

## IS MAN'S WILL FREE?

John 1:11-13

Intro: Martin Luther said that the answer to this question was the major issue of the Portestant Reformation. His greatest work was his book, The Bondage of the Will -- a book which everybody at Trinity Bible Church should read.

In beginning the last section of his book in which he was answering Erasmus, he acknowledged that he had to limit himself. He said that he could not bring all of the Scriptures into such a short book because, he said, ". . . the entire Scripture, every jot and tittle of it, stands on my side" (p. 273).

That might sound like an overstatement, but once you see this truth, you see it everywhere in the Word of God.

In Volume 10 of John Owen's works you will find a very interesting and a very convincing expose of Arminianism in his work called, A Display of Arminianism. In it he refutes the many errors of Arminian theology. In Chapter XII he deals with so-called, free will. This is what he has to say:

Our next task is to take a view of the idol himself, of this great deity of free-will, whose original being not well known, he is pretended, like the Ephesian image of Diana, to have fallen down from heaven, and to have his endowments from above. But yet, considering what a nothing he was at his first discovery in comparison of that vast giant-like hugeness to which now he is grown, we may say of him as the painter said of his monstrous picture, which he had mended or rather marred according to every one's fancy, . . . it is the issue of the people's brain. Origen is supposed to have brought him first into the church; but among those many sincere worshippers of divine grace, this setter forth of new demons found but little entertainment. It was looked upon but like the stump of Dagon, with his head and hands laid down before the ark of God, without whose help he could neither know nor do that which is good in any kind, still but . . . "a fig tree log, an unprofitable piece of wood." . . . The fathers of the succeeding ages had much debate to what use they should put it, and though some exalted it a degree or two above its merits, yet the most concluded to keep it a block stil; until at length there arose a stout champion (Pelagius), challenging on his behalf the whole church of God, and like a knight-errant, wandered from the west to the east to grapple with any that should oppose his idol; who, though he met with divers adversaries, one especially (Augustine), who in behalf of the grace of God continually foiled him and cast him to the ground, and that in the judgment of all the lawful judges assembled in councils, and in the opinion of most of the Christian bystanders, yet, by his cunning insinuation, he planted such an opinion of his

idol's deity and self-sufficiency in the hearts of divers, that to this day it could never be rooted out (Vol. X, pp. 114, 115).

That was written in 1642 -- over 300 years ago, and the idea that man has a free will is more entrenched in popular Christian teaching today than it ever has been.

Obviously this is a subject too great in magnitude to discuss fully in one message, but I want to deal with some of the basic questions related to it so that any person who had never heard of the controversy which has raged around this subject for hundreds of years would be able to know what we are talking about.

This first question we need to ask is this:

#### I. WHY IS THIS SUBJECT SO IMPORTANT?

It has divided men all through these years. It was the issue in the Reformation. There is no more vital question in the area of Bible interpretation and theology than this one: IS MAN'S WILL FREE?

It is important because it has to do with the all-important doctrine of salvation.

It affects our preaching, and it affects our methods of evangelism.

But most of all, since God has designed salvation for his own glory as well as for the blessing of men, it affects the glory of God adversely -- robbing him of glory which rightly belongs to Him.

A second question:

#### II. WHAT DOES FREE WILL MEAN? That is, What does it mean with respect to salvation?

It means that it is man who determines whether or not he is going to be saved.

But you must understand that this includes two vitally important things:

- 1) This would mean that man, in himself, has both the inclination and the ability to receive Christ.
- 2) This would also mean that man has the power to successfully resist God and to reject Christ even if God were determined to save him.

I want to deal with this second point a little later, but here I want you to note that this would mean that man is

capable of overthrowing other great doctrines of Scripture, such as, the sovereignty of God, the decrees of God, the providence of God. And this is the main reason that, whenever you are with those who preach the free will of man, you either find that these other major doctrines are either watered down so that they no longer mean what they mean in Scripture, or they are ignored altogether!

A third question:

III. WHAT IS THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, IS MAN'S WILL FREE?

The Scriptural answer is, No, man's will is NOT free! Man's will is in bondage.

I could cite passages like John 1:11-13 and Romans 9:16 to show that man's salvation is not based upon his will, but one passage that clinches this question beyond any doubt is our Lord's statement in John 6:44.

However, there is much more that can be said on this point, and I will say more later.

