

Choice and Free Will

It can be observed that one of the most common charges by those who hate the doctrine of God's free grace against those who love it, is that the reduce man to a puppet . . . a mechanical "thing" manipulated by God at His caprice.

This sort of thing is encouraged by novice Calvinists and Hyper-Calvinists who conclude and often state that "man has no choice." I have heard this false statement made a number of times recently by those professing to embrace the Sovereignty of God. It is a grievous error, and contrary to the scriptures. I would hope to better instruct those who have fallen into it.

The idea that man has no choice is not stated or even taught in the Bible. On the contrary, all of God's commands to man is based upon his responsibility *and* ability to choose. And although ability is severely restricted, especially in the fallen state, responsibility is never lessened. The error comes, not from Bible dogma, but from an illogical deduction from divine Sovereignty, and a confusion of free will, free agency, and choice.

I suspect that it is also a *desired* error for some who would excuse their sinning on the basis that God, Who ordains all things after the counsel of His Own will, determined it. In so doing, they charge God with responsibility for their wickedness. They couldn't help it, they say, since because it happened it was God's will. This is a misuse and a confounding of God's unchangeable decree, and His revealed will. Our choices and all our actions are to be governed and directed by His revealed will . . . what He has made known to us as what is good and right. Sin, in any form, is never included in this revealed will. His hidden decree, on the other hand includes all the sins (though they are not commanded or directed: They fall out as a consequence of man's willful corrupt state), all the error and evil of all men and angels. This decree has nothing to do with our responsibility to make right choices and can never stand as an excuse for our sins.

Free Will

Martin Luther's classic The Bondage of the Will has firmly refuted, for those who study and believe the scriptures, the myth of free will. This is not the place to enter a long Biblical treatise on it. A few remarks will be sufficient:

1. That all rational creatures, angels as well as men have wills, none will deny. Even beasts have a will of sorts, since they make volitional choices, sometimes in a most stubborn way.
2. The will is not a free agency within itself, but is free only to will according to the constitution of the individual to which it belongs. It always wills according to the mind and the affections of the creature, never contrary to it. The will, therefore, is free only to will what the creature will; not what he will or can not will. That is considerably less than "free will."
3. Absolute freedom of the will exists nowhere but in God, since to be properly free, one must be at liberty to will anything that may be willed. Not only does this demand infinite possibilities in intelligence and affections, but in ability to perform what is willed.

In some people's understanding of free will, a goat is free to will to live like a fish. No one tells him he cannot so choose to do it. But his will is not that free. He is bound by his constitution to will only what a goat wills. As a goat, he hates water, his brain would never think of such a thing, and he has no physical faculties to equip him to swim and breathe under water. Preach, persuade and entice him all you will. He will never will to be anything but a goat.

In like manner, a sinner is dead in sin. He is insensitive toward God, at enmity with Him, has no love for Him, no desire to serve Him, hates His laws, and will never come to Him. "Ye *will not* come . . ." (John 5:40).

Free Agency

Agency refers to the whole creature or thing which acts or performs. Men do not have free will, but they are free agents. That is, they are free to act or perform within the bounds of what they are, their constitution. They cannot, of course, act or do beyond such bounds. Intelligence, emotion and will are determining factors in the choices a free agent will make.

God gives laws to men and demands that they as free agents obey those laws. They have responsibility to choose to do so.

Choice

To choose is the prerogative, responsibility and the ability that belongs to a free agent. We have seen that a free agent's choice will be determined largely by what he is, but that certainly can never be called no choice. A man dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-5) is not dead as a rock or a log. He is a rational creature, and though he will not choose to come to Christ, he *may*. No one can forbid him. And though he has no desire to seek God, sanity tells him he ought, and he can at least choose to go to church, to read the Bible, listen to the admonitions for the word. Although there is nothing in him to desire those things, he *may* choose to do so. An unregenerate man cannot will himself saved, but he can choose to do less evil than he is doing, to be more in line with the truth and righteous living than he is. He can choose to make himself a candidate for saving grace. The scriptures enjoin him to do so.

The regenerate sinner can and *must* choose to repent and believe. All who do not so choose surely perish.

The regenerate converted man has a yet wider choice. Whereas the sinner cannot choose to obey God from the heart, the righteous can. The saint can choose to sin, although it is contrary to his nature and he will find no pleasure in it, only the displeasure of God and an inward mourning and grieving within himself. The child of God, though his works are ordained, must choose the right ones. It is God Who works in him to will and to do His good pleasure, yet he must choose the right works. And to suggest (because

one fell into or deliberately chose to, sin) that God works in the saint to will and to do wickedness is a horrendous perversion of the gospel of grace.

To preach that men go to hell because they have no choice is to slander the goodness of God and a travesty of electing grace. Men go to hell because they *choose* to ignore God and go their own way. They are acted upon, influenced, compelled by nothing other than their own depraved nature and choose according to it.

On the other hand, some men do choose to come to Christ. They are not driven or compelled against their will. God does so act upon their hearts that they can do none else, but in the end, they must, and do, choose to come.

“Choose you this day whom you will serve.”

- C. M.