

## Does man have free will?

This question lies at the root of the argument between Arminianism and Calvinism; that is, between God as sovereign in man's conversion or whether man contributes by believing and repenting. In other words, does God provide a universal salvation, asking man to choose (exercise free will) to accept or reject it (Arminianism); or does God only provide salvation for the elect, whom he then empowers to believe and repent (Calvinism)?

Philosophically, man does not have free will in the sense that he is conditioned to choose in certain ways by his parental training, education, social situation, environment and so on. Your background disposes you to act in certain ways and not others. However this is not the matter under question here. What is debated by Christians regards self-determination; that is can man choose to obey God and do good in believing the Gospel, or is man unable to do this?

Calvinists believe that man has free will to choose on a daily basis according to his disposition. No one denies that man can freely choose to have Cornflakes rather than bacon for breakfast. What Calvinists deny is that man can choose to do good or act righteously; this includes the good work of believing the Gospel. The issue is – can man do anything good; free will is useless if it can only choose sin. There is another related problem; if man can choose to believe and repent, then he has not only contributed to his salvation (which the Bible says is only of God Ps 3:8, 37:39; Jon 2:9), but he has performed works of merit – which the Bible utterly denies (Rm 4:2-6, 9:11; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5).

The doctrine of Total Depravity makes clear that man cannot do any good of any kind; all his works are evil; even his ploughing is sin in God's eyes (Prov 21:4). Calvin and Augustine called human good works 'splendid sins'. This means that he cannot do any spiritual good work, which includes believing God and obeying the Gospel command (Matt 10:18; Rm 3:10-18). The Gospel comes to those who are dead in sin (Eph 2:1). Now a man dead toward God can do nothing of any spiritual value, including exercising faith.

But God expressly states that conversion is not of man's will in many places, such as: Rm 9:11, 15-18; Jn 1:12-13. Indeed God is found by those who do not naturally seek him (Isa 65:1; Matt 11:25), not by those who contribute to their salvation by free will. God draws only his chosen to seek him (Jn 6:44, 65) and then works his will in those he chooses (Phil 2:13; Jm 1:18). Those who truly seek God are being called because they are elect. Clearly, natural man cannot exercise free will in contributing to his conversion. There is no free will in salvation; man cannot contribute to it in any way.

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