

Election and 'Free' Will

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It is a delight for us, over these past several weeks, we have been studying the book of Ephesians together verse-by-verse going through Ephesians and we've come to the 13th and 14th verses of chapter 1 just for those of you who are visiting to give you a little sense of perspective about where we have been and why we are going to the text that we're going to. As we have studied this passage, we have seen clearly God's sovereignty in salvation. He chose us. He adopted us. He redeemed us. It is all to his ultimate glory at the end of time and he has graciously included us in his plan to see that great climactic event of the end of time and the beginning of eternity. We will be there to witness it as one who belongs to the King of creation, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we've been studying over the past several weeks.

Now, in the course of pastoral discussions with people over those weeks, there has come a question that is very natural and understandable that we want to address today and we're going to use verses 13 and 14 as a framework for the question but we actually won't get into the text of these verses until next week. So Ephesians 1:13 and 14. I'll read those verses and then I will set the question on the table that we want to address today. In verse 13 it says,

13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation - having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

That's where we're at in the natural progression of our exposition verse-by-verse of Ephesians. We're really going to pick it up next week. For this morning, I want to address a question that comes from verses like this, however, as you look at chapter 1:4. It says that, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Verse 5 says, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." And in verse 9 it says, "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him. We have obtained an inheritance," verse 11, "having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." That magnificent passage puts the credit for

salvation squarely on the shoulders of God and not in the soul of man. It says that God is the one who is to be credited for the fact that any are saved and it says that God did this before the foundation of the world. He determined what he wanted to do beforehand and he predestined all things to work to that purpose and it is a very theocentric passage in that sense with a preeminent emphasis on the will of God determining the outcome of salvation. We respect that text. We honor it. We believe it. Salvation was God's design. It was God's gift. It was God's work and it is to God's glory. Period. End of sentence. End of paragraph.

Now, as you read through this passage and if we just gave ourselves time to get into the beginning of chapter 2, we would come to the answer to this question but for pastoral purposes, knowing how many people have a question burning on their minds, I want to address this particular question that flows from that emphasis on the sovereignty of God. The question is this: what about the free will of man? We're going to go right there. We're going to, with reckless abandon, go right into the heart of that question. If God is sovereign in salvation, what are we to say about the free will of man in salvation? That is an important question. I would say this: the answer that you give to that question is going to determine the utter trajectory of your Christian life. In fact, the answer that you give to that question may evaluate and expose whether you're a Christian or not. It's that significant because ultimately we have to come to grips with what is the responsibility of man in light of the sovereignty of God. The way the question is often framed is: if God is sovereign, how can man be free? Fair enough. Good questions to ask and questions that Scripture answers with, I believe, definitive clarity.

Having said that, it is notoriously difficult to discuss this topic. People use the same words with different meanings and people will take what is said and take it to conclusions that the teacher doesn't intend to say. We're trying to build a wall and we're building it brick-by-brick, as it were, and so sometimes people think that you mean an implication that is not at all what Scripture teaches. So I just say that to acknowledge that right from the very start, this is a difficult topic to discuss simply because we're all coming at it conditioned by years of prior teaching and sometimes that prior teaching has led us to a veneration of the will of man that perhaps Scripture does not justify. That's what we want to look at this morning. So let me say it this way: the accusation is made against the doctrine of election that it turns men into robots, that's not true. That's demonstrably false. It's said that election destroys evangelism, that's also false and demonstrably untrue. We'll talk about that more next week. But we want to address the topic and consider the will of man in this message, in light of the overall context of the sovereignty of God, particularly as he exercises his sovereignty in the realm of salvation. I'm not going to repeat all those messages, the content of those or even review it, from verses 3-12 that have led us to this point.

