

Thy Will Be Done: What the Bible Says about the Will of God and the Will of Man

A Christ on Campus Retreat
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I, A Poor Miserable Sinner

What is man? How far have we fallen? This session will outline a strongly Biblical and uniquely Lutheran anthropology centering around the four states of man's will: before the fall, after the fall, after baptism and after the resurrection.

Original Sin Must Be Revealed

It is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

(Romans 3:10-19)

This hereditary sin is so deep and horrible a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be learned and believed from the revelation of Scriptures, Psalm 51:5; Romans 6:12ff; Exodus 33:3; Genesis 3:7ff. [Martin Luther, *Smalcald Articles* III.I.3]

Original Sin is Universally Denied

- "I'm a good person."
- "What kind of ethical philosophy is it that condemns every child, even before it is born, to inherit the sin of a remote ancestor?" [Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 253]
- "Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love." [Baptist Faith and Message (2000)]
- "[Original sin] is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin-an inclination to evil that is called 'concupiscence.'" [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 405]

Regarding concupiscence: "This concupiscence, which the Apostle sometimes calls sin,

the holy council declares the Catholic Church has never understood to be called sin in the sense that it is truly and properly sin in those born again, but in the sense that it is of sin and inclines to sin." [The Council of Trent, Session V.5]

- "Nor do I absolve my own self of blame: the human soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His Mercy: but surely my Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful." [The Quran 12.53]
- Man is responsible for sin because he is endowed with free will; yet he is by nature frail, and the tendency of the mind is to evil: "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. viii. 21) [Jewish Encyclopedia]
- Also they teach that since the fall of Adam all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this *disease*, or *vice of origin*, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost.

They condemn the Pelagians and others who deny that original depravity is sin, and who, to obscure the glory of Christ's merit and benefits, argue that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason. [The Augsburg Confession, Article II: Original Sin]

- 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. (Ephesians 2:1-3)
- The denial of original sin means that most people live in the delusion of their own freedom.
- The law comes to show us the depths to which we have fallen, our complete inability to love, serve and fear God, our complete lack of freedom, and so our utter dependence on Jesus for freedom, life and salvation.

Original Sin is the Foundation of the Gospel

- The article of Justification is the article upon which the church stands or falls. The article of original sin is the article upon which justification stands or falls.
- But the knowledge of original sin is necessary. For the magnitude of the grace of Christ cannot be understood and no one can heartily long and have a desire for Christ, for the inexpressibly great treasure of divine favor and grace which the Gospel offers, unless our diseases be recognized. As Christ says Matt. 9, 12; Mark 2, 17: *They that are whole need not a physician*. The entire righteousness of man is mere hypocrisy and abomination before God, unless we acknowledge that our heart is naturally destitute of love, fear, and confidence in God that we are miserable sinners who are in disgrace with God. [Apology to the Augsburg Confession, II.33-34]
- The depth of our sin puts the "alone" in front of grace, in front of faith, in front of Christ. (Psalm 130)

The Four States of Man's Will

- This is the golden clarity that a uniquely Lutheran anthropology provides.
- The state of man's will may be considered in four unique states: (1) before the fall, (2) after the fall, (3) after baptism, and (4) after the resurrection (in eternal life).
- **Before the Fall:** *posse non peccare*, able not to sin
- **After the Fall:** *non posse non peccare*, not able not to sin
- **After Baptism:** *non posse non peccare, non posse peccare*, not able not to sin and not able to sin (saint and sinner)
- **After the Resurrection:** *non posse peccare*, not able to sin

Conclusion: We're stuck! We need help.

Get Out of Jail Free

Can you make a decision for Christ? How are we converted, and what is our part in that? What is repentance? Threading the Biblical needle we can avoid Calvinism on one side and Armenianism on the other. How? By focusing on the means of conversion: the means of grace.

If Man Retains Some Freedom, then Salvation must be an act of man's free will

- Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. **[Baptist Faith and Message]**
- Accepting Jesus. Making a decision. Altar calls, etc.

Decisionism: Out!

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” [Ephesians 2:1, see also 2:5 and Colossians 2:13]

“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.” [1 Corinthians 2:14]

“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” [Galatians 5:17]

“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” [Ephesians 4:18]

“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.” [Romans 8:7]

“The light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” [John 1:5]

Monergism: In! (Grace Alone)

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 2:8-10]

Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” [Acts 11:18]

“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.” [Matthew 11:27]

“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” [Matthew 13:11]

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. [1 John 5:20]

“For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” [2 Corinthians 4:6]

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. [Romans 1:16]

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. [Romans 10:17]

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. [*Small Catechism*]

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” [John 15:5]

“You did not choose Me, but I choose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.” [John 15:16]

Repentance

Faith

Means of Grace

Luther Against the Heavenly Prophets

We treat the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and give to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But He has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There He has distributed and given it through the Word, and also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world.

