

FREEDOM and DEPRAVITY**DEFINITIONS:**

Free will is normally conceived of as an equal ability or power to accept or reject something. In relation to the gospel it is the belief that man, within his own nature, is as able to believe as to disbelieve.

Do people have 'free will' in the sense that it is defined above? The Bible says they do not.

"It is simplistic and misleading to say, without qualification, "man is free" or "man is not free." To say that man has free agency is to say he is free to do what he wants. If he wants to reject Christ, he can. If he wants to accept Christ, he can. In brief, **the human will is free to choose whatever the heart desires.**

However, apart from the interposition of divine grace, no one wants or wills to have Christ in his thinking or in his life.

All people freely and voluntarily and willingly reject the gospel because it is their heart's desire to do so.
A person's freedom consists in the ability to act according to one's desires and inclinations without being compelled to do otherwise by something or someone external to himself. So long as one's choice is the voluntary fruit of one's desire, the will is free. This is what I mean when I say, "Yes, all people are free moral agents."

On the other hand, to say that a person has free will is to say that he has equal ability or power to accept or reject the gospel. It is to say that he is as able to believe as to disbelieve, and that this ability springs from his own making and is native to him notwithstanding his fallen and sinful state. If this is what you mean when you ask me, "Is man free?" my answer, or rather, the answer of the Bible, is "No." A man's will is the extension and invariable expression of his nature. As he is, so he wills. A man is no more free to act or to will or to choose contrary to his nature than an apple tree is free to produce acorns." (Sam Storms)

As we will see, man is not free.

- He is bound by his sinful nature – he is a slave to sin. He has no will to choose Christ. We call this "total depravity."
- He is bound by the restraint of God; God does not allow every desire in the heart of man to be acted out. We call this activity of God "common grace."

Total Depravity "According to this doctrine, man in his present condition since the fall is so polluted with a principle of evil that every aspect of his being and personality is affected by it. The term depravity refers to the moral disposition or inclination of fallen man's nature toward evil and against good. This principle of sin and moral pollution is such that man is by nature opposed to what is true and righteous. The inclination of his heart, the delight of his soul, the orientation of his will is toward wickedness. Nothing compels him to sin. He sins because he loves it. He revels in it. He has no taste for God, but relishes evil and pursues it with voluntary zeal." (Sam Storms)

Genesis 6:5 Genesis 8:21 Job 14:4 Job 15:14-16 Psalm 51:5 Psalm 58:1-5 Proverbs 22:15 Jeremiah 13:23
Jeremiah 17:9 John 3:6 John 5:40 John 6:44 Romans 3:10-18 Romans 8:5-8 Romans 9:16 1 Corinthians 2:14
Ephesians 2:1 Ephesians 4:17-19 2 Timothy 2:25

If man's inclination is continually toward wickedness then why isn't the world worse than it is? Why are there people who are good, generous, and kind? I believe the answer is found in the principle of common grace.

Common Grace is the undeserved favor that God shows to all creation.

The first aspect of common grace is the restraint of sin. Although God's restraining of sin and its effects is "neither complete (else no sin would exist at all) nor uniform (else all men would be equally evil or good), it is of such a nature that the expression and effects of human depravity are not permitted to reach the maximum height of which they are capable." (Sam Storms) (2 Kings 19:27-28; 2 Thess. 2:6). In addition, He also holds in check the destructive tendencies that are part of the curse of sin upon nature (Gen. 3:17 and 9:2-5), and withholds the immediate judgment that sin deserves. That is to say, in common grace God not only restrains the sin of man but also the execution of the full measure of judgment which sin demands. This latter element of restraint is especially evident in such texts as Genesis 6:3; 1 Peter 3:20; Acts 17:30; Romans 2:4; and 2 Peter 3:9.

The second aspect of common grace is more positive in thrust. God not only restrains the sinful operations and effects of the human heart, He also bestows upon both nature and humanity manifold blessings both physical and spiritual. Psalm 104:10-30; 145:1-16; and 136:25. God endows people with "gifts, talents, and aptitudes; he stimulates them with interest and purpose to the practice of virtues, the pursuance of worthy tasks, and the cultivation of arts and sciences that occupy the time, activity and energy of men and that make for the benefit and civilization of the human race." (John Murray). We read about this manifestation of common grace in Genesis 39:5; Acts 14:16-17; Matthew 5:44-45; Luke 6:35-36; 16:25. It is because of such operations of common grace that the unregenerate may be said to perform "good" (cf. 2 Kings 10:30; 12:2; Matt. 5:46; Luke 6:33; Rom. 2:14-15).

Consequently, when we speak of total depravity we do not mean that all men are as depraved as they possibly could be, nor that the depravity of their heart will always manifest itself equally in all respects at all times. Total depravity simply means that the whole of the individual, his heart, soul, spirit, and will, is affected by and enslaved to sin, thereby rendering him odious in the sight of God.

CONCLUSION:

Man does not have free will in the sense that it is commonly used. He can choose, but he always, invariably, inevitably, without pause, but no less willingly and voluntarily, says "No" to the things of God. "Note well. I am not saying that when confronted with the gospel a person cannot exercise his or her will. All of us have a will and are all capable of exercising it in the making of choices. *What I am saying is that when confronted with the gospel we cannot will well. We are not kept from believing against our wills.* 'The one who comes to Me,' declares Jesus, "I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37b). The problem, however, as Jesus goes on to say, is that 'no one can come to Me, *unless the Father who sent Me draws him*' (John 6:44a)." (Sam Storms)

The person "who affirms total depravity, also affirms common grace, according to which God not only restrains the full manifestation of the evil tendencies of the human heart but also, on a more positive note, enables the non-Christian to perform deeds of relative 'good'." (Sam Storms)