

## Free Will

### Isaiah 1:18-20

Does man have free will, or has God already made every decision affecting his salvation? While we recognize that God is sovereign and has a plan for the world, we also understand that God has made each of us a free moral agent. If God predetermined every motive and intention on our part, how could we ever freely love and choose Him from our hearts? I do not believe that He has done so. I maintain that our choice to take up our cross and follow Jesus is not forced open us. We do so out of committed love and faith, not out of compulsion.

God in **1 Tim. 2:3-4** says, ***“This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*** God wants you to come to know Him, love Him, and to serve Him.

In our Scripture reading this morning we read **Isa. 1:18-20**, ***“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”***

The word **“if”** has but two letters, but it is one of the most crucial words of the Bible! In the passage in Isaiah, God wanted to reason with Israel so that they had taken a different path than the one they had taken earlier. They are spiritually sick; their worship is offensive to God because of their sin. In **verses 16-17** He told them, ***“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”***

They were sinners, but they didn’t have continue in sin. God was calling them to change, to cease their evil and to learn to do good. God believed

they could change, and expected them to as well, He had told them, ***“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”*** Now come the word ***“if”*** – ***“if you are willing and obedient, you shall eat of the good land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”***

Life is filled with so many choices, and we must learn to choose wisely. Since we have to live with the consequence of our choices, we must be careful to choose what is right. **The Bible teaches that we have that ability.** Many passages teach that man is free to choose between good and evil, and between God and Satan, and that man can change his choice.

In **Romans 2:6-11** we read that God ***“He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.”***

God has not arbitrarily chosen some for salvation and others for condemnation. He permits each person to make a choice to go for the good or to do evil. People can follow the commandments of God or they can refuse to obey the truth. We all choose what we follow. If we choose to follow God, we will find life and blessing; but if we choose to follow sin, we will only find death. We each choose what we will follow and who we will serve in this life, and this choice will affect the life to come.

Paul puts it this way in **Romans 6:16-18**, ***“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the***

***one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”***

Did you notice that the people who were at one time slaves of sin made the decision to leave that life? They were enslaved to sin but chose to break away and serve God – they wanted a new Master and therefore chose to leave the old one. How did they do this? They obeyed from the heart the standard of teach which the apostle taught them. They were not forced, they wanted to make the change.

Remember the prodigal son, he though he was serving himself, but actually he was really serving sin and Satan. He though he was free, but his sins were destroying him. Sin will lead you where you have nothing left, just like he had nothing left. When this young man finally came to his senses, he left the pig farm, confessed his sins and was penitent. He then decided to go home. He changed his ways; he didn't stay in sin.

The people that Peter preached to on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem were guilty of crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ. When they sought an answer for their guilt, Peter told them what they should do. He told them, ***“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).*** They were not told they could not do anything about their sins. They were not told that God had to work a miracle in their lives. No, they were told to repent and to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

Then in **verse 40** Peter continued and said, ***“Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”*** What did he mean by “save yourselves”? Am I suggesting that a person can earn his way into heaven? No way! **What**

**I am saying is what Peter said, that a person can and must repent and be baptized, for the forgiveness of sins, in order to respond in faith to God.** No one earns salvation, but we are given salvation when we respond to the gospel, you “save yourselves” by responding to the grace and the forgiveness that God offers to you. God is not going to save you against your will.

We were drowning in sin and God has thrown us a life preserver, but we have to grab on to be saved. God graciously provides our salvation through the blood of Jesus, but we have to respond by faith and obedience to that grace. We cannot save ourselves by our efforts, but we can respond to the gracious gift of salvation, and we have too! Wouldn't it be foolish to have God's rope of grace extended us and then respond to God, on no, I can't do anything to help save myself. Of course, we can do something, we can grab hold of the life that Christ purchased for us as such a great price.

On another occasion Peter wrote about how people are saved. In **1 Peter 1:22-23** he wrote, *“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God...”* People purify their souls when they hear and obey the gospel truth.

They are born again not through some miraculous movement of God but by obedience to the preaching of God's word. Paul put it this way in **Romans 1:16**, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* It is the gospel that saves us. Then in **1 Cor. 1:21** he said, *“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.”* It was God who decided to save man in this

way, giving them a gospel and saving them through their response to that message.

It is very clear throughout scripture that God has given man free will to accept or reject God's message, and throughout history people have made choices as to whether they will obey God or not. Late in his life Joshua addressed the people of Israel saying, (**Joshua 24:14-15**), ***“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*** Joshua knew people had freewill, they could choose which god they serve, whether the God in Heaven or the false gods of the people around them.

The prophet Elijah faced off against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah on Mt. Carmel. Before the challenge in **1 Kings 18:21**, Elijah went before the people and said, ***“How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.”*** At the end, once they had seen the evidence, they chose the God of heaven.

They had free will, and so do you! In **Rev. 22:17** we read, ***“The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”*** Let the one who hears – means everyone that heard, everyone who desires take the water of life without price. It must be desired and chosen, but this offer was open to all who hear.

In **2 Peter 3:9** we read, ***“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”*** God does not wish for anyone to be lost, but He will not make you repent. You have

to decide that for yourself. God allows you to make that decision; He won't make it for you.

The belief that God has predestined us for heaven or hell and that we have no choice in the matter, goes against the grain of Scripture. We do not see this in the O.T. and we do not see this in the N.T. If we cannot change why does God urge us to change, why does he urge us to believe? Why does he urge us to love Him? Why does He tell us to repent? Why does the Bible warn us against sin? Such language becomes absurd if we have no free will.

The very word temptation refers to a moral testing, to see whether we will choose right or wrong. Choice is involved. God in **1 Cor. 10:13** teaches, ***“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*** If people cannot make a choice to do right or wrong, they cannot be tempted; but every person faces temptation regularly.

You are not a puppet or a robot. You are a person made in God's image and accountable for your own choices. How can man be held accountable to God for his actions in judgment without free will? Only people with choice can be held responsible for their choices. Wouldn't God be unjust to condemn someone arbitrarily and eternally, when they had no way to choose for themselves?

The Bible is clear, God does not show partiality. Peter told Cornelius in **Acts 10:34-35**, ***“So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”*** God wonderfully, marvelously, graciously offers to us the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from sin. We can choose to be crucified with Christ and we can enjoy God's grace and forgiveness; or we can rebel against God and live our lives as we wish. God gives us the choice.

Sin, all sin, is a serious issue. When we choose to sin, we must face the consequences. Sin will not go away on its own. We cannot hide our sins from God; in fact, our sins come between God and us. Sin offends and separates us from God.

If sin is left unresolved; it will cost us our souls. That is why we need the blood of Jesus to be saved. How do we come in contact with the blood of Jesus?

By believing in Christ, repenting of our sins, confessing Jesus as the Christ, and by being baptized. When we from our heart obey the gospel, we are baptized into the death of Christ, and that is where the blood was shed. It is in baptism that God brings us into contact with the blood of Christ (see **Acts 22:16**). As has always been the case, it is our decision to make? How will you respond?