Martin Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*

AE 40.213-214

Picking My Outfit, Picking My God

What is God's will for my life? How do I know it? How do I keep it? In this session we will look at the practical outcome of our anthropology and study the places in our life where the Lord has given us freedom.

The Christian is Free

- So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. **John 8:36**
- For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. **Galatians 5:1**
- Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. **1 Peter 2:16**
- From sin, the fear of death, the law, free to love.
- While our wills are not free regarding things above us (ie we cannot fear, love and trust in God), our wills are free regarding things below us.
- So in Christ we are free from working to earn God's approval (we have that in Christ), and now we may love and serve our neighbor.
- Instead of serving self, we give our lives away. (We die in our vocation is death; we die in love.)

Vocation: Calling

- The Christian is given different stations in life.
- Church, Home, State.
- The key word in vocation is: love.

Vocation makes sin into a good work

- Consider the soldier (and the 5th commandment), the spouse (and the 6th commandment), and the doctor (and the 5th and 6th and 7th commandment!).
- One man pulls out a gun and shoots another. (Soldier)
- A man and a woman in intimate embrace. (Husband and Wife)
- I'm sitting in a room naked waiting for another man to walk into the room. (Doctor)
- Or, said another way, leaving the boundary of our vocation is always a sin.

Faith and Love

- *We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor* (Martin Luther, AE 31:371).
- And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. (1 John 3:23)
- By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our

lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

- Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

Fleshly Flip

- The flesh always flips things around, orders them the opposite way God has them.
- Love toward God and faith toward the neighbor.
- Free toward God, in bondage toward the neighbor.
- Creative with the Gospel, traditional with the law.

What is God's will for my life?

- I'm not free to sin.
- I'm free to love.

Election: The Theologian's Final Exam

What does the Scripture teach about election? Who is doing the choosing? Why do some people believe while others do not? In this session we will see how the Scriptures hold universal grace and grace alone in the balance and give us the doctrine of election as a doctrine of comfort.

It has been well said that the in the doctrine of election a theologian takes his final exam.
Francis Peiper *Christian Dogmatics* III.503

Election Comes Last

- Follow the order of Romans.
- Therefore, if we wish to think or speak correctly and profitably concerning eternal election, or the predestination and ordination of the children of God to eternal life, we should accustom ourselves not to speculate concerning the bare, secret, concealed, inscrutable foreknowledge of God, but how the counsel, purpose, and ordination of God in Christ Jesus, who is the true Book of Life, is revealed to us through the Word, namely, that the entire doctrine concerning the purpose, counsel, will, and ordination of God pertaining to our redemption, call, justification, and salvation should be taken together; as Paul treats and has explained this article Rom. 8, 29f ; Eph. 1, 4f , as also Christ in the parable, Matt. 22, 1ff. [*Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*. XI.13-14]
- With this revealed will of God we should concern ourselves, follow and be diligently engaged upon it, because through the Word, whereby He calls us, the Holy Ghost bestows grace, power, and ability to this end, and should not [attempt to] sound the abyss of God's hidden predestination, as it is written in Luke 13, 24, where one asks: *Lord, are there few that be saved?* and Christ answers: *Strive to enter in at the strait gate.* Accordingly, Luther says in the Preface to the Epistle to the Romans: *Follow the Epistle to the Romans in its order, concern yourself first with Christ and His Gospel, that you may recognize your sins and His grace; next, that you contend with sin, as Paul teaches from the first to the eighth chapter; then, when in the eighth chapter you will come into temptation under the cross and afflictions, this will teach you in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters how consolatory predestination is, etc.* [*Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*. XI.33]
- Election remains clear and comforting when we hold forth these three teaching:
- Grace Alone
- Universal Grace
 - “For this reason Christ has *commanded that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations. For God loved the world and gave His Son, [John 3:16]. Christ bore the sins of the world, [John 1:29], gave His flesh for the life of the world, [John 6:51]; His blood is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, [1 John 1:7; 2:2].* Christ says: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, [Matthew 11:28]. God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all, [Romans 11:32].*
 - *The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, [2 Peter 3:9]. The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him, [Romans 10:12]. The righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe, [Romans 3:22]. This is the will of Him*

that sent Me, that every one that sees the Son and believes on Him may have everlasting life, [John 6:40]. Likewise it is Christ's command that to all in common to whom repentance is preached this promise of the Gospel also should be offered [Luke 24:47; Mark 16:15]." [Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration. XI.28, Triglotta]

