

“...faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things...”

GOD’S SOVEREIGN, ELECTING GRACE, AND MAN’S SO-CALLED FREE WILL



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MAY we not say, on the one hand, that the real root of all error lies in not seeing, feeling, or owning the entire ruin, enmity, and contrariety of fallen man to God; while, on the other, God in His greatness and sovereignty is not seen, acknowledged, or bowed to, because sinful, helpless man imagines that he is not so utterly mined but that he has still, at least, some little free agency, strength, or goodness in him? Hence, therefore, the almost universal belief in *free will*. Let me here remind my reader, that the further any people, sect, or so-called church are from what is commonly called orthodox truth, the stronger and deeper such persons are in their belief in the dogma of free will. Take the Heathen, the Jew, the Roman Catholic, the Socinian², Unitarian³, Irvingite⁴, Mormonite⁵, or Campbellite⁶, all of whom the real believer knows to be fundamentally wrong as to real, vital conversion or regeneration; and they will all be found to contend most strongly for a large measure of spiritual power

¹ This work is a republication of a gospel tract that was originally published in 1865; original from the British Library

² Among other errors, Socinianism rejects the propitiatory view of atonement; it teaches that our Lord's sacrificial death did not result in the redemption of His people.

³ A person, especially a Christian, who asserts the unity of God and rejects the doctrine of the Trinity.

⁴ A member of the Catholic Apostolic Church

⁵ A follower of the false prophet Joseph Smith, aka; a member of the Mormon church

⁶ A group that teaches baptismal regeneration (i.e. the act of baptism saves), i.e. The Churches of Christ

in man in an unconverted condition. It is a curious, but a solemn and awful fact, that the further any people are from the simple gospel of God, the more they battle for free will. Let any real child of God only speak to an Infidel, or indeed to any of the parties I have named above, and he will soon prove how strongly and fully such persons hold man's free agency, power, or will, in an unconverted or unchanged state. The further—I repeat it—the party is from the truth as it is in Jesus, the more tenaciously is free will upheld. My reader can easily test the truth of what I assert by addressing a few words on the point to an Infidel, a Roman Catholic, an Irvingite, Mormonite, or Campbellite, (as the writer has done,) and he will not doubt the accuracy of the statement made. This, therefore, is nature's religion or belief; for where you have no knowledge of real conversion, but, in fact, a complete denial of it, the belief in the "natural man's" powers prevails the strongest. This ought to be in searching, solemn lesson Christians who find themselves, in this matter, following these who, the more they deny the Spirit, truth, and gospel of God, the stronger do they hold the erroneous idea of what they call man's free will.

In order the more clearly to ascertain the real state or condition of the unconverted man's will, let us look for a moment at what Scripture says as to the actual state of the unregenerate man, viewed as a whole. We look at his head, and we hear of a long-headed man, a wise-headed man, a sound-headed man: but what does God say? "The *whole*

head is sick.”⁷ View his eyes: and what is said by the Spirit of God? “Having eyes full of adultery, and that *cannot* cease from sin.”⁸ Take the mouth: “Whose mouth is *full* of cursing and bitterness;” the lips: “The poison of asps is under their lips;” the tongue: “With their tongues have they used deceit;” the throat: “Their throat is an open sepulchre;”⁹ the heart: “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;”¹⁰ the hands: “your hands are full of blood.”¹¹ the feet: “their feet are swift to shed blood.”¹² This is an awful but true picture, and if we sum it up as a whole, we have only further to quote that never-to-be-forgotten passage of Isaiah, “From the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is NO SOUNDNESS, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.”¹³

Let us now look at man inwardly or mentally, and we if we can find any good or really *free* will or agency there. Take the understanding: one finds how frequently that is lauded, but God says, “Having the understanding *darkened*, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them.”¹⁴ Take the mind—and man praises nothing more than

