

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION (14)

QUESTION #10 – Since the Bible clearly teaches that God is absolutely sovereign over all things, is it possible to connect God’s sovereignty to personal salvation?
(Soteriology - Question #26)

Actually, by virtue of the fact that God is absolutely sovereign over all things, it is impossible not to connect God’s sovereignty to personal salvation.

In an attempt to unfold what the Scripture teaches on this subject, there are several biblical observations that must be made:

- 1) A lost person has a mind blinded by Satan so that he is incapable, in and of himself, of understanding the Gospel. II Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 2:1-3; II Tim. 2:24-26
- 2) A lost person has a will so rebellious against God that cannot understand or will not seek God. Rom. 3:10-12
- 3) A lost person is convicted of sin by God. John 16:8a
- 4) A lost person is convicted of righteousness by God. John 16:8b
- 5) A lost person is convicted of judgment by God. John 16:8c
- 6) A lost person is drawn to Christ by God. John 6:37, 44
- 7) A lost person is given understanding by God. II Cor. 4:3-6
- 8) A lost person is granted repentance by God. II Tim. 2:24-26; Acts 11:18
- 9) A lost person has a heart opened by God. Acts 16:14
- 10) A lost person is given faith by God. Eph. 2:8
- 11) A lost person is given salvation by God. Eph. 2:8-9; John 1:12-13; James 1:18; Acts 13:48

The biblical record definitely testifies to the reality that “salvation is of the Lord.” God wants His people to understand that salvation is His work.

Floyd Barackman, a contemporary theologian, writes:

“Although the sinner must believe the gospel to be saved, yet he cannot receive credit for this, for all of salvation (including salvational faith) is wholly God’s work. In the application of salvation the sinner does cooperate with God in the sense that he must receive the Savior (Acts 16:31).

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But this response does not contribute anything to salvation by completing it, adding to it, effecting it, or meriting it. The sinner does not even make the final decision to be saved. Left to himself, he would neither desire salvation nor respond to the gospel (Rom. 3:11; John 6:44). When the elect person is effectually called of God, he freely responds by receiving the Savior. But his decision to accept the Savior is not one of absolute freedom or independent cooperation. It is a conscious, personal response that is prompted and carried out by the inward activity of God, below the level of human consciousness. The elect's obedience to the gospel is initiated and completed by the concurrent action of God in the impartation of salvational faith" (Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology*, p. 255).

After seeing what the Bible says regarding God's absolute sovereignty and after connecting God's sovereignty to the salvation of the lost, we may observe that Dr. Barackman's statement is doctrinally solid. The sovereign mysteries of God are deep, but when all is said and done, God's perfect will shall be accomplished and He will be glorified.

QUESTION #11 – Since the Bible does teach that God is completely sovereign, how does this relate to man's will?
(Soteriology - Question #27)

When considering the will of man, Dr. Charles Ryrie observed: "Actually the Bible says much more about the will of God than man's will, and what it does say is unsystematic" (*Basic Theology*, p. 199).

The fact that God's Word does not have much to say concerning the will of man further lends itself to our finite ignorance when we try to understand the sovereignty of God as it relates to the will of man.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer once quoted Dr. John Dick, who in *Lectures on Theology*, once wrote, "Upon such a subject, no man should be ashamed to acknowledge his ignorance. We are not required to reconcile the divine decrees and human liberty. It is enough to know that God has decreed all things which come to pass, and that men are answerable for their actions" (Vol. 1, p. 243).

Having said this, it does become our responsibility before God to study to "rightly divide" all biblical matters (II Tim. 2:15). We have been commanded by God to grow in knowledge (II Pet. 3:18). We do know that one of the reasons God gave His Word was to teach us doctrine (II Tim. 3:16). Thus, even though we will never fully understand this issue, it is our responsibility to learn as much as we can so our faith is an accurate reflection of what the Scriptures reveal.