- The Means of Grace

Reason Throws us Off the Track

- When we put the teaching of election first rather than last, when we try to build our theology on it, everything runs amuck.
- Danger on both sides:
 - If God Elects some to salvation, then He must elect the others to damnation (double predestination)
 - The *Crux Theologorum*: Why some and not others?
- Answer: There is no answer, or: every answer is wrong.
- Calvin answers that the difference is in God: saves some, damns others.
- Armenius says the answer is in man: some believed while others didn't.
- It is really two different questions with two different answers: Why some? God's grace alone. Why not others? Man's sinfulness.
- And, the Scriptures never balance God's grace with His judgment.
- Matthew 25: Sheep go to the place prepared for them, Goats to the place prepared for the devil.
- Romans 9:22-23: God endures the vessels of wrath for the sake of the glory prepared for the vessels of mercy.
- If I'm elect I'm good, so I can live however I want. If I'm not elect there's no hope. (false security and impenitence on the one hand, despair on the other) We know that this teaching of election is wrong (reason's teaching, not the Bible's) because the Scripture excludes both false security and despair:
- All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Election of Grace: A Doctrine of Comfort

- You a damnable sinner.
- Jesus died for you.
- The Holy Spirit gives you the promise of the forgiveness of all of your sins and the faith to believe it.
- This promise is continually given to you in the means of grace and the preaching of the Gospel, that we would endure and at last come to everlasting life.
- After all this the Lord says, "I planned this all from the beginning."

Luther on Election

"God says to you: 'Behold, you have My Son. Listen to Him, and receive Him. If you do this,

you are already sure about your faith and salvation.' 'But I do not know,' you will say, 'whether I am remaining in faith.' At all events, accept the present promise and the predestination, and do not inquire too curiously about the secret counsels of God. If you believe in the revealed God and accept His Word, He will gradually also reveal the hidden God; for 'He who sees Me also sees the Father,' as John 14:9 says. He who rejects the Son also loses the unrevealed God along with the revealed God. But if you cling to the revealed God with a firm faith, so that your heart is so minded that you will not lose Christ even if you are deprived of everything, then you are most assuredly predestined, and you will understand the hidden God. Indeed, you understand Him even now if you acknowledge the Son and His will, namely, that He wants to reveal Himself to you, that He wants to be your Lord and your Savior. Therefore you are sure that God is also your Lord and Father.

"Observe how pleasantly and kindly God delivers you from this horrible trial with which Satan besets people today in strange ways in order to make them doubtful and uncertain, and eventually even to alienate them from the Word. 'For why should you hear the Gospel,' they say, 'since everything depends on predestination?' In this way he robs us of the predestination guaranteed through the Son of God and the sacraments. He makes us uncertain where we are completely certain. And if he attacks timid consciences with this trial, they die in despair, as would almost have happened to me if Staupitz had not delivered me from the same trial when I was troubled. But if they are despisers, they become the worst Epicureans. Therefore we should rather impress these statements on our hearts, such as John 6:44: 'No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him.' Through whom? Through Me. 'He who sees Me also sees the Father' (cf. John 14:9). And God says to Moses: 'You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live' (Ex. 33:20). And we read (Acts 1:7): 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But go, and carry out what I command.' Likewise (Ecclus. 3:22): 'Seek not the things that are too high for you, and search not into things above your ability; but the things that God has commanded you, think on them always, and in many of His works be not curious.' Listen to the incarnate Son, and predestination will present itself of its own accord.

"Staupitz used to comfort me with these words: 'Why do you torture yourself with these speculations? Look at the wounds of Christ and at the blood that was shed for you. From these predestination will shine. Consequently, one must listen to the Son of God, who was sent into the flesh and appeared to destroy the work of the devil ([1 John 3:8](#)) and to make you sure about predestination. And for this reason He says to you: "You are My sheep because you hear My voice" (cf. John 10:27). 'No one shall snatch you out of My hands'" **Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 5:46-47**

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches

of his grace,⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight. [*Ephesians 1:3-8*]