**Is our will really free? *John 8:31–36***

**Opening Clarifications**

*What \_\_\_\_\_\_ of freedom are we considering?*

The role of the human will in coming to Christ. Will an unregenerate person trust Jesus without any external compulsion or must there be a prior work done \_\_\_ us to allow us to come

*What is the will?*

What is the will? Most simply, **the will is the mechanism by which humans make \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**.

*The concept of “free will” ultimately boils down to a question of desires. What does the human will most \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?*

*Four eras of freedom*

The Bible speaks of the nature of man in four distinct ways:

• There is man as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Man was originally created in a state of goodness and innocence. Though we do not know how long this condition lasted, it covers only two chapters of the Bible.

• Since Genesis 3, we see man as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Fallen man is fundamentally different from man as he was originally created. He was no longer innocent or good.

• There is a third way of understanding man, man as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Regeneration refers to the work of God to transfer a man or woman out of darkness and into light, out of death and into life. John 3 calls this reality being “born again.” The regenerate state is also a temporary condition awaiting the consummation of God’s work in eternity.

• Man as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ describes the final state in which God’s work of redemption will be complete.

***What is the fallen human will \_\_\_\_?***

**The Reality of Unregenerate Bondage**

The human will universally inherited in Adam is not born into a state of neutrality and apathy. Fallen humanity is naturally (that is, by nature) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and depraved. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:3, we are “by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” This fallen nature has limitations.

***It cannot not sin***. All it desires (wills) is sin.

Sin is not merely external action, but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ affections and motivations. As the Bible states, anything done in unbelief (Romans 14:23) or done without respect to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31) falls short of righteousness.

Because we \_\_\_\_ (desire) sin, we \_\_\_\_ (do) sin. We are “willing” participants in sin, and all we can do is sin.

The question is not***, “Can we do what we want?”*** but ***“\_\_\_\_\_\_ do we want?***

As long as we conceive ourselves as neutral in our longings and desires, we will assume a false foundation for understanding the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of our freedom or bondage.

The biblical depiction of fallen mankind is desperate, dark and dire. Consider the following descriptions of an unregenerate person:

• Our eyes are blind to the glories of the gospel (Matthew 13:14-15; John 12:39-40; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

• Our minds are darkened and hostile toward God (Romans 8:7; Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 1:21).

• Our ears are deaf to the call of our Creator (Matthew 13:14-15).

• Our hearts are darkened and deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 1:21).

• We are enslaved to sin (John 8:34; Romans 6:17; Galatians 4:8).

• We are foolish (Romans 1:21; Titus 3:3).

• We hate God (John 3:19-20).

• We are dead (Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13).

Considering the biblical depiction of mankind, the type of freedom that many simply assume to be true is grounded in an \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ understanding of what has happened to man in the Fall.

Fallen freedom consists of the ability to do what one desires; though, those desires are universally directed away from Creator and toward creation.

**Considering the Objections**

Do we have a choice?

We do indeed have a choice and are free to choose as we wish, but the reality of our depravity reveals that we all choose \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Not one fallen man in a trillion will trust God unless God first overcomes his natural resistance. This God mercifully and graciously does for the elect.

**Is this unfair?**

Jonathan Edwards provided a helpful approach to answering this in his *distinction between natural and moral inability*.

**We possess a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ inability**. Though we are truly bound, our bondage is a result of our own desires. We are responsible because we have willfully rebelled. We reject Christ not because we are restrained by rope, but because we are hindered by our hatred of God. We are shackled only by our own selfish loves.

Some people might object that they were born this way and did not elect Adam to be man’s representative (Romans 5:12-21) in the garden. They did not eat the fruit and, thus, should not be subject to fallen futility or the consequent judgment.

Yet, with every sin we commit, we evidence the justice of God’s decree by casting our vote \_\_\_\_ Adam’s sin. By virtue of our ongoing rebellion, we demonstrate that we accept our allegiance to our Adamic head and fully merit the forfeiture of the degree and type of freedom that mankind once possessed. We are not simply third or fourth generation children born into a slavery inherited from our forefathers. We are prisoners of a war in which we were and **continue to be willing combatants**.

**Conclusion**

Do we have free will? It depends on what we mean by free will, and it depends on who you mean by “we.”

The freedom that Adam and Eve possessed prior to the Fall is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from the freedom experienced by all humanity after the Fall.

Furthermore, these two types of freedom are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from the freedom experienced as a regenerate believer and what he or she will experience in the eternal state.

It might be helpful to distinguish between two terms in understanding this. This distinction boils down to a differentiation between “\_\_\_\_ freedom” and “freedom of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

***True freedom consists of the ability to act without the hindrances of sin***, whereas ***freedom of choice consists in the ability to do as you wish.***

Here is a helpful way to remember the four different eras and the types of freedom experienced within each:

1. Human beings as created had both true freedom and freedom of choice.
2. Human being as fallen forfeited true freedom but retained freedom of choice.
3. Human beings as regenerate have regained a measure of true freedom while retaining freedom of choice.
4. Human beings as glorified will be perfected in true freedom and will retain freedom of choice.

If understood correctly, we can affirm the reality of free will but not without properly interpreting the term through the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of Scripture.

Fallen creatures are free to do what they want. All they want is sin. God overcomes that desire in the elect and creates in them a new desire which subsequently inclines to God and His promises. This inclination is hopefully growing now as they mature, but will certainly one day be fulfilled as the residue of their flesh is destroyed and they experience the fullness of resurrection.