Let's say this as a starting point: man has a will in the sense that he has the capacity to make choices. At a superficial level, we decide what we want to eat; we decide where we want to eat it; where we want to go; we decide what job we want to have; we decide who we want to marry; we decide when we're going to get up, when we're going to lay down; what kind of medicine we're going to take when we're ill. There are all kinds of choices

that we make by the exercise of our will. We are not robots. We are people with a choosing capacity. No one compels us to do those things. We're not conscious of being forced to do something against our will. We generally act in accordance with our desires when we are given occasion to do so. So of course, man has a will. What we say further about that will is where the controversy begins but let's just restrict this discussion to the area of salvation. Many people unconsciously assume because they've been taught to think this way, many people unconsciously assume that daily power of choice in life means that we have an equal power of self-determination in the spiritual realm as well. "I decide whether I'm going to eat an apple," a man says, "therefore I also decide whether I am going to go to heaven." That's the problem. That's the breakdown. You cannot reason from the lesser to the greater in that way. When you enter into the realm of salvation where Scripture abundantly says multiple, multiple times that salvation belongs to the Lord, that salvation is his gift to give as he sees fit, then you have to realize that the will of man has to bend and bow the knee.

The problem is even greater than that. What do we say about the free will of man? Well, let's build up to a conclusion. The problem isn't with the word "will." The problem is with the word "free." That's where Scripture says the problem is. That's where we need the sovereignty of God to overcome us and help us because our will is not free to choose God in the strength of our own power. Scripture makes this so abundantly clear that it cannot be reasonably disputed. I want to show you three areas in which manifest the fact that our will is not free to choose salvation on our own power. We must have the help of God if we are going to be saved at all. We're going to see this from three different ways. We're going to go through several different Scriptures here this morning. So when I say "free" I'm using that in quotation marks. I am using that in quotation marks as a concession to the way the question is framed, not because I believe in a will that is utterly free from any outside influence.

What do we say about the will of man? First of all, if you're going to think through it, you have to consider first of all, point 1: the sinner's dead capacity. The sinner's dead capacity. Physically dead men do not reach for apples. That may seem like a truism and I guess in some senses that it is, but if you've ever been around a corpse, you know that is completely motionless, lifeless, there is nothing in it to energize it to do anything. Spiritually speaking, dead men don't reach for salvation. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick." A desperately deceitful heart is not going to reach out to the God of purest truth.

Look at Ephesians 2:1, we're in Ephesians here and we've looked at some of these passages in the past but we're going to put them together to address this particular answer. By the way, I just want to be careful to emphasize because some of you are the ones who have asked the question. Let's take a little time out here. We're going to take a little sidebar here. The fact that so many of you are asking this question is really a healthy sign. It is a good sign and I welcome the questions because the questions show that you are grasping the implications of the sovereignty of God. You don't ask that question unless you're starting to recognize, "Wow, what Scripture says here in this area about the sovereignty of God impacts what I have thought in the past about the free will of man."

And the fact that you even realize that that issue is engaged by what has been taught from Scripture in the past few weeks, shows that you're getting it. So be encouraged and know that your questions are important and welcome and well received and it's because I want to help you work through that that we're having this. This is designed to help you.

One other thing that I would say: think of this message from the perspective of two mirrors. Two mirrors that you could look into and either one is going to show yourself but only one of the two is going to show the real you now here as you hear this message. For some of you, you're going to be looking into a vanity mirror and you're going to be seeing your face described by what I have to say here this morning, what Scriptures show us. You're going to be seeing from Scripture a mirror of the current condition of your heart and when this describes you, understand and you realize that this is describing me here this morning, and this is my current condition, understand that the Spirit of God is convicting you that you do not belong to Christ, that you are dead in sin and that you are in desperate risk of eternal judgment. That's seeing yourself in the vanity mirror. You're seeing yourself up close and personal and for some of you it is going to be those of you that are claiming to be Christians as you see yourself in the mirror. May the Spirit of God help us to break through that kind of darkness.

For the rest of us, we're seeing it in a mirror but it's in a different mirror. We're seeing it in a rearview mirror. We're seeing what we were like in the past. We're seeing what God saved us out of. We're seeing what we've been delivered from and you should see echoes of what your former life was before you became a Christian and say, "Yes, that's all true. That's true of what I used to be. Now God has given me new life in Christ and what marked my former life is not what marks my life now." And if you see yourself in the rearview mirror instead of the vanity mirror, what you have in front of you here today in what we're about to see is grounds for unbounded, unrestricted, unqualified praise and thanksgiving to the God of your salvation. To realize that he exercised such a great power on the core of your soul to deliver you in a way that you never could have done yourself, makes you love and praise Christ. Makes you love and praise the Father. And what we have to say here today should cause you to rejoice and give thanks. But one way or another, my friends, you're looking at a mirror today. It's just a question of which mirror you're seeing yourself in.

