hand of God reaches out to them first.

## Repentance and Faith

But does not the Lord Jesus command people to repent and believe the Gospel? As the Scripture says:

Mark 1:14-15

<sup>(14)</sup> Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, <sup>(15)</sup> And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

God requires all men everywhere to repent. Thus, the Scripture says:

Acts 17:30-31

<sup>(30)</sup> And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: <sup>(31)</sup> Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (See vv.22-29)

Acts 26:19-20

<sup>(19)</sup> Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: <sup>(20)</sup> But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. (See vv.15-18)

And are not repentance and faith exercises of our own free will?

We will consider this question in the section that follows.



## Part 5

### ***The Work of The Holy Spirit in Effectual Calling***

#### **The Holy Spirit Must Open a Sinner's Eyes**

God commands all people everywhere to repent. However, no-one anywhere is capable of repenting, until, by God's sovereign grace, the Holy Spirit draws that person to Christ. God requires all people to believe. But no person is capable of exercising saving faith in the Son of God, until—by the Spirit—his or her spiritual eyes are opened and sight is restored.

A blind man cannot see, nor can he heal himself. Though he earnestly desires his sight, yet he cannot make himself see, merely by the exercise of his own free will. Of himself, he does not possess the ability to effect his healing. Nor can he do anything that contributes toward the restoration of his sight. If he is to be healed, someone else must heal him. If he is to see, someone else must restore to him his sight. All the blind man can 'do' is to entrust himself entirely to the healing skill of another person.

So it was with us. We, who once were spiritually blind, could not see the Light of the World (Jesus). In our darkness, we could not understand the truths of the gospel. Nor could we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ by any effort of our own free will. If we were to see and believe, someone else—the Son of God—had to restore spiritual life and sight to us. Only then, could we begin to understand spiritual things. Christ did this by drawing us to himself by his Word and by his Spirit. He healed us. He enabled us to repent and believe. In gratitude, we received him—freely and willingly. Therefore, salvation is all of grace, and none of self.<sup>2</sup>

#### ***Holy Spirit Must Reveal the Truth***

##### **Scripture References**

Concerning the necessity of the work of the Spirit in imparting spiritual sight or understanding, God's Word says:

1 Corinthians 2:12-13

<sup>(12)</sup> Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. <sup>(13)</sup> Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (See vv.1-11)

1 Corinthians 2:14-15

<sup>(14)</sup> But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>(15)</sup> But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. (See v.16)

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<sup>2</sup> See *Bible Truths Explained: Predestination; Faith; Regeneration*, by the same author.

## ***Holy Spirit Must Lead to Christ***

### **Scripture References**

Concerning the necessity of the work of the Spirit in drawing men and women to Christ, God's Word says:

John 12:32-33

<sup>(32)</sup> And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me.

<sup>(33)</sup> This he said, signifying what death he should die. (See vv.27-31; cf. v.32 with Num. 21:8; John 3:14)

John 12:36-38

<sup>(36)</sup> While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.

<sup>(37)</sup> But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him:

<sup>(38)</sup> That the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? *{Isaiah 53:1}* (See vv.34-35)

John 12:39-40

<sup>(39)</sup> Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again,

<sup>(40)</sup> He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. *{Isaiah 6:8-10}* (See vv.41-43)

John 12:46-48

<sup>(46)</sup> I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

<sup>(47)</sup> And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. <sup>(48)</sup> He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. (See vv.44-50; cf. v.48 with Mark 16:16; Luke 10:16)

## ***Holy Spirit Convinces and Converts***

### **Scripture References**

God draws people to himself, through his Holy Spirit in effectual calling. The Spirit creates conviction of sin in their hearts, and brings them to repentance and faith—both of which are gifts of God's grace. Thus, to the people of Israel, Peter said:

Acts 2:36-39

<sup>(36)</sup> Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

<sup>(37)</sup> Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?

<sup>(38)</sup> Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. <sup>(39)</sup> For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call. (See vv.14-35)

Acts 2:47b

<sup>(47b)</sup> ...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Acts 11:17-18

<sup>(17)</sup> Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

<sup>(18)</sup> When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. (See vv.1-16)

### **Limitations of Free Will**

Free will has limitations. It has limitations in that there are some things that a free agent cannot do—even if he possessed the necessary ability. For instance, although God is a free agent, he cannot do evil. Again, although Satan is a free agent, he cannot—by the exercise of his free will—recover his lost inheritance in holiness. Similarly, although men and women are free agents, they cannot—by the exercise of their free will—change the inward evil desires of their hearts or minds. Free will does not provide the necessary power or ability.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. C. Hodge, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2 p.293.



