

“What it means to be Reformed”; Session # 14 “Sola Gratia – The Myth of Man’s Free-Will ”, Prepared for the Adult Sunday School class on November 2nd, 2014, by Pastor Paul Rendall.

We have been studying the doctrine of total depravity; the first of the truths that must be understood in order to understand the Doctrines of Grace. Every person who has been born into the world, outside of Jesus Christ, is totally depraved because of the first man Adam’s sin. To be totally depraved means that every faculty of man’s being has been affected by sin; the mind, the heart, the will, and the conscience. To be reformed is to believe in all the doctrines of God’s grace; unconditional election, particular redemption, effectual calling, and the perseverance of the saints. These doctrines all relate to God’s sovereignty in salvation. God’s sovereignty in salvation was absolutely necessary because man is totally depraved until he comes to Christ. God’s sovereignty in salvation should be believed by all Christians because the Bible clearly teaches it, and without believing in it, God does not get all the glory that He deserves and is worthy of receiving, for what He alone has done; what He alone is doing, and what He will do, to bring our complete salvation about.

I want to end our consideration of the doctrine of Total Depravity this morning with a short study on the freedom of the will. When I entitled this message, “The Myth of Free-Will”, I did so in order that you might better understand what was re-discovered from the Bible and brought to light by the Reformers of the 16th Century; that man does have free-will, but that will is always biased by the inclinations of his mind, and the desires of his heart. The will of man, before conversion to Christ, is actually enslaved to sin. Every person before conversion to Christ is a slave of sin, and in bondage to it. They may not realize this, but they are. The Bible is clear on this, and this is what I will try to show you now. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can free people from this awful bondage to sin.

Turn with me over to John 8, verses 31-36. “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue (abide, NKJV) in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine: and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’” They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’” “Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.’” “The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.” “So if the Son makes you free you will be free indeed.”

You can see from these verses that the nature of Total Depravity is to deny the truth which Christ clearly asserts – That even religious people who have the Scriptures may still be in sin if they are trusting only in the privileges of their being Jewish or, as in our day, the privileges of going to church and taking the sacraments, thinking that they are a Christian; that they are still being free without really being set free by Christ Himself by their being born again and believing the gospel. These men did not believe that they were slaves at all. They were in the physical house, the temple of the Lord, Sunday by Sunday, and yet they were still in bondage to sin. Later in this same chapter Jesus tells them that they are of their father the devil, and the deeds of their father they would do. They would try to kill Jesus for telling them the truth about themselves. That is total depravity.

Now turn over to Romans Chapter 6, verses 16-20. “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?” “But thanks be to

God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” “I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.” “For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.” “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.” “Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed?” “For the outcome of those things is death.” “But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”

An unregenerate person is “free” with regard to sin only, it says here. But they are not free with regard to doing and practicing righteousness. Since they are totally depraved, all parts of them have been affected by sin. Their mind and heart are free to choose that which they want. And their conscience will either approve or disapprove. But according to the Bible it is what a fallen person is inclined to think and do, when they are in this state of nature, that shows them to be partial to sin. But the Bible also teaches us that it is only when a person is given grace that they are able to choose Christ and then they have the ability by His grace to pursue spiritual things which are good for their soul. The unregenerate man, the natural man is free to choose in everything, but the truth is, he will not choose Christ and the spiritual things of the Bible.

Let’s look a little more closely at this truth of the myth of free-will of man before conversion.

Turn with me over to 1st Corinthians Chapter 2, verses 11-16.

“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?” “Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things (thoughts, in the NAS) with spiritual (words, in the NAS).” “But the natural man does not receive (accept, in the NAS) the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (appraised, in the NAS).” “But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.” “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” “But we have the mind of Christ.”

Now I hope that you can see that the natural man here being spoken of, is the unregenerate man; the man without the Spirit, the man who has not had a work of God’s grace in regeneration performed upon His heart. When a person receives the Spirit, they have received Him by God’s sovereign choice alone; nothing in them by nature wants it or is willing to receive it. Rather God makes them willing in the day of His power. Before conversion, the spiritual things of the word and even the gospel itself, seem to be foolishness to him. Notice the wording: He cannot understand them, he cannot accept them, he cannot receive them. And one of real reasons is not only because he is unable to do so; he is also unwilling to do so unless something radically changes in his heart. So, what exactly is the will like before conversion to Christ?

Turn with me over to John chapter 5, verses 36-42.

“But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.” “And the Father who sent Me, he has testified of Me.” “You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.” “You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do

not believe Him whom He sent.” “You search the Scriptures because you think that there in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”

Now you can see from these verses that the Father has testified about Jesus through the works that He gave Him to do. These were His miraculous sign gifts which were prophesied of in the Old Testament Scriptures in such places as Isaiah 35: 5 and 6. “Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.” “Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.” The Pharisees and the other religious leaders should have been able to have related this Scripture to the Lord Jesus’ coming and His doing these works. Why couldn’t they? They were those who searched the Scriptures because that there was eternal life in them, but it was those same Scriptures which testified about Jesus, and then He adds this telling statement: “And you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have eternal life.” Eternal life was there for the taking and they did not want it. They were unwilling to come to the Lord Jesus so that they could have it. They were by nature, Totally Depraved.

Spurgeon in his sermon “Free Will – A Slave” says this:

“You have heard a great many Arminian sermons, I dare say, but you never heard an Arminian prayer. An Arminian on his knees would pray like a Calvinist, for he cannot pray about free will; there is no room for it. Fancy him praying the following: ‘Lord, I thank you that I am not like those poor presumptuous Calvinists. I was born with a glorious free will. I was born with power by which I can turn to you of myself. I have improved my grace. If everybody had done the same with their grace that I have done with mine, they might all have been saved. Lord, I know you do not make us willing if we are not willing ourselves. You give grace to everybody. Some do not improve it, but I do. There are many that will go to hell who had as good a chance and were as much blessed as I was. It was not your grace that made us to differ. I know it did a great deal, but it was I who made the difference. I made use of what was given to me and others did not. That is the difference between me and them.’”