A fourth question:

IV. WHY DO WE THINK THAT WE HAVE A FREE WILL?

There must be some reason why this teaching has gained such widespread acceptance, or even reasons! What are they?

- A. One is that we are making decisions freely every day, hundreds of times a day.
- B. A second is (and this is most influential) that the Scriptures in many passages seem to indicate this.

For example, Rev. 22:17. Add to this John 3:16, and many other like it.

- C. A third reason, not often mentioned, is the pride that is in man's heart.

Man does not like to feel that there is anything that he cannot do. He is not only convinced of his own authority over himself, but of the fact that, given the right circumstances, he will always make the best and right choice.

Undoubtedly there are other reasons, but this is enough for now.

A fifth question:

## V. WHY IS OUR WILL NOT FREE?

There are two main answers to this question:

## A. Because of sin within.

This goes back to the nature of man. This is where modern psychology and the teaching of Scripture are hopelessly at odds.

Cf. John 8:34,

Jesus answers them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

Who commits sin? Everybody does. Why do they do it? Because they are the bondslaves of sin and cannot help themselves. They are in bondage to their sin.

But there is another reason:

## B. Because of Satan without. Cf. 2 Tim. 2:26.

Cf. Col. 1:12, 13,

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

And then listen to what Paul said that the Lord said to him about his ministry. It is in Acts 26:18:

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

We cannot overcome the sin in our own hearts, nor can we throw off the bondage with which Satan holds us. Add to the above one other verse: 2 Cor. 4:3, 4,

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

All of the willing that man might think that he could do could not throw off such blindness in any way!

A sixth question:

## VI. WHAT WOULD IT MEAN IF WE HAD A FREE WILL?

This is really the crux of the matter, and here we return to

some of the points I made earlier.

I want to mention four things -- although, again, much more could be said.

- A. It would mean that we would determine our own salvation.

But the Bible declares that salvation is all of God. I will come back to this in dealing with the other points I want to mention.

- B. It would mean that we would have something to glory in and about.

But Scripture, again, specifically denies this to man. Salvation would be in part attributable to man. God's work in Christ would not be sufficient until man exercised his so-called "free will" to let God save Him.

- C. It would mean that our wills would be above God providence, His decrees, and most amazingly of all, above everything that has to do with His sovereignty.

It would put God exactly where a lot of the Lord's people want to put Him -- saying that He would like to save everybody, but that there are millions of people who won't let Him do what He would like to do!

- D. It would mean the denial of Scripture -- not only of particular verses, and the interpretation of many, many passages, but of such doctrines as, the effect of sin upon man (Total Depravity), of God's purpose in salvation (Unconditional Election), and of God's sovereignty (Irresistible Grace).

We cannot ignore these truths. They are in everybody's Bible. And here we come to one of the major reasons that a teaching like free-will has gained so much headway among Christians: Christians have not been taught the great doctrines of Scripture, and neither have they been taught that the doctrines of the Word of God never contradict each other, but are one great harmonious system of truth.

My seventh and last question:

#### VII. WHAT IS, THEN, THE TRUTH?

The truth is stated in Phil. 2:13. God has not ignored man's nature in planning for their salvation. He, of His own sovereign choice has elected certain people to salvation, and throughout history He has called them to Himself through

the preaching of the Gospel. But they will not come. They cannot come. They refuse to believe, and cannot believe. Neither can they repent. So what does God do? He works in His chosen ones "to will and to do of his good pleasure," which is their salvation. He draws them, and they come. He grants them repentance, and, through His Word, He gives them faith. Thus, He gets all of the glory because human works have no part at all.

Cf. Eph. 2:8, 9; Tit. 3:5.

Concl: Thus, as we preach the Gospel, we pray, and we explain the Gospel message as clearly as we can. But our hope is not in our persuasive powers, nor in our manipulating methods. (What a sad day for the Gospel ministry when these ideas entered in to the Lord's work!) No, our hope is in the convicting work of the Spirit, and in the drawing power of the Father, and in the power of the Word of God.

What about those who do not come? Are they responsible? Yes, they are! It is true that anyone who believes can be saved. Christ died to save His elect, but His work is of infinite value and could save all if they would come. But the fact that all do not come is the greatest practical proof that we have that man is not free, and will never be able to set himself free. Only God can do that!

What if you are not saved?

Turn to Christ. Ask the Lord to save you. The very fact that you are concerned, and that you desire to be saved, is evidence that God is already at work in your heart. Believe in Christ. He is your only hope.