## Part 6

### ***Man is Fully Responsible***

Sin is a result of man's wilful abuse of his free will. Mankind's entire nature has been corrupted by the Fall—including his free will.

Although unregenerate mankind cannot exercise free will in a sense that is pleasing to God, he can still choose—in a limited sense—between good and evil. His total inability in the *spiritual* realm does not prevent him from exercising a considerable degree of ability in the *moral* realm. To a greater or lesser extent, man still possesses moral values, although these cannot aid him in being reconciled to God. Nevertheless, the fact that unregenerate man is incapable of exercising free will—in the sense of living righteously—does not absolve him of his responsibility. He is still fully accountable to God for all his thoughts, words and actions, and the Lord will judge him accordingly; i.e. according to his works or deeds.

### ***Man's Will Inclined Toward Evil***

#### **Scripture References**

That man's free will is permanently inclined toward evil is amply illustrated by Eve's deliberate choice of the forbidden fruit. Thus, the Scripture says:

Genesis 3:6

<sup>(6)</sup> And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (See vv.1-7)

Genesis 6:5

<sup>(5)</sup> And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. (See vv.1-8)

Genesis 8:21a

<sup>(21a)</sup> And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth... (See vv.20-22)

Again, that man's free will is permanently inclined toward evil, is demonstrated by the Lord Jesus' own words:

Mark 7:20-23

<sup>(20)</sup> And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.  
<sup>(21)</sup> For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, <sup>(22)</sup> Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: <sup>(23)</sup> All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. (See vv.1-19)

## ***Man is Fully Responsible for his Actions***

### **Scripture References**

Regarding the fact that man is fully responsible for all his thoughts, attitudes, words and deeds, and that the Lord will judge him accordingly, the Scripture says:

Ecclesiastes 12:14

- <sup>(14)</sup> For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil. (See v.13)

Romans 14:10-12

- <sup>(10)</sup> But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
- <sup>(11)</sup> For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. {*Isaiah 45:23*}
- <sup>(12)</sup> So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (See vv.1-13)

2 Corinthians 5:10

- <sup>(10)</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. (See v.11)

Revelation 20:12

- <sup>(12)</sup> And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. (See vv.11-15; cf. Rev. 21:8,27)

## Part 7

### ***Free Will and The Believer***

#### **Yielding to Sin**

If the believer walks by the Spirit, he will not gratify the desires of the old sinful nature, which is still within him. However, if he fails to walk by the Spirit, then he will be much more inclined to yield himself to sin. To see the truth of this, we need only consider the number of times we deliberately choose wrong instead of right, or evil instead of good. Again, we can see this truth in the times we harbour sinful thoughts in our hearts—and continue to dwell on them—instead of dismissing them from our minds. We see it, too, in the times we seek *our* will, instead of *God's* will. All these are deliberate exercises of our free will. They demonstrate that the old sinful nature is still very much present within us. They illustrate our constant need of the Holy Spirit's sanctification, and of the cleansing blood of Christ in continuing within us the work of redemption.

#### **Acts of the Sinful Nature**

God's Word tells us to put to death the deeds of the sinful nature (or the 'flesh'). To the end, the Scripture says:

Colossians 3:5

<sup>(5)</sup> Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: (See vv.1-4)

Colossians 3:8-10

<sup>(8)</sup> But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. <sup>(9)</sup> Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; <sup>(10)</sup> And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: (Cf. v.10 with Eph. 4:23-24)

These are just some of the acts of the sinful nature of which we can be guilty—in thought, attitude, word or deed—by the exercise of our free will. However, the Scripture also says:

Galatians 5:13-14

<sup>(13)</sup> For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. <sup>(14)</sup> For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. {*Lev. 19:18*} (See vv.1-15)

## These Will Not Inherit God's Kingdom

The Scripture goes on to warn that those who persist in exercising their free will to indulge the sinful nature will not inherit the kingdom of God. Thus, God's Word says:

Galatians 5:19-21

<sup>(19)</sup> Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, <sup>(20)</sup> Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, <sup>(21)</sup> Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (See vv.16-18; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:7-8)

## Putting to Death Sinful Desires

Again, God's Word says:

Galatians 5:24-25

<sup>(24)</sup> And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. <sup>(25)</sup> If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (See vv.22-26; cf. vv.24-25 with Rom. 6:6-7,11-14; 8:8-10)

Of course, we cannot crucify the desires of the sinful nature merely by our own strength or ability. However, we must endeavour to do it by relying upon the power and ability of the Holy Spirit who works within us.