⁷ ISAIAH 1:5

⁸ 2 PETER 2:14

⁹ ROMANS 3:13-14

¹⁰ JEREMIAH 17:9

¹¹ ISAIAH 1:15

¹² ROMANS 3:15

¹³ ISAIAH 1:6

¹⁴ EPHESIANS 4:18

the human mind, while the truth of God declares that, “The carnal mind *is enmity* against God;”¹⁵ it is not even said that it is *at* enmity, but that *it is itself* enmity against God; and the carnal mind is every man’s mind, until by sovereign grace he gets a new mind. Take the thoughts; and of these God says, “All their thoughts are against me for evil;”¹⁶ “their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity.”¹⁷ Imagination: “Every imagination of the heart was evil continually.”¹⁸ Imaginations: “An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations.”¹⁹ Look at the conscience: of even nominal Christians it is written, “Having their consciences seared with a hot iron;”²⁰ and again, “Even their mind and conscience is defiled.”²¹ Such, then, is man viewed in the unerring glass of God, both inwardly and outwardly. But now let us look at the will. Is this an exception to the great appalling catalogue that we have just counted up from God’s word? Is there some freedom, some good in the will, while all besides, mentally, spiritually, morally, and we may say physically, is a complete wreck and ruin, and in dire and dreadful opposition to God? There is some soundness, some good in the will, we are told, for it is “a free will.” But if the word of God be true, man must be a

¹⁵ ROMANS 8:7

¹⁶ PSALM 56:5

¹⁷ ISAIAH 59:7

¹⁸ GENESIS 6:5

¹⁹ PROVERBS 6:18

²⁰ 1 TIMOTHY 4:2

²¹ TITUS 1:15

liar in this, for, as we have quoted, God says there is no soundness in the whole man, that is, from “head to foot;” and, as if not to leave a shred behind, we have the words “crown” and “sole;” these, then, are the utmost extremities of the whole man, for above the crown of the head there is nothing, and below the sole of the foot there is nothing. Where, then, can we find this sound or free will? The Apostle Paul also says, that “in me, that is in my flesh,” which, if you please, is the whole carnal or natural man, “dwelleth NO GOOD THING.”²² The unconverted man is said to be “without strength;”²³ but this cannot be if the will be free, for then he has strength in his will. Such an one is also said to be morally or spiritually dead; but how could this be said if his will be spiritually alive or free?

Again, it is written that man, before he is born again, is “bound,” a “captive,” a “slave,” and a “prisoner ;” but he is neither bound, captive, slave, or prisoner—which all set forth, in a figure, entire helplessness—if he in a very essential point, even in his will, be free. Now mark, dear reader, that while God plainly declares that man is a “*prisoner*” and “*bound*,” man says, No, he is free, and neither bound nor a prisoner. This, I repeat it, is the real root of the great evil of this dogma—denying the fall in its full and awful extent. [Had] an American or African slave, in a human sense, a free will to choose a master or a service such as he pleases? Surely not. And has the slave of sin, of self, of

²² ROMANS 7:18

²³ ROMANS 5:6

Satan, and of the world a free will, in a spiritual sense, to choose God and His service? The Saviour Himself gives us the full answer to this question: “Ye have *not* chosen me, but *I have chosen you.*”²⁴ But it will be said that the words of Joshua contradict this. Not at all; Joshua is speaking to God’s national children—to those whom God had bought, redeemed, and brought nigh to Himself. Joshua says, “Choose YOU (Israel, God’s people) this day whom ye will serve.”²⁵ The major and minor prophets speak similarly, but always to those who were already redeemed, and freed from Pharaoh and Egypt. Nothing is more injurious to the cause of Christianity and the gospel, than mixing Jewish and Christian things together. It was thus by Judaizing the Church of Rome destroyed the whole framework of christian truth, and in this the Establishment and the Dissenters have followed her. How true is the proverb, ‘He is a freeman whom the truth makes free: and all are slaves besides.’ “If the Son,” said the Saviour, “shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”²⁶

But now a few words directly from Scripture on free will, as it is called. In Romans 9 where the sovereignty of God and of His grace are so fully brought out, we have Exodus 33 quoted, where Israel had forfeited everything by making the golden calf. This is what their will chose; just as man now in this dispensation, only in a much more awful way, chose, *by*

²⁴ JOHN 15:16

²⁵ JOSHUA 24:15

²⁶ JOHN 8:36

his will, Barabbas, a murderer, and delivered Jesus to be crucified. When such hardness, blindness, and idolatry as this is manifested, nothing but sovereign mercy and compassion can come in, or else all must be lost and consumed. And this is just what we see. God says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."²⁷ And now observe the conclusion: "*So then* it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."²⁸ See here how man's will and man's work, or "running," are set aside, and God's sovereign mercy and compassion established; and were it not so, I say again, all must be lost; for on the ground of free will, or choosing, or on the ground of running, or doing, they had most fearfully proved what man's free will and work amounted to and ended in, even in their idol the calf.