So, with that bit of introduction, let's look at that sinner's dead capacity. We saw Jeremiah 17:9 and now we look at Ephesians 2:1 where it says, looking back in the rearview mirror, Paul is looking back in the rearview mirror at his audience and he says, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." It has the idea that this was their ongoing state and condition. This is what you were like. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." One of the things that I would just point out to you in this text is that for whichever mirror you're looking in, the current vanity mirror or the rearview mirror, there is no grounds for

boasting for any of us in this because Scripture says we all formerly were like this. Paul says to his readers, "You and I used to be like what I'm describing right now."

So there's no boasting in this. There is no spiritual pride in what we're saying here at all. We freely acknowledge as we uphold the Scriptures that Scriptures are describing what we used to be like when we talk about being dead in sin. Look at chapter 2, verse 1, he says, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." There was no life within you. Verse 2, "You walked according to the course of this world." The manner of physical life that you had was "according to the prince of the power of the air." You walked as the devil wanted you to walk. "That spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." Verse 3, you were "indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and you were by nature children of wrath even as the rest." When you're asking the question, "Well, what about the will of man in salvation?" You have to start with the fact that the sinner is in a position of death. It's not that he's struggling for air as he's drowning in the ocean, it's that he's already drowned and he's at the bottom of the sea. You can't throw him a life preserver because he can't reach for it. He's dead. That's you if you're not a Christian this morning. That was you if you are a Christian this morning. This is the universal testimony of Scripture about the universal nature of man.

Now, if Ephesians chapter 2:1-3 was the only passage that taught this sort of theme, it might be a fair objection to say, "Well, you're taking one passage out of context." That's not true. That's not true at all. Turn over to the book of Romans. We mentioned Ephesians for those of you that are with us on an ongoing basis. That just gives you a brief preview of what we're going to come to in a few weeks to realize that Paul himself anticipated your question. I'm simply accelerating the consideration because I don't want this to block your receptivity to the word of God. This is too important. This is too definitive and determinative of where we go spiritually individually and as a body of believers together. What does Scriptures say about the heart and mind of an unbeliever? It says this in addition to the fact that he's dead, it says that the unbeliever does not seek God nor does he subject himself to God. Look at Romans 3:10 and as you're looking at this passage, I want you to understand one other thing as we're looking at this that there is a cumulative impact of everything that is being said here this morning. We have a total of three points. We're just looking at number 1, the sinner's dead capacity. We're looking at three different avenues that all testify in the same direction about the condition of the heart and the will of the unsaved man.

So Romans 3:10, we're still talking about the sinner's dead capacity. "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands." Here's the kicker for us today, "There is none who seeks for God." None. How much more clear could this be? Where do we find the idea that there are people that are just dying to come to God if only they could and they are longing for salvation and they have the power and capacity to respond in their own power, unprompted by the Spirit of God? Paul repeats himself for emphasis: none righteous, not one, none who understands, there is none who seeks for God. Humanity in sin. Individuals in this room who are outside of Christ should not flatter themselves by saying, "I am a seeker for God." Scripture says that you're not. Verse 12, "All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good,

there is not even one." This is a pervasive condemnation of the nature of man that says that he has nothing within him that enables him to respond to the things of God. Not only does he not have it, he doesn't want it.

Turn over to Romans 8:7. This is what I used to be like. It says that, "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." And so when we say, "Could a man by his free will respond to Christ of his own power without the influence of the Spirit of God on his heart?" No. He can't. He can't please God so much with his self-generated faith that God rewards him and bestows salvation on him in response to that self-generated faith. Scripture says that he can't do it. It is outside his capacity. He is unable to do so just like a dead man can't reach to the counter. A dead man cannot reach for God. He's not able to do so. Not only is he not able to do so, he's hostile to the God who is presenting salvation to him. Where is saving faith going to come from inside a deceitful, dead, rebellious heart like that? Where? There's no room for it and I'm not even started. We haven't even begun to exhaust what Scripture has to say about this and we certainly won't exhausted it in this hour.