## War Between Old and New Natures

However, during our life on earth, a constant conflict or spiritual warfare will always exist between the desires of the sinful nature (the old man), and the desires of the Spirit of holiness. Thus, God's Word says:

Romans 7:14-20

<sup>(14)</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. <sup>(15)</sup> For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. <sup>(16)</sup> If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. <sup>(17)</sup> Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. <sup>(18)</sup> For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. <sup>(19)</sup> For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. <sup>(20)</sup> Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (See vv.1-13)

Romans 7:21-25

<sup>(21)</sup> I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. <sup>(22)</sup> For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: <sup>(23)</sup> But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. <sup>(24)</sup> O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? <sup>(25)</sup> I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (See Rom. 8:1-9)

To the same purpose, the apostle Paul says to the believers at Galatia:

Galatians 5:16-17

<sup>(16)</sup> *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. <sup>(17)</sup> For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. (See v.18; cf. Rom. 6:15-23; 8:1-17)



## Part 8

### ***Free Will Involves Deliberate Choice***

As we have noted above, the deliberate choice of sin instead of righteousness is an exercise of our free will. However, every exercise of our free will involves responsibility for our actions. We are fully responsible to God for every choice we make. At the last day, the Lord will judge all our thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. Thus, God's Word says:

Matthew 12:36-37

<sup>(36)</sup> But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. <sup>(37)</sup> For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (See vv.31-35)

Romans 14:10-12

<sup>(10)</sup> But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

<sup>(11)</sup> For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. {*Isaiah 45:23; Phil. 2:10,11*}

<sup>(12)</sup> So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (See vv.1-23)

2 Corinthians 5:10

<sup>(10)</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. (See vv.1-11)

Revelation 20:12

<sup>(12)</sup> And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. (See vv.11-15)

### **Believer Lacks Ability to Obey Completely**

Even in the regenerate (those who have been born again), free will does not enable a person to live righteously at all times. The believer still lacks ability: the ability to obey God completely. Thus, as we have seen, the apostle Paul declares:

Romans 7:18-19

<sup>(18)</sup> For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. <sup>(19)</sup> For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (See vv.1-25; Rom. 8:1-9)

Galatians 5:16-17

<sup>(16)</sup> This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. <sup>(17)</sup> For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. (See vv.13-18)

## **Christ Saves the Worst of Sinners**

In spite of our many shortcomings, however, we have these precious assurances from the Word of God:

2 Thessalonians 3:3

<sup>(3)</sup> But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep *you* from evil [or *the evil one*].

1 Timothy 1:15-16

<sup>(15)</sup> *This is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. <sup>(16)</sup> Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. (See vv.12-17)

In God's sight, the believer stands clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ—a righteousness that God has imputed to every redeemed and justified sinner. However, *imputed* righteousness does not make a person *inherently* righteous; i.e. it does not change that person's character, thereby making him holy in all manner of life. The believer's character is still inherently sinful. It will not be completely free from sin until the Holy Spirit completes the work of sanctification in that person's life, and God then receives him, glorified, into his presence. Only in heaven itself, will the image of God in the believer be fully restored. Only then will the believer possess the full ability to exercise free will in doing good, but not in doing evil.<sup>4</sup>

## **Christ's Righteousness Imputed to the Believer**

Concerning imputed righteousness, God's Word says:

2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>(21)</sup> For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (See v.19)

Colossians 1:21-23

<sup>(21)</sup> And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled <sup>(22)</sup> In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight: <sup>(23)</sup> If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

## **Daily Transformed in Christ's Likeness**

Regarding the progressive nature of sanctification, the Scriptures say:

2 Corinthians 3:18

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<sup>4</sup> See *Bible Truths Explained: Justification; Sanctification; Heaven*, by the same author.

