

Dear Phil

tells the Jews that the reason they don't believe Him is because the Father hasn't given it to them. "I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father" (John 6:64-65). These verses imply that, beyond the enabling of sinners' wills granted by the first overtures of prevenient grace, God must continue to draw them to Christ and grant them the further ability to believe unto salvation.

Paul seems to confirm this understanding in Philippians 1:29 where he writes "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, ...to believe in Him ...". Acts 16:14 recounts the story of how God granted it to Lydia, the first Philippian convert, to believe on Christ. It says, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and *the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.*" If the prevenient grace Lydia had already received was all she needed to respond to the gospel, what did God do when He "opened her heart to respond?" This passage leads me to believe that we should pray for God to open sinners' hearts to respond to the gospel when we are witnessing, passing out tracts, or preaching.

The principle of grace-enabled will is also true for believers. Paul tells the Philippians that it is God who works in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Yes, we must "work out our own salvation," but we can only do that as we are enabled by God's grace. That is why salvation is *sola gratia*. It is by grace from start to finish that God accomplishes His salvation in our lives.

Sincerely,
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FREE WILL

"Doesn't the Bible teach that we all have free will?" —Kevin

Dear Kevin,

Good question. If by "free will" you mean that we are able to do anything we want, that God never constrains our wills, or that we are born naturally free to accept or reject God, the Bible's answer is no. We don't have natural free will; we have grace-enabled will. The difference separates heresy from orthodoxy.

First, God sovereignly limits our choices. For example, service to God or slavery to Satan are the only options on the table. We are not free to choose a third alternative. Second, God does at times constrain the human will. For example, God told Sennacherib that He would put a hook in his nose and turn him back from his rapacious rampaging (Isa. 37:29). The reason Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Israel was God stirred his heart (Ezra 1:1-2).

Third, and most significantly, when Adam sinned he became a slave to sin (Rom. 6:16). As a result, we are all born enslaved to sin (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1-3). Psalm 53 pictures God as looking down from Heaven to see if there is anyone who is seeking for Him. What He finds is that "Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not

even one." Paul quotes this passage in Romans 3 and concludes "There is none who understands; There is none who seeks for God." (Just so you don't misunderstand: both Psalm 53 and Romans 3 are talking about sinners, not about people who have been saved.)

These passages teach that we are *by nature* enslaved to sin and would never even want to seek God. We are not naturally free to choose or reject God. Naturally, our wills are in bondage to sin. This is why, historically, Wesleyan-*Arminians* have emphasized *free grace* rather than *free will*. By "free grace" we mean that God graciously gives all men the ability to respond to the light He has given them. We draw this conclusion from the nature of God's justice revealed in Scripture as well as from the implication of passages in which God calls upon men to respond or judges them for not responding (e.g., Deut. 30:19; Isa. 1:18; 55:1; Rom. 1:18-25).

Although Scripture teaches that God graciously gives all men the ability to respond to the light He has given them, Jesus also teaches in John 6:44 that no one is *able* to come to Him unless the Father draws him. A few verses later Jesus