It may be well, before going further, to state that, as to the will, in an evil, bad, or merely human sense, it is, alas! only too free, at least so far as anything can be said to be free, that is under the power of Satan; and as long as any remain in an unconverted state, they are, while in that state, altogether led by Satan, (Ephesians 2:2,) and nothing in them, no matter what, from head to foot, that is not evil, and only evil always (Genesis 6:5). In this state such persons are altogether bound and tied under Satan, as regards good, but altogether free in their mind and will under the same Satan, as regards evil; and in no other light does the word of God ever present the

²⁷ ROMANS 9:15

²⁸ ROMANS 9:16

natural or unregenerate man; and therefore it is a fatal and melancholy mistake to talk of *free will*, in a good and truly spiritual sense. As we have said before, there is not a shred or atom of any kind in the natural man that is *rightly or really* free, until the Son in sovereign grace makes him free, through faith, by the Holy Spirit. What men call their free will is one of the great agencies employed, as they believe, in their conversion; but see what Scripture says about this in the first chapter of John's Gospel, where, in a threefold view the Lord Jesus is regarded; that is, first, as light *in* the darkness, but "the darkness comprehended it not;"²⁹ second, as in the world, the World's Creator, but "the world knew him not;"³⁰ and third, as the One who came unto *His own*, but His own received Him not. Here you have, in the most peculiarly-marked manner, the whole world rejecting the Lord. What is to be done? Sovereign grace must work; and it does work, and work exactly contrary to the will of man; for man's will, as we have seen, had cast Christ off—no matter in what form He presented Himself. How, then, can the will of man have anything to say to or do with the new birth? It can have nothing; and therefore we read, verse 13, "Which were born, NOT OF THE WILL OF THE FLESH, NOR OF THE WILL OF MAN, but of God."³¹ Here you have sovereign grace and man's will brought together in a manner so telling and so plain, that neither can be gainsayed [contradicted] or set aside. Look at the Saviour at the close of His beautiful and blessed life,

²⁹ JOHN 1:5

³⁰ JOHN 1:10

³¹ JOHN 1:13

when one would have thought that, from such a life of love, in word and in deed, He would have commended Himself to and have been received by all. But what do we find, now that He is delivered to *their will*? Is there any good, or freedom in their will, for good? None in the least. Their will is—and they prove it—to persecute Him in the basest, most cruel, and brutal manner, even unto and *in* death, for He received, *by the will of man*, an amount of degradation at His death to which no creature, either before or after, was ever subjected. This, then, is the true exhibition of the so-called *free will* of man. It would be impossible to have a more faithful picture of man's will than you have presented here; for, do not forget, He was delivered to their will. But see again how sovereign grace comes in here. If the will of man murdered Him, the grace of God gave Him, in resurrection-life, as the Saviour even of His own murderers. “Fulfilling the desires, [or wills, (margin,)] of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”³² The will or desire of the flesh and of the mind, as the previous verse, Ephesians 2:2, proves, is to “walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air”—that is, the devil. With such a passage as this before us, who will dare any longer to say that the will or desire of the flesh and mind is free as to any real good?

And notice here that the Holy Ghost uses the word in the plural, *wills* or desires, as if to leave no way of escape from the awful fact that the whole will, in every variety of phase,

³² EPHESIANS 2:3

is but a willing slave of Satan's; moving only, and with no exception, "according to the prince of the power of the air."³³ The whole scene of the crucifixion of Christ is the fullest proof of the fact. But behold again how sovereign, electing love comes in. And at the very period when man was declared to be so full of evil, that his very nature constituted him a child of wrath, "But God, who is rich in mercy,"³⁴ quickens him "*while and when*" he is thus dead in sins. O how precious are God's truths, and how contrary to the lies of Satan! God gives man his real and true place and character—"dead in sins, and by nature the children of wrath,"³⁵ with every desire or will of the flesh and mind only evil continually; and then and there, even WHILE in such a state, gives him eternal life, through the death of His own Son upon a cross. Is not this sovereign, electing grace? Or what is it? The will of man, as to its entirely evil character, is seen in the willful king, beast, or antichrist, of the last days. Of this man of sin, it is written, "He shall do according to *his own will*, and, he doeth according to *his will*, he did awarding to *his will*." (Daniel 4:85, 8:4, and 11:16.) Now of our blessed Lord it is written, "I seek *not mine own will*"³⁶—"I came from heaven *not to do mine own will*"³⁷—"Lo, I come to do

