

General Topics :: Man's Will- Free Yet Bound by Walter J. Chantry**Man's Will- Free Yet Bound by Walter J. Chantry - posted by roaringlamb (), on: 2007/1/24 15:55**

This is a very good article about the will of man, which I believe would be profitable to be read by all. Especially those involved in the "sword sharpening" over the Five Points of Calvinism thread.

The article itself is lengthy, but the link to the whole article is posted below this portion.

Would like to hear everyone's thoughts. Not quarrels, but thoughts please! :-D

Man's Will- Free Yet Bound
by Walter J. Chantry

For more than fifteen hundred years the Church has engaged in a heated debate over the freedom of man's will. The major issues came to general attention in the early fifth century when Augustine and Pelagius did battle on the subject. Through medieval times the nature of man's freedom received a great deal of attention. As they studied the Scriptures, Bernard and Anselm made significant contributions to the doctrine of the human will. In the sixteenth century the freedom or bondage of the will was one of the chief issues dividing Reformers and Roman Catholics. To the mind of Martin Luther, it was the key to his dispute with Rome. In the seventeenth century the nature of man's freedom was at the heart of the debate between Arminians and Calvinists. The conflict surfaced again in the eighteenth century during the Great Awakening. Finney's approach to revival in the nineteenth century led the church astray through a misunderstanding of the human will. So too the nature of man's will continues to bring intense disagreement between Reformed and Fundamentalist believers.

A proper understanding of the content of the gospel and the use of GOD-honouring methods in evangelism are dependent on one's grasp of this issue.

Some theologians, both Arminian and Calvinistic, have been quite lucid in their discussions concerning man's will. Others, for example, Jonathan Edwards, have soared into the lofty clouds of philosophy where many a believer faints in the thin air of difficult logic and complex thought. But none is so refreshingly clear as our holy LORD. His instruction on the subject is laced with vivid illustrations to assist our groping minds:

Matthew 12.33-37 says, 'Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.'

In this passage are three verbal windows through which the light of Christ's lesson passes. Each presents a familiar scene. (1) A tree that has fruit - v. 33. (2) A man who brings treasures out of a chest - v. 35. (3) A stream that overflows from a fountain. This last is rather more obscure than the first two, but it is suggested by our LORD's choice of words in v. 34. The word 'abundance' suggests superfluity or overflow.

I. Man has a will and that will has a certain freedom. Our LORD clearly teaches that man has a power of choice. It is important to begin here to disarm opponents of all the foolish accusations that have been brought against the Biblical doctrine of man's will. Every man has the ability to choose his own words, to decide what his actions will be. We have a faculty of self-determination in the sense that we select our own thoughts, words, and deeds. Man is free to choose what he prefers, what he desires.

No one ties fruit on a tree's branches, not even GOD. The tree bears its own fruit. Evil men sin voluntarily; they take evil treasures out of their chests, that is, evil words and deeds. Righteous men are holy by choice; they select good treasures, that is, good words and works. The person who is speaking and acting is completely responsible for his moral behaviour. This power of the will is a vital part of human personality. It always exists in you and me and in all to whom we witness or preach.

GOD never forces men to act against their wills. By workings of outward providence or of inward grace, the LORD may

change men's minds, but He will not coerce a human being into thoughts, words or actions. When GOD in His holy wrath sent the Israelites to drive the Canaanites from their land, He also sent hornets against them. There is a children's song which tells the story of these hornets stinging the Canaanites, causing the pagans to flee the land. The chorus then sings:

GOD never compels us to go, Oh no,
He never compels us to go;
GOD does not compel us to go 'gainst our will,
but He just makes us willing to go.

When Saul was converted, the LORD did not compel him to edify the church instead of persecuting it. He added a new factor of inward grace in his soul, consequently Paul changed his decision. GOD may renew the will but He never coerces it.

The Westminster Confession is very careful to assert the liberty of the human will. When it speaks of GOD's eternal decrees, we are told, 'GOD from all eternity did . . . freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is GOD the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.' When discussing Free Will, the Confession begins, 'GOD hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined, to good or evil.' Neither by creation nor by subsequent acts of GOD are man's decisions made for him; he is free to choose for himself.

This sort of freedom of the will is essential to responsibility! Having a will is a necessary ingredient to being morally accountable. This is clearly implied in our LORD's words in verses 36 and 37: 'I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.' A man can be condemned only because the words are his own. He was free to bring them out of his treasure chest. They were the overflow of the fountain of his own heart. They are the fruits of his own tree of nature. No one imposed the words on his lips. He chose them. Society, companions, parents cannot be blamed. Idle words are the product of the man's own will.

It is vital for every minister to appreciate the importance of man's will. For in evangelism the will must be addressed. In preaching the gospel we are not only to shine the light of truth upon darkened minds. We are also to appeal to men's perverted wills to choose Christ. Faith is as much an act of the will as it is of the mind. When by the Spirit a mind understands essential truths, by the same Spirit the will must trust Christ. Repentance is a selecting of good and a refusing of evil. Volition is central to faith and repentance.

Indeed, in conversion, a man must make a decision. We shy away from that term because in modern jargon a 'decision' has come to be identified with an outward expression, such as raising the hand or going forward to the front. While such external acts have nothing to do with forgiveness of sins, the heart must make a decision to be saved.

When Christ stood to cry 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink,' He was soliciting a willing choice of Himself as satisfying drink for the soul. GOD urges all sinners to come just because they may come. And it is our duty to inform the sinner that he has a warrant, a right to choose Christ. Beyond this, we must assure him that he has a positive duty to embrace the Saviour.

The great guilt of sinners under the gospel is that they will not come. Christ complained in John

5.40: 'Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.' And to Jerusalem He sobbed, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not!' There is in the unregenerate hearer of the gospel an obstinate, wilful choice not to come. Hence it is that in flaming fire Christ will come to take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel. In the free exercise of their uncoerced wills men have rejected the Son of GOD.

In speaking of responsibility we have implied nothing regarding ability, as will be seen below. But the point is that men have wills which must be addressed as powerfully and directly as their minds and emotions in gospel preaching. Men must be confronted with their responsibility. 'This is the work of GOD, that ye believe into Him whom He hath sent'.

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The rest of this article can be read here

(http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/freewill_chantry.html) Man's Will- Free Yet Bound