

"Free Will"

Does man have free will, or has God already made every decision affecting his salvation? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today we're asking if man is free to choose God, so stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search God's word for the Lord's will. The Lord's way is wise and good. It leads us in the path of righteousness and away from sin. The Lord's way leads us to love and blessing. No other path is so important to your soul. We're so happy to spend this time with you. We want to be a part of your life each week, and we ask that you tell a friend about our program.

Some people hold the view that God has already predetermined everything that we think or do. That God has made us the way we are, predetermined our motives and attitudes, and even predetermines the choices that we will make. According to them, we may think we are free to choose right or wrong, but God has already determined whether we will follow Him or follow the world to destruction.

While we recognize that God is sovereign and has a plan for this 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? If man has no free will, then he is but a puppet on a string. We maintain that our choice to take up our cross and follow Christ is not forced upon us. We do so out of committed love and faith, not out of compulsion.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 2 verses 3 to 4, "This is good, and it's 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, to love Him, and to serve Him. And so we study and we try to learn the truth so that we may know how to please Him and to be saved from sin. This allows us to live with Him eternally.

Now if you want to study more about this topic, we offer the information on this program free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, and we'll read from Isaiah chapter 1, verses 18 to 20, and then we'll explore the free moral agency of man.

Our reading from God's inspired word comes today from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 1, verses 18 to 20. "'Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the LORD, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword.' Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken." That's a reading from God's inspired, all-sufficient word. Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful that You have given us Your will so that we may understand it. And that You have taken time to reason with us through Your word. Oh Father help us to consent and to obey. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

The word "if" has but two letters, but it's one of the most crucial words of the Bible. In the passage in Isaiah, God wanted to reason with Israel so that they would take a different path than the one they had taken earlier. Now in that first chapter, chapter one, the people had abandoned and despised the Lord. They were spiritually sick; their worship was offensive to God because of their sin. God spoke

through the prophet Isaiah and told Israel in Isaiah chapter 1 verses 16 to 17, "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."

Oh, they were sinners, but they didn't have to continue in sin. They could change. They could cease their evil and they could learn to do good. God believed that they could change and expected them to do so. So he says, "'Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the LORD, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; and though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If, if you consent and obey, you'll eat the best of the land; But if, if you refuse and rebel, You'll be devoured by the sword.' Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 1:18 to 20).

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 to 11, the Bible says that God "will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God."

Now God hasn't arbitrarily chosen some people for salvation and other people for condemnation. He permits each person to make a choice either to go for the good or to do evil. People can follow the commandments of God or they can refuse to obey the truth. Now we're all choosing what we follow. If we choose to follow God, we'll find life and blessing; but if we choose to follow sin, we'll only find death. We each are choosing what we will follow and serve in this life, and it will affect the next life.

In Romans 6 verses 16 to 18 God's Word says, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, that you're 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, you have become slaves of righteousness." Now you make the choice of your master. You'll present yourselves to someone as an obedient slave.

Now 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 they were still able to make a choice. They could leave their old master and come to a new master. They could be freed from that sin, the sin that was destroying them and serve a master who would give them eternal life. They did this by obeying from the heart. They weren't forced. They wanted to make a change.

Remember the prodigal son, he thought he was serving himself, but actually he was really serving sin and Satan. He thought 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 boy finally came to his senses he left the pig farm, confessing his sins and penitent. And he decided to go home. He changed his ways. He didn't have to stay in sin, and he wasn't going to!

The people that Peter preached to on the day of Pentecost were guilty of crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ. When they sought for an answer to their guilt, they asked Peter well what shall we do. And Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2 and verse 38). Now they

weren't told they could do nothing about their sins. They were not told that God would have to work a miracle in their lives. Oh no, they were told to repent and to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

Now Peter then said in Acts 2 and verse 40, "Save yourselves from this perverse generation." Well what does that mean, "Save yourselves"? Are we suggesting that a person can earn his way to heaven? No, by no means. We're saying 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's not going to save you against your will.

Now if you're drowning, and I throw you a rope and a life preserver, don't you have to grab hold? God graciously provides our salvation through the blood of Jesus, but we have to respond by faith and obedience to that grace. We can't save ourselves by our own efforts, but we can respond to the gracious gift of salvation, and we have to. Wouldn't it be foolish to have God's rope of grace extended us and then we just throw up our hands and say oh we can't do anything. Of course, we can do something. We can grab hold of the life that Christ purchased for us at such a great price.