Choose the Gospel? Choose to accept Christ? Ha, he can't even understand the Gospel. Look at 1 Corinthians 2. If it seems like I'm repeating the Scripture references a lot in this message, it's because I have no confidence in the fact that I said them right the first time. 1 Corinthians 2:14. You need to see these with your own eyes. Honestly, if you struggle with this issue, you need to put your finger on the physical page of the text and go along as its read and follow along with your finger as your eyes follow along. I say that not to minimize or diminish the importance of this but to heighten it. Scripture speaks to this with clarity and you can see it with your eyes and put your own finger on it and see that I'm not making this up. It's not in my self-interest to make this up because this condemns and convicts me too, the man that I used to be. 1 Corinthians 2:14, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." He doesn't accept it. He doesn't want it. He refuses it. His knee-jerk, reflex reaction is, "No," and he cannot understand it. He does not have the capacity to understand it. He doesn't have the ability to understand it because these are things that are spiritually appraised and that natural man, that unsaved man, is spiritually dead so he can't appraise anything spiritual. He doesn't have the ability to do so. He cannot understand it because his spiritual brain is flatlined. So that's the sinner's dead capacity. Dead in sin. He does not seek for God. He cannot understand spiritual things. He is wired to reject it because it's all foolishness to him.

Now, I want to do two things with you. Those of you that are Christians, you think back to when you first heard the Gospel when you were not a Christian and almost without exception, you're going to remember a time when you said, "That can't be right. If that's true, then everything that I've thought before is wrong." And so there's this knee-jerk, reflex reaction that you have that says, "That can't be right." That's what was coming out of your own natural heart before the Spirit of God helped you. Now, let's apply this in a different way that some of you will be able to relate to. I know that I can relate to it and I'll speak about it from that perspective. I remember before my conversion multiple times

where I prayed to Christ and said, "I accept you as my Lord and Savior." Now I want to tell you something: nothing spiritual happened when I did that except that the wind from my lips caused a motion to occur in the air around me but nothing spiritual happened. There are some of you who can understand because you've said, "I prayed so many times and it never seemed to stick. I accepted Christ again and again," some of you who came from that tradition. "I went up to the front again and again and it just never seemed to work." Well, the reason for that in that effort, you were not seeing yourself as a desperately lost sinner. You were thinking that and I was thinking that I could make this happen by the power of my own will and the reason that it never took, so to speak, in all those efforts that you were making to do it and the reason that you had such confusion in your spiritual life in the times that followed that, is because you were attempting a salvation to exercise your will to make it happen and that's why it was so frustrating to you. You had not yet seen yourself as someone who was spiritually bankrupt. You thought you had the capacity in you to bring Christ into you, not realizing, not understanding that what you needed was Christ to exercise his power to bring you into him. Your heart had never been completely humbled under the law of God. You had never seen yourself as a lost sinner. You had never seen yourself as one spiritually bankrupt. You thought you could say a few words of prayer and make it happen. I say that not to condemn you but to help you understand what was going on and why you had such great confusion and great frustration in your spiritual life. Scripture says that we're dead and the teaching that tries to flatter man by saying, "You can choose to do this," leaves him in a position of pride that makes him think he's got some reservoir. "I can wait. I'll put this off until my deathbed so that I can live a life of sin and then I'll decide." All of that is a product of very corrupt theology. A sinner is dead.

Now, that's point number 1: the sinner's dead capacity. Secondly, let's consider for a moment: sin's dominant control. Sin's dominant control. For that I want you to turn over to the Gospel of John. We'll look at a couple of passages in the Gospel of John at this point and come back to it at the end of the message if I don't forget. John 3:19. Sin's dominant control. In John 3:19, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." For some of you who are now Christians, you can look back and remember, if you're honest, you can remember that you resisted the Gospel because you realized it men repenting and turning from sin that you loved. That is what is being described here in 3:19. We have to understand that unsaved men are in darkness but it's not just that they're in darkness, they like it that way. That's where they want to be because they love their sin and when the Gospel of Christ comes and says, "You are guilty and convicted under the law of God," when the Gospel of Christ comes and says, "You are facing judgment and you must repent from that wickedness," the sinner from the depths of his heart whether he verbalizes it with his lips or not says, "No, I'm not giving this up because I like this sin. I like this sinful relationship."