Perhaps the issue of faith is more connected to this doctrine than we might realize, as John Dick said, "If everything in religion were level to the comprehension of reason, there would be no room for faith. It is better to believe humbly, than to reason presumptuously" (*Ibid.*, p. 243).

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In approaching this subject, it is legitimate to ask a question and then search for biblical answers to the question. This will be our approach to this matter.

QUESTION #12 – Does the Bible teach that God created beings having a will?
(Soteriology - Question #28)

There is only one, true biblical answer to this question and it is YES! Created beings most definitely have a will.

- 1) That may be seen in Adam and Eve. Gen. 2:15-18
- 2) That may be seen in Satan. Isaiah 14:13-17
- 3) That may be seen in angels. Jude 6
- 4) That may be seen in Israel. Josh. 24:15
- 5) That may be seen in unbelievers. James 4:4; Rev. 9:20-21
- 6) That may be seen in believers. Rom. 7:16, 19; James 4:13-17

An honest examination of the Bible does reveal that created beings do have a will.

QUESTION #13 – Does the fact of the will make the created being accountable to God?
(Soteriology - Question #29)

Again, the Bible's answer to this question is YES!

The use of the will in rebellion against God ended up with Satan and one-third of all angels being cast out of heaven (Rev. 12:4). Certainly the way the angels used their will made them accountable and condemnable.

The fact that God has allowed His program to include Gentiles is clear evidence that Israel has an accountable will. It was her refusal to respond to God that prompted God to temporarily sever His program from Israel (Matt. 23:37-38; Rom. 11:20).

The fact that God will punish the unrighteous is clear indication that unbelievers are not robots, but have a will that is accountable and answerable to God (II Pet. 2:12-13). Also, the fact that a lost person can apparently somewhat earn his eternal status in hell indicates that a lost person does have a will that is accountable to God (Rev. 20:11-15; Luke 12:45-48).

When it comes to the believer, the reward system clearly indicates that believers have a will that is accountable and answerable to God (Rom. 14:10-12; I Cor. 3:11-13; II Cor. 5:10; II Tim. 2:19-21).

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All of these facts combined certainly lead us to conclude that men were created with a will and that will is accountable to the God who created it.

QUESTION #14 – What do we mean by the term “will of man”?
(Soteriology - Question #30)

It is generally accepted that when we use the words “will of man” we are referring to one’s perceived ability to make a voluntary choice.

A voluntary choice naturally presupposes the choosing or selecting something and the refusing or rejecting something else.

QUESTION #15 – Does man have a free will?
(Soteriology - Question #31)

It is right at this question that great theological controversy begins. In 1525, Martin Luther, the famed Reformer, wrote a very famous book which he titled *On the Bondage of the Will*. Martin Luther wrote this book in response to a book which had been written by a leading humanistic scholar named Desiderius Erasmus, who in 1524 wrote *On the Freedom of the Will*.

Erasmus was a Roman Catholic scholar who was attempting to combat Luther’s position that salvation was solely by God’s grace, by saying that man’s free will played an important role in salvation. In 1525, Luther responded by writing his famous book which argued that man’s will was so utterly in bondage to sin that only God’s action could save a lost soul. Luther defended the position that salvation, the entire process from beginning to end, was solely the gracious work of God.

Who is right, Luther or Erasmus? Did the Roman Catholic Renaissance humanistic scholar, Erasmus, have a better perspective and grasp of theology than the converted Roman Catholic Reformer, Martin Luther?

Actually, the purpose of Systematic Theology is to carefully study the Bible so that we may determine what God specifically says. So the issue of “free will” is not a debate between Luther and Erasmus, it is an issue of the Bible.

QUESTION #16 – What do we mean by the term “free will of man”?
(Soteriology - Question #32)

A free will, in an absolute sense is a sovereign will. In order to have a “free will” in an absolute sense, the will must be completely “free” from any influence or restriction and is subject to no one or nothing. In order for a will to be completely and totally free, it must be capable of making any choice in total free sovereignty.