

Free (?) Will (?) !

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"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done." (Revelation 22:12)

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:2-10)

"Faith's role in justification is purely instrumental, faith is... like the empty hand of a beggar receiving a gift, it alone (sola fide) is the appropriate vehicle to receive reconciliation, forgiveness, Christ and His merits.."
(Robert D. Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," Concordia Theological Quarterly 45 (1981)172)

What is free will?

What do you believe about free will?

What does the world believe about free will?

What does the Church believe, teach, and confess about free will?

Luther: On the UnFree Will, a.k.a. "The Bondage of the Will":
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/bondage.pdf>

Free Will

Q. What does the LCMS believe regarding man's freedom of will?

A. The Lutheran Cyclopedia (Erwin L. Lueker, editor; Concordia Publishing House, 1975) contains the following helpful summary of the Lutheran understanding of what Scripture teaches regarding the freedom of the will:

The Scriptural doctrine of the freedom of the human will is closely connected with the doctrine of original sin (see Sin, Original). The doctrine of the freedom of the human will after the fall of man must be studied from the viewpoint of original sin. Scripture emphatically declares that man, also after the fall, continues to be a responsible moral agent, who in earthly matters, to some extent, may exercise freedom of will; but it asserts that "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, . . . neither can he know them" (1 Co. 2:14); that man, by nature, is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1); that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Ro 8:7) and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Co 12:3).

Accordingly, Scripture denies to man after the fall and before conversion freedom of will in spiritual matters, and asserts that conversion is accomplished entirely through the Holy Ghost by the Gospel. God "hath saved us, . . . not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace" (2 Ti 1:9); "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned" (Jer. 31:18).

Accordingly, Article 18 of the Augsburg Confession ("Freedom of the Will") states:

It is also taught among us that man possesses some measure of freedom of the will which enables him to live an outwardly honorable life and to make choices among the things that reason comprehends. But without the grace, help, and activity of the Holy Spirit man is not capable of making himself acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with his whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lusts from his heart.

This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God, for Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:14, "Natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God."

Additional Scripture passages which may be helpful as you study and discuss this issue are: John 1:12–13; 15:16–19; Rom. 10:14–17; Eph. 1:4; 2:1–9; Col. 3:12; 2 Thess. 2:13.

Of the Election of Grace

(St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, N.D.)

[Adopted 1932]

35. By the election of grace we mean this truth, that all those who by the grace of God alone, for Christ's sake, through the means of grace, are brought to faith, are justified, sanctified, and preserved in faith here in time, that all these have already from eternity been endowed by God with faith, justification, sanctification, and preservation in faith, and this for the same reason, namely, by grace alone, for Christ's sake, and by way of the means of grace. That this is the doctrine of the Holy Scripture is evident from Eph. 1:3–7; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28–30; 2 Tim. 1:9; Matt. 24:22–24 (cp. Form. of Conc. Triglot, p. 1065, Paragraphs 5, 8, 23; M., p. 705).

36. Accordingly we reject as an anti-Scriptural error the doctrine that not alone the grace of God and the merit of Christ are the cause of the election of grace, but that God has, in addition, found or regarded something good in us which prompted or caused Him to elect us, this being variously designated as "good works," "right conduct," "proper self-determination," "refraining from willful resistance," etc. Nor does Holy Scripture know of an election "by foreseen faith," "in view of faith," as though the faith of the elect were to be placed before their election; but according to Scripture the faith which the elect have in time belongs to the spiritual blessings with which God has endowed them by His eternal election. For Scripture teaches Acts 13:48: "And as many as were ordained unto eternal life believed." Our Lutheran Confession also testifies (Triglot, p. 1065, Paragraph 8; M. p. 705): "The eternal election of God however, not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but is also, from the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus, a cause which procures, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what pertains thereto; and upon this our salvation is so founded that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, Matt. 16:18, as is written John 10:28: `Neither shall any man pluck My sheep out of My hand'; and again, Acts 13:48: `And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed..'"