So to discredit the Gospel which alone can save them, they in turn mock it, criticize it, refuse it, argue against it, instead of submitting themselves to the mind of God as it's expressed in the Gospel of Christ. Now look: when that happens, when sinners do that,

that is a morally culpable act. God has brought the message of salvation which could deliver their soul from sin and secure eternal salvation for them and they have mocked it, they have rejected it, they have criticized it rather than bringing their mind into submission to it. Whatever else you think about the electing choices of God before eternity began, you must understand that when sinners refuse the Gospel quite apart from any choices that God has made, they have brought judgment down on their guilty soul because it is reprehensible for a sinful man to reject the one message of salvation that could deliver him from damnation. What possible excuse is there for that? There is none. And so what we must do as believers, the way that we must think about the Gospel, is not to revere the free will of man in his death and domination under sin, but we must revere and respect the Gospel. We must respect the message that says Christ came into this world to save sinners. That Christ commands sinners everywhere to repent and believe in the Gospel. That's where our affection should be. That's what we should care to defend, not the free will of man. We love the glory of the Gospel so much that we're happy to endure the taunts and mocking of those who hate it. We'll stand with the Gospel before we'll bend to men on this.

And to realize further as we're sharing the Gospel either from a pulpit or from sharing it in individual conversations on your porch, in your driveway, whatever it may be, for you to understand that this is no casual discussion. There is an earnest spiritual engagement taking place and there are consequences to the way that person responds. For that person to walk away is not – here, watch this – is not a sign that you did something wrong in your presentation of the Gospel. It's a sign that the wickedness and the domination and the death in their heart is being manifested when they say, "That's not for me." When you understand this, it frees you a lot and gives you a lot of liberty as you're sharing the Gospel. You realize, "Well yeah, they walked away but that's not because I said something wrong, it's because they are still under the dominion of death and sin and they are manifesting that." You know, if a person could see it clearly, they would thank you for bringing the Gospel to them. The fact that they don't and they mock you and they separate themselves from you is a sign, it's a manifestation of what the Bible says about their inner man is absolutely true.

There is nothing, let me say it again, there is nothing in the Gospel that a sinner should refuse. It is his message of hope. It is the only means for him to have eternal life. It comes from a gracious God who is sincerely presenting the opportunity for eternal life, who promises blessing upon repentance and faith and there is nothing in that to be rejected. Those of you that are here and you continue to be hardhearted against the Gospel, you don't understand the condemnation that you're piling up on your own soul. It is wrong for you. It is wicked for you to reject the Gospel again and again and again. That's wrong. That's wrong. Why would you spurn your Creator? Why would you spurn an offer made in love to you? There is no excuse. There is no excuse for that. The fact that you do, the fact that that is your present response to the preaching of the Gospel, the word of Christ to you this morning, is simply manifesting the death that reigns in your soul, the fact that sin has control over your heart and you don't have the capacity to get out of it. There are consequences to what Scripture says.

Look over at Titus 3 at a verse we looked at a few months ago. Maybe you say, "Well, you know, I'm not hostile. I just don't care." Well, indifference is just as culpable as outright hostility. How can you be indifferent to your Creator and Savior presenting to you that which would give you life and you say, "Eh, I don't care. How soon can we eat? How soon can I get back to what I do during the day?" No, I don't know how else to say it. I don't know how else to say it except that your indifference and hostility is a manifestation that judgment is your rightful lot. It's wrong to respond to the Gospel of Christ with that kind of careless, indifferent, wicked attitude.