³³ EPHESIANS 2:2

³⁴ EPHESIANS 2:4

³⁵ EPHESIANS 2:1-3

³⁶ JOHN 5:30

³⁷ JOHN 6:38

thy will, O God"³⁸—"I delight to do *thy will, O my God*"³⁹—"If this cup may not pass, *thy will be done.*"⁴⁰ I need not quote further as to the kind of evil thing man's will is. The most wicked man the world ever saw or shall see, even "*that man of sin,*"⁴¹ is characterized and *set forth* by the evil of his will; while on the other hand, our blessed Lord, as the suffering servant and self-emptied man, is characterized and *set forth as not doing* His own will.

Thus, on all hands, we have the fullest proofs that what man calls free will, in a good or spiritual sense, is never found in scripture; but on the contrary, that which is characteristically opposed to it—the will or wills of the flesh governed and led on by the prince of the power of the air, even, Satan. This being the case, and seeing that from head to foot there is *no* good thing in man, the doctrine or principle of election is most clear and simple. If God deals with man on man's own ground or state, all must be destroyed, for all are guilty, and but one entire mass of sin, as we have seen and proved. If, then, any are saved, it must be the sovereign, electing love and grace of God that saves, and nothing in any way on the part of man, for, I repeat it, there is *no good*, but only evil in him. How blessed and how beautiful, therefore, is the truth of God's electing love, for with out it, I say again, all *must* be lost. Is man, then, to find

³⁸ HEBREWS 10:7,9

³⁹ PSALM 40:8

⁴⁰ MATTHEW 26:42

⁴¹ 2 THESSALONIANS 2:3

fault because God saves some, when He might justly and righteously have condemned all, and no man could righteously find fault. Is it not great mercy and love to save any? Assuredly it is; for if God dealt with man according to man's desert, when man had no merit but only evil in himself, He could not and would not have saved any. The queen of these realms saves some, though she need not save any of the condemned criminals sentenced to be executed, and the kingdom bows to her sovereign prerogative and rejoices; but when God saves some, and that too by putting His own Son to death, man, in the pride and self-will of his heart, finds fault; but it would be well if he would listen on this point to that awfully solemn word—"Nay, but O man, *who art thou* that repliest against God?"⁴² Who indeed! with such a picture and character of him as we have already seen. But does this destroy man's accountability and responsibility? Not in the least, but quite the opposite. Election shows and proves how bad man must be, for if he had not sinned there would have been no need for the principle of election. But is not man accountable and responsible for sinning, and for opposing, and hating, and killing the Son of God? Assuredly; and now, in the present dispensation of the grace, the gospel, or the Spirit of God, he is still more deeply accountable and responsible for rejecting the grace and setting at nought the gospel, and doing despite to the Spirit of God. The meaning, therefore, on the one hand, of God's electing grace and love is apparent; while on the other, man's accountability and responsibility are also

⁴² ROMANS 9:20

apparent, because of his rebellion and sin. There is nothing more simple nor certain than the fact, that if God had not chosen His people His people never would have chosen Him. Only admit man's dreadful, universal state of evil, of contrariety, and enmity to God, as has been again and again proved from the Scriptures in this tract, and you cannot avoid seeing and admitting the sovereignty of God's electing love; for without it no one by any possibility could be saved. To the child of God, amongst the many precious truths contained in the word of God, no doctrine in its place is more precious than that of election. And why? Because it makes all so irrevocable and certain to him. Let no one suppose that there is any license for sin or carelessness in this great truth; on the contrary, it is most precious and plainly written, that we were chosen in Christ "before the foundation of the world, *that* we should be holy and without blame before him in love."⁴³ Nothing can be plainer than this, both as to the doctrine and its blessed effects and consequences. Peter also says, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit, *unto obedience* and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"⁴⁴ (See Romans 8:9).

May the Lord give to us all such an heart that we shall believe and rejoice in every word of scripture, no matter how it may expose and beat down our proud, vile nature. The strongest and bitterest medicines are often the best.

⁴³ EPHESIANS 1:4

⁴⁴ 1 PETER 1:2

Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding,
Ransom'd souls the tidings swell!
'Tis a deep that knows no sounding:
Who its length or breath can tell?
Saved by Christ, we're free for ever—
This the Spirit's voice declares.
Death, nor hell, not sin, can sever
The Lord Jesus from [His] chosen heirs.

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