On another occasion the same inspired apostle Peter wrote about how people are saved. He wrote in 1 Peter 1:22 to 23, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring 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 the Word of God. It is the gospel that saves (Romans 1 and verse 16). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." Now this was God's choice of how to save people, giving them a gospel and saving them through their response to that message.

That man has free will to accept the gospel message or to reject it is also very clear in the Scriptures. Throughout history people have made choices as to whether they will obey God or not. You'll remember that Joshua late in his life addressed the people of Israel. And he says in Joshua 24 verses 14 to 15, "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if it's disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; (and then he says) but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua knew people could choose which god they serve, whether the God of Heaven or some other false god. They had freewill.

The prophet Elijah faced off against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah on Mount Carmel. You'll remember the prophets of Baal were completely overcome by the God of Heaven when the fire came down and consumed Elijah's sacrifice. Now before the challenge in 1 Kings 18 verse 21 Elijah went before the people and he said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." Of course, Baal was just an idol and was never anything but a figment of the people's imagination. The God of Heaven, however, was real and sent fire down from heaven, which convinced the people to kill the prophets of Baal. When the people saw the evidence, they chose God and rejected Baal.

They had free will, and my friend so do you. In Revelation 22 verse 17 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 wishes take the water of life without cost. God invites us to believe and obey! The gospel promises blessings and He gives them to "whosoever will." Whosoever means anybody, anyone and everyone who wants to who wants to come to the Lord they may come to the Lord.

The Bible says in 2 Peter 3 and verse 9, that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." God doesn't wish anybody 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 we have no choice in the matter goes against the grain of Scripture. If we cannot change, why does the Bible urge us to believe? Why does it urge us to love God? Why does it tell us to repent? Why does the Bible warn us about sin? You see, such language becomes absurd if you have no free will.

The very word temptation refers to a moral testing, whether we will choose to do right or give in to the wrong. Choice is involved. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 13, that "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will 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're not a puppet or a robot. You're a person made in God's image and accountable for your choices. Now if a person were arbitrarily predestined to heaven or hell, no matter what choices he made, how could God be just? 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 that person could not choose? The God of all grace is not so monstrous, no.

God does not show partiality. Peter told the first Gentile convert Cornelius in Acts 10 verse 34 and 35, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome 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. Oh friend, what will you choose, what will you do? Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that you give us the opportunity to love You, to believe and trust in You, to Know You, and to obey You. Father help us to be the kind of people that are willing to do all of those things. May Your will be done in our lives on this earth, just as it's done in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Now, sin, all sin, is a serious issue. When we choose to sin, we must face the consequences. We can't ignore our sins and hope they'll go away. We can't wish our sins away. We can't blame anyone else. We can't hide our sins from God. Sin is that huge issue coming between God and us. Sin offends God and it separates us from Him. God will not simply forget what we did. Sin has to be dealt with.

Sin that's left unresolved will cost us our souls. And that's why we need the blood of Jesus to be saved. How do we come into contact with that blood? By believing in Christ, repenting of our sins, confessing Jesus as the Christ, and by being baptized. When we from the heart obey the gospel, we're baptized into the death of Christ, and that's where the blood was shed. It's in baptism that the blood of Jesus is applied to our souls, and washes them clean. That's the time our sins are washed away (Acts 22 and verse 16). My friend, do you want to be saved today?

You have to make a choice. You can rebel against God and stay in your sins, or you can come to Christ. You can live your life on your own terms or you can listen to the Lord. Today is the very best day you'll ever have to change your life, to leave the old man of sin behind, and to follow the Lord. Oh, I hope you'll be like the prodigal son and come to your senses. Isn't it time to come back home to God and to the abundant life in Christ. God has given you free will. Use it. God is offering you eternal life in Christ. Why not grab hold of life and never, never, let it go?

We hope that today's study of God's Word has blessed you or challenged you to think, especially about your soul. If you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, then mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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Please worship with a church of Christ in your area. They're the reason that we don't ask for money. If you're looking for a church home, we'll be happy to help you find a good solid church. Churches of Christ love and want guests, and you'll be glad you worshipped with them. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about the Search program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.