Titus 3. We're talking about sin's dominant control here. The Apostle Paul, again looking back pre-conversion for him and his readers, says, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived," here it is, "enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." Do you see that word in there "enslaved"? Sin, your wicked desires, were your master that owned your obedience. You were not free to come in and out of it. Sin owned you. If you are not a Christian, sin today owns you, present tense. And I'm beside myself with concern for the future of your soul. Concerned as you reject and close your ears once again to the only message that can give you life. Don't flatter yourself thinking, "I'm choosing not to do this." No, you're following the dictates of what owns you, is what you're doing if you are rejecting the Gospel here this morning. Scripture describes the unsaved man as someone who is a slave to sin. Jesus said in John 8:34, "Everyone who commits sin is the slave to sin." Don't fool yourself into thinking that you're free by rejecting the Gospel. You are simply affirming the fact that, "I am a slave to something else." O God, do something in their hearts because human words don't have the power to do what needs to be done. Everyone who commits sin is the slave to sin and unsaved man cannot and will not leave sin behind. He's enslaved to various lusts and pleasures. There is a cord, there is a chain around his neck that he can't leave behind. That's what it means to not be a Christian. It's to be a slave. It's to be owned by an evil, wicked force outside yourself that you cannot set yourself free from.

Now look, unless I state these things plainly, you won't hear them. Unless I state it this bluntly, this directly, unless there's some measure of animation and passion, there is no hope for this to ever pierce through to you. It has to be stated plainly. I can't flatter your vanity. I can't flatter your spiritual pride and still point you in the direction of the kingdom of heaven. You are lost and you need to be found and until you are desperate for salvation, you'll never come to Christ with the proper spirit. Until you realize that you are ruined, you won't cry out and say, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." My clarity this morning is not a mark of unkindness, it's a mark of Gospel love. It is though Paul says and Paul describes it as though Christ is imploring through us to be reconciled to God. This is how the Spirit of God pleads and works on the souls of men, it's through a clear understanding of their lost estate. If any of you end up at the Great White Throne Judgment, you won't be able to say that, "No one loved me enough to tell me," because mark the date, August 10th, it happened right then. And your final excuse is gone and you're left with nothing more than the exposure of your hostile, rebellious heart for everybody to see. That's what you're left with. There's nothing else. In that guilty condition in which you find yourself right at this moment, Christ says, "Come to me, for

the one who comes to me, I will never cast out." Right now Christ invites you to come to him for salvation but come not boasting in your ability, confessing your inability and asking him to be merciful to you the sinner. Won't you do that? I'll spare the theatrics of actually getting down on my knees to beg you but the Gospel begs you now, be reconciled to God.

The sinner's dead capacity, sin's dominant control. It's worse. We need to thirdly consider: Satan's dark command. Satan's dark command. We're going to circle back around and wrap this up about how this deals with free will. Ha, free will. I can't even say it now. I'm at a point now where I can't say it without laughing. Free will, ha, ha, ha, ha, are you kidding me? There is nothing free about this. Honestly, I laugh at the thought. Free will, ha. Read the Bible and then come back and talk about your free will. Satan's dark command. You see, it's not just sin, it's that Satan himself, that malevolent spirit being, the angel fallen from heaven, the great deceiver in whom the whole world lies in his evil power, that Satan holds the unbeliever captive to do his will.

You're in Titus, let's just go back a couple pages to 2 Timothy 2:24. It says, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps," notice the source of repentance and saving faith, "if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." God from outside, the inner man, gives something to him that he did not previously possess. That's what we're talking about. And that he having done that, so to speak, verse 26, "they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." There is your free will subjugated entirely to Satan. Your will is an instrument of the will of Satan. That is Satan's dark command over your soul.

Turn to your right a bit. We're going to go to 2 Corinthians if I don't forget, but turn to 1 John 3, again, a passage that we've looked at in the past. But it's okay. It's okay to repeat these things. We all needed to hear them multiple times before it sunk into us. Satan doesn't surrender his stronghold usually in a first time act. God let's this play out and work out over time so that these principles sink deep into our minds. But look at 1 John 3:8. "People think I'm a self-made man," they like to say. "I did this on my own." Ha, you're not free like you think you are. Verse 8, "The one who practices sin is of the devil." That's your source. That's where your life energy emanates from. It's where it comes from, Satan, the devil. "For the devil has sinned from the beginning." Your sinful disposition, your sinful thoughts, your sinful words, your sinful deeds, are all rooted in the fact when that is your practice in life, when that is what you love, when that is what you engage in and pursue, all you're manifesting is that, "There is a fountain behind me further back, named personally Satan, and I do the desires of what he wants me to do." That's what a life of sin is saying. Biblically informed, that is what an unbroken life of sin is witnessing to. It's saying, "Look who my father is. Satan sinned from the beginning. Here is my life of sin. Guess who I belong to?" And all of a sudden your stubbornness in sin and the things that you boast in and glory in the deception of, all of a sudden it's exposed for the utter darkness and wickedness that it is. The one who commits sin is of the devil.

