

Historical Theology

Free Will

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Grace and Free-Will

“No-one will say that ‘free-will’ actually vanished from the human race because of the first man’s sin. Yet it is true that sin robbed humankind of ‘liberty’, the liberty that existed in paradise—that is, the liberty we can define as perfect righteousness with immortality’. That is why human nature stands in need of divine grace. So the Lord says, ‘If the Son sets you free, you will be really free’ (John 8:36) – free for a good and righteous life. Even so, free-will has not entirely perished from sinners; for free-will is the power by which people commit sin! This is especially the case with all who delight in sinning and love their sin; they choose to do what pleases them. The apostle says, ‘When you were the slaves to sin, you were free from righteousness’ (Romans 6:20). It is clear that people can become ‘slaves of sin’ only because they are in fact free; for the thing that makes people ‘free from righteousness’ is their own sinful free choice! By contrast, however, the only thing that makes people ‘free from sin’ is the grace of the Saviour. The admirable teacher Paul makes this very distinction: *free* from righteousness (Romans 6:20) – *set free* from sin (6:22). He says ‘free’ from righteousness, not ‘set free’ from it; but to prevent his Christian readers from taking any credit to themselves, he does not say they are ‘free’ from sin, but ‘set free’ from it. He deliberately uses the phrase ‘set free’ in harmony with the Lord’s statement, ‘If the Son sets you free’. For the children of humankind cannot live a good life unless God makes them into His children. How then can Julian of Eclanum try to pretend that the power to live a good life comes from our free-will? Only God’s grace gives this power through Jesus Christ our Lord.” **Augustine of Hippo, *Concerning Two Letters of Pelagius*, Chapter 1, section 5** (Needham, 289-90)

Christ Chose Us

“‘You did not choose Me,’ Christ says, ‘but I chose you’ (John 15:16). Such grace is beyond description. What were we, apart from Christ’s choice of us, when we were empty of love? What were we but sinful and lost? We did not lead Him to choose us by believing in Him; for if Christ chose people who already believed, then we chose Him before He chose us. How then could He say, ‘You did not choose Me,’ unless His mercy came before our faith? Here is the faulty reasoning of those who say that God chose us before the creation of the world, not in order to make us good, but because He foreknew that we would be good. This was not the view of Him Who said, ‘You did not choose Me.’ We were not chosen because of our goodness, for we could not be good without being chosen. Grace is no longer grace, if human goodness comes first. Listen, you ungrateful person, listen! ‘You did not choose Me but I chose you.’ Do not say, ‘I am chosen because I first believed.’ If you first believed, you had already chosen Him. But listen: ‘You did not choose Me.’ And do not say, ‘Before I believed, I was already chosen on account of my good works.’ What good work can come before faith when the apostle Paul says, ‘Whatever is not of faith is sin’ (Romans 14:23)? What then shall we say when we hear these words, ‘You did not choose Me’? We shall say this: ‘We were evil and we were chosen that we might become good by the grace of Him who chose us. For salvation is not by grace if our goodness came first; but it is by grace—and therefore God’s grace did not find us good but makes us good.’” **Augustine of Hippo, *Commentary of John 15:16*** (Needham, 290-91)

Romans 8:28-34 (NASB)

²⁸And we know that God causes all things to work together for good

to those who love God,

to those who are called according to His purpose.

²⁹For **those whom He foreknew**, (Amos 5:2)

He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

³⁰and **these whom He predestined**, He also called;

and **these whom He called**, He also justified;

and **these whom He justified**, He also glorified.

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Romans 9:6-24 (NASB)

6But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; **7**nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." **8**That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. **9**For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." **10**And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; **11**for though *the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad*, so that God's purpose according to *His choice* would stand, **not because of**

works but because of Him who calls, **12**it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." **13**Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

14What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! **15**For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." **16**So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. **17**For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." **18**So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

19You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" ²⁰On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? **21**Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? **22**What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? **23**And *He did* so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, **24***even* us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

Romans 10:8-17 (NASB)

8But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, **9**that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; **10**for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. **11**For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." **12**For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for

all who call on Him; ¹³for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

14How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? **15**How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”

16However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?” **17**So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Sinners Inability

John 6:44, 65

John 8:34, 36

Romans 8:5-8 (Hebrews 11:6)

1 Corinthians 2:14-15

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

John 1:11-13

James 1:18; (4:13-17)

In creation man had the ability to sin and the ability not to sin. (Sproul, 52)

“For Augustine the sinner is both free and in bondage at the same time, but not in the same sense. He is free to act according to his desires, but his desires are only evil.” (Sproul, 63)

Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Romans 3:9-18

“In heaven in our glorified state we will be rendered not only sinless but incapable of sinning.” (Sproul, 52-23)

Resources:

Needham, Nick. *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, Vol. 1, The Age of the Early Church Fathers, 1st to 6th Century, Christian Focus Publications Ltd. 2016.

R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, Baker Books, 1997.