<sup>(18)</sup> But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord. (See vv.5-17)

Philippians 3:12-14

<sup>(12)</sup> Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. <sup>(13)</sup> Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, <sup>(14)</sup> I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (See vv.7-16)

## Translated and Glorified

Again, the same thought of no perfection before glorification is presented by the apostle Paul in his discussion about the resurrection. Thus, God's Word says:

1 Corinthians 15:49-50

<sup>(49)</sup> And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

<sup>(50)</sup> Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. (See vv.35-48)

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

<sup>(51)</sup> Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>(52)</sup> In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. <sup>(53)</sup> For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. (See vv.54-58)

Regarding the image of God being fully restored to the believer in glory, the Scripture says:

Romans 8:29

<sup>(29)</sup> For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (See vv.28-30)

Philippians 3:20-21

<sup>(20)</sup> For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>(21)</sup> Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. (See vv.17-19)

1 John 3:2

<sup>(2)</sup> Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (See vv.1,3)

Jude 1:24-25

<sup>(24)</sup> Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, <sup>(25)</sup> To the

only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power,  
both now and ever. Amen.

## Part 9

### ***Free Will Yielded to God's Will***

We each have free will, and God requires that we use that free will wisely and responsibly. This is especially true of those who belong to the Lord. We are the Lord's holy people—his saints. The word *saints* means 'set apart ones' or 'sanctified ones'. The Lord Jesus has set us free from sin's guilt, bondage, and corruption. He has separated us from the world, and set us apart to God. Again, we are the Lord's slaves (Greek, *doulos*). Being the Lord's slaves, however, does not deprive us of our free will or liberty in Christ.

The Lord has redeemed us; and, in his Word, he has set before us his will and his ways for our lives. As his redeemed people, we are each responsible to God for obeying his will, and following his ways. We must exercise our free will in a manner that is glorifying to God, and that is in full accordance with his purposes for our lives.

Free will (or liberty) is not licence. We have free will, but we do not have the freedom to do as we please this would be an abuse of our free will, and a deliberate sin against the Lord. The Lord requires trust, honour, and obedience. We can only fully trust, honour, and obey the Lord when we make our (free) will subject to God's will for our lives. We have free will; but our will can never be truly free until we surrender it to God's will. We will always experience conflict and frustration in our lives, until our will and desires are in complete harmony with God's will and desires for us.

Those who endeavour to resist the will of God cannot hope to win.

Regarding the responsibility we are under to submit our will to the will of God, the Scripture says:

Romans 12:1-2

<sup>(1)</sup> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.* <sup>(2)</sup> And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (See vv.3-21)

### **Bought At a Price**

We are not our own. Our whole self—body and soul—is the redeemed possession of the Lord. Therefore, we must surrender ourselves totally to his control. As God's Word says:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

<sup>(19)</sup> What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* <sup>(20)</sup> For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (See vv.12-18)

God works within us, by his Word and by his Spirit, to accomplish his will and purposes for our lives. Therefore, the Scripture says:

Philippians 2:12-13

<sup>(12)</sup> Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salva-

tion with fear and trembling. <sup>(13)</sup> For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure. (See vv.1-11)

Philippians 2:14-16

<sup>(14)</sup> Do all things without murmurings and disputings: <sup>(15)</sup> That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; <sup>(16)</sup> Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. (See vv.17-18)

## Led by The Spirit of God

At all times, we should submit our wills to the will of God's Holy Spirit; i.e. we should be led by the Spirit, and not by the desires of our old sinful nature. Thus, God's Word says:

Romans 8:1-4

<sup>(1)</sup> *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. <sup>(2)</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>(3)</sup> For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: <sup>(4)</sup> That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (See Rom. 7:12-25)

Romans 8:5-8

<sup>(5)</sup> For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. <sup>(6)</sup> For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. <sup>(7)</sup> Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. <sup>(8)</sup> So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:9-11

<sup>(9)</sup> But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. <sup>(10)</sup> And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness: <sup>(11)</sup> But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Romans 8:12-15

<sup>(12)</sup> Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. <sup>(13)</sup> For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. <sup>(14)</sup> For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. <sup>(15)</sup> For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (See vv.16,17)