Look at verse 10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious." This isn't difficult, in other words. This is plain. It's out there for everyone to see. "Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God." You're either a child of God or you're a child of the devil. If you hate Christ and some of you do, if you hate Christ and reject the Gospel, then understand that the other side of that coin is that you're saying, "I belong to the devil and I like it that way." Is that where you want to spend your life? Is that why God gave you breath so that you could be a child of the devil and live in rebellion to the Gospel? What's wrong with you? What's wrong with you? I'll tell you what's wrong with you, you're dead in sin and you're dominated by sin and you're under the command of Satan. That's why you embrace a life like that. That's why you hate Christ. That's why you hate the Gospel. Don't tell me about your free will. Your life says everything that we need to know, that you are under the control of an evil, wicked spiritual being who introduced sin into the universe, that the principle of sin, the love and lusts and desires for sin, control you and you can't break away from them and as a result of that, you are dead in sin and unable to respond to any positive spiritual influence from the preaching of the Gospel or the Spirit of God of your own power. You have no power of your own. You're dead. You're dominated. You belong to Satan. That's your free will. Now it's not funny. Now it's really serious.

One other thing. 2 Corinthians 4, I think I promised you that we'd go back there. 2 Corinthians 4:3, "Even if our gospel is veiled," even if people don't get it, "it is veiled to those who are perishing." What can we say about them? What can we say about you who are rejecting the Gospel even as it's being earnestly preached to you this morning? Well, if that's you, put your name in verse 4. "In whose case," in my case, "in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Held captive by Satan and blinded by him so that you can't see it. Look, Spirit of God, look down on us and help us. All of this shows you how desperately lost you are if you're not a Christian. I'm not going to flatter you with anything else. You are desperately lost and the weight of that needs to press upon your conscience until it gets to this point. Think about it as squeezing an orange until juice comes out. You just squeeze and squeeze and squeeze. What the Scripture is teaching on these issues is designed to do, is to produce in your heart a level of desperation that says, "O God, save me." Notice the difference in the spirit of what I'm about to describe. No longer saying, "Jesus, I accept you. I bestow my crown upon you and receive you into my life." Oh please. That's not the spirit of saving faith at all. The spirit of saving faith is found in Luke 18 where the tax collector said, "Be merciful to me the sinner. Jesus, forget about me accepting you. Please, you accept me! I'm lost! Help!" And you cry out with a level of desperation as the Spirit of God has begun to drive a wedge in your understanding and opened it up so that a little bit of light can get in and say, "I'm dead. Sin controls me and Satan commands me. Wow, I need a Savior really bad. Let me flee to Christ who is the only one who can save me." Not with a spirit of pride that this is my decision, but in a hope and a trust and an entrusting of yourself to Christ who says, "I receive sinful men. Come to me for eternal life."

So what do we say about this free will? This dead capacity? Sin's dominant control? Satan's dark command? Well, we're not saying that every man is as bad as he could possibly be. We're not saying that men are not capable of comparative degrees of kindness on a human level. What we're saying is this, is that the unsaved man cannot do anything to please God. Unredeemed sinners have no spiritual merit before God and they are utterly unable to do any spiritual good to change their condition or earn his favor. That's what we're saying. So, with the question then: I understand what you're saying about election, what about free will? Let me having circled all the way around here, let me answer that question like this: free will from the beginning is a false premise. Spiritual forces stronger than the man dominate his will. He has a pre-existing, settled disposition against the Gospel. He cannot come to Christ on his own power. God must help him from outside to do that or he will remain lost in sin. So how does election work together with free will? If God had not chosen some, none would have come to Christ. Satan is that strong. Sin is that bad. Man is that lost.

