

St. Paul Lutheran Church Sunday Morning Bible Class

Formula of Concord Series

Free Will

Preliminary Note

Four different states or stages are recognized in the discussion of the will of man:

- 1) The will of man before the Fall
- 2) The will of man after the Fall but prior to conversion
- 3) The will of man after conversion
- 4) The will of man after the resurrection of the dead

Our study centers on free will during the second state: After the Fall but prior to conversion.

The Question at Issue:

- A) Since the fall into sin and prior to conversion, man has the power to prepare himself for the reception of God's grace and to accept that grace, or,
- B) Since the fall into sin and prior to conversion, man possesses no positive spiritual powers, is hostile toward God, and can make no positive spiritual decisions or bring himself to faith.

Why It Matters

- 1) If man has the spiritual power to choose good prior to his conversion, then man must, at minimum, receive part of the credit for his own salvation.
- 2) If man has the spiritual power to choose good prior to his conversion, then Christ is not our only Savior, he is at best our co-savior, and at worst redundant.
- 3) If man can (and must) decide for Christ to be saved, then our outreach or mission work must be geared toward reasonable arguments rather than the candid presentation of law and gospel.

What the Bible Teaches

Romans 8:7-8 Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

John 15:16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God.

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ⁷ So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

Ephesians 2:1-5 And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Romans 10:17 So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

- 1) Man, as he is born, knows nothing of spiritual matters – other than the natural knowledge of God, which knowledge cannot, by itself, save him.
- 2) Man, as he is born, is not neutral toward God but is hostile toward him – God's enemy.
- 3) As a corpse cannot bring itself to life physically, so man is born spiritually dead and cannot bring himself to spiritual life.
- 4) God the Holy Spirit alone can create spiritual life, and he does so through means (the gospel).
- 5) Satan cannot create a substance; he can only, with God's permission, corrupt accidentally the substance which God has created.
- 6) At conversion, God the Holy Spirit does change stubborn and unwilling people into willing souls who do cooperate, however weakly, in the works which the Holy Spirit performs through Christians.

What the Bible Rejects

- 1) That man operates under a certain, unavoidable "fate" where all things are predetermined.
- 2) The Pelagian idea that man can, without any help from the Holy Spirit, bring himself to faith.
- 3) The semi-Pelagian teachings that a) man can begin the process of his own conversion, but cannot complete it without the Holy Spirit, or, b) the Holy Spirit begins the process but man finishes it.
- 4) Any notion that man can keep the law of God perfectly and entirely after conversion.
- 5) The idea that God the Holy Spirit effects conversion in the absence of (or without) means.
- 6) The error that some are brought to faith because they resist less than others.