37. But as earnestly as we maintain that there is an election of grace, or a predestination to salvation, so decidedly do we teach, on the other hand, that there is no election of wrath, or predestination to damnation. Scripture plainly reveals the truth that the love of God for the world of lost sinners is universal, that is, that it embraces all men without exception, that Christ has fully reconciled all men unto God, and that God earnestly desires to bring all men to faith, to preserve them therein, and thus to save them, as Scripture testifies, 1 Tim. 2:4: "God will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." No man is lost because God has predestined him to eternal damnation. -- Eternal election is a cause why the elect are brought to faith in time, Acts 13:48; but election is not a cause why men remain unbelievers when they hear the Word of God. The reason assigned by Scripture for this sad fact is that these men judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life, putting the Word of God from them and obstinately resisting the Holy Ghost, whose earnest will it is to bring also them to repentance and faith by means of the Word, Act 13:46; 7:51; Matt. 23:37.

38. To be sure, it is necessary to observe the Scriptural distinction between the election of grace and the universal will of grace. This universal gracious will of God embraces all men; the election of grace, however, does not embrace all, but only a definite number, whom "God hath from the beginning chosen

to salvation," 2 Thess. 2:13, the "remnant," the "seed" which "the Lord left," Rom. 9:27–29, the "election," Rom. 11:7; and while the universal will of grace is frustrated in the case of most men, Matt. 22:14; Luke 7:30, the election of grace attains its end with all whom it embraces, Rom. 8:28–30. Scripture, however, while distinguishing between the universal will of grace and the election of grace, does not place the two in opposition to each other. On the contrary, it teaches that the grace dealing with those who are lost is altogether earnest and fully efficacious for conversion. Blind reason indeed declares these two truths to be contradictory; but we impose silence on our reason. The seeming disharmony will disappear in the light of heaven, 1 Cor. 13:12.

39. Furthermore, by election of grace, Scripture does not mean that one part of God's counsel of salvation according to which He will receive into heaven those who persevere in faith unto the end, but, on the contrary, Scripture means this, that God, before the foundation of the world, from pure grace, because of the redemption of Christ, has chosen for His own a definite number of persons out of the corrupt mass and has determined to bring them through Word and Sacrament, to faith and salvation.

40. Christians can and should be assured of their eternal election. This is evident from the fact that Scripture addresses them as the chosen ones and comforts them with their election, Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13. This assurance of one's personal election, however, springs only from faith in the Gospel, from the assurance that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; on the contrary, through the life, suffering, and death of His Son He fully reconciled the whole world of sinners unto Himself. Faith in this truth leaves no room for the fear that God might still harbor thoughts of wrath and damnation concerning us. Scripture inculcates that in Rom. 8:32, 33: "He that spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Luther's pastoral advice is therefore in accord with Scripture: "Gaze upon the wounds of Christ and the blood shed for you; there predestination will shine forth." (St. Louis ed., II, 181; on Gen. 26:9) That the Christian obtains the personal assurance of his eternal election in this way is taught also by our Lutheran Confessions (Formula of Concord, Triglot, p. 1071, Paragraph 26, M. 709): "Of this we should not judge according to our reason nor according to the Law or from any external appearance. Neither should we attempt to investigate the secret, concealed abyss of divine predestination, but should give heed to the revealed will of God. For He has made known unto us the mystery of His will and made it manifest through Christ that it might be preached, Eph. 1:9ff.; 2 Tim. 1:9f." -- In order to insure the proper method of viewing eternal election and the Christian's assurance of it, the Lutheran Confessions set forth at length the principle that election is not to be considered "in a bare manner (nude), as though God only held a muster, thus: `This one shall be saved, that one shall be damned'" (Formula of Concord, Triglot, p. 1065, Paragraph 9; M., p. 706); but "the Scriptures teach this doctrine in no other way than to direct us thereby to the Word, Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 1:7; exhort to repentance, 2 Tim. 3:16; urge to godliness, Eph. 1:14; John 15:3; strengthen faith and assure us of our salvation, Eph. 1:13; John 10:27f.; 2 Thess. 2:13f." (Formula of Concord, Triglot, p. 1067, Paragraph 12; M., p. 707). -- To sum up, just as God in time draws the Christian unto Himself through the Gospel, so He has already in His eternal election endowed them with "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," 2 Thess. 2:13. Therefore: If, by the grace of God, you believe in the Gospel of the forgiveness of your sins for Christ's sake, you are to be certain that you also belong to the number of God's elect, even as Scripture, 2 Thess. 2:13, addresses the believing Thessalonians as the chosen of God and gives thanks to God for their election.