Look over at the Gospel of John 6:65, Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." He said, verse 44 in the same chapter, "No one can come to Me," no one can come to me, "unless the Father who sent Me draws him." It has to be granted from God. God has to do a work or it doesn't happen at all. God must exercise his omnipotence to awaken the sinner and overcome his bondage to sin and Satan. God must exercise his power to overcome that dominating power of sin, to overcome the dominating influence of Satan on a life. God who is stronger than both, God who is the God of life and can overcome death as shown by the resurrection of Christ from the tomb, God has power over all of this and God is able to do what is impossible with men. That's the point of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek," Romans 1:16.

You see, Scripture doesn't congratulate you on your free will. It exposes how miserably enchained, if I can make up a verb that way, how miserably enchained your will is to other forces and says you're only how hope is to cry out for mercy from the God of salvation who can overcome death, break the chains of sin and throw out the devil. You go to Christ, not in pride but in desperation, "Lord, be merciful to me the sinner." This is where evangelism comes in. That's what we will talk about next week. For now, I quote John Stott who says this, "The preaching of the Gospel is the very means that God has appointed by which he delivers from blindness and bondage those whom he chose in Christ before the foundation of the world, sets them free to believe in Jesus and so causes his will to be done."

The Gospel is foolishness until you realize that you are lost and unable to save yourself. Then this piece of good news means everything. In the words of Harvey Murdoch of Buckhorn, Christ receives sinful men. Ask Christ for mercy that you don't deserve and life you cannot reach. Christ will receive you and if your heart is motioned in that way, if it's in that direction, act upon the assumption that God is awakening you and even if you don't feel anything in your heart, still go to Christ. Go to Christ. Go to Christ. Go to Christ. Go to Christ, I say. Only he can save you. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we share

a common life in Christ together, if you know Christ this morning, thank him afresh for your salvation. Thank him for mercy that you never could have earned. Thank you for kindness that you sinned against in the rearview mirror. Thank you that your old man, you're dead nature, is a thing of the past and rejoice in the fact that God had mercy on you by name, to save you by name, and brought you into his kingdom by name so that you could one day worship him in heaven in the glories of eternity by name. And he will know you because he chose you for that ultimate saving end and overcame all of your sin, overcame all of the work of Satan to blind you and said, "Ah, that one will be mine. That one, I will claim. That one, I will draw to myself. That one belongs to me." That is the privileged position that you have if you're a Christian here this morning and when you understand that, you're not interested in boasting in your self-will. As Paul said, "God forbid that I should boast in anything," Galatians 6:14, "except in the cross of Christ, my Savior."

Bow with me in prayer.

Lord, all is vain unless the Spirit of the holy one comes down and applies this to our hearts. Lord, how many hundreds or thousands of times have we heard truth proclaimed and we walked out unchanged? Indifferent, uncaring, glad that the message was over? God, the human messenger, the human instrument, can't change that response, only you can. Only you can give power to your word so that it is applied savingly to those who do not know Christ. Only you can seal it into our hearts and minds that are believers so that it reaps ongoing fruit. Only you can help us, Father, so that we're not like a man who looks in the mirror and then walks away unchanged.

Father, for those who are in the mirror of vanity and their hearts have been exposed by your word today, would you keep their eyes focused on the darkness until their heart is crushed enough to come to Christ without reservation and cry out to you for mercy. Don't let them walk away from that mirror, Lord. God, you've got to help us. We don't want to just go through the motions. We don't want to bat against the air and have sinners walk away unchanged but just as it's outside their power, Father, it's outside of ours as well. God, help us by bringing your power of salvation to bear on those hearts.

Father, for those of us who joyfully look in the rearview mirror and say, "That's the man in my past. He's behind me. That's not me anymore," Lord, with joy we adore you. With profound thanks and complete self-denial, we honor you as the God of our salvation and it's our delight, it's our privilege, it's our holy single desire to return to you a life of worship and obedience, worthy of the one who saved us by name and has reserved for us a place in heaven undefiled, that will not fade away, throughout all the echoing ages of the halls of eternity, O God, we will love and adore our Christ. That one who loved us and gave himself up for us. We attribute to him all the glory of our present position. We thank you that you have buried our past in the depths of the sea no longer to hold us accountable to it and now, Lord, we present ourselves to you and pray that individually and corporately you would make us a voice, a pure unadulterated voice for the Gospel as long as you give us breath. We pray in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

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