

Free Will and Man's Four-fold State

(Part Two)

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In this chapter, we will continue to consider free will and man's four-fold state. In the last chapter, we considered man's will in the state of innocence and man's will in the state of degeneration (his unregenerate state).

The State of Grace or The State of Regeneration

In this state the person is both a saint and a sinner at the same time. In this third state the free power of choice belongs to a man as a regenerate person, but his will is not yet perfected as it will be in the glorified state.

In this state of grace, the will no longer uses its liberty openly for doing that which is evil, as it did before regeneration. Now the will chooses both—partly the good and partly the evil.

In this state of regeneration, there is freedom from the love of sin and from the dominion of sin. "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14). Our Lord said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Zacharias Ursinus, in his *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, gives us an excellent exposition on the will of man in the state of grace:

The regenerate man does that which is good, because the Holy Spirit, by his special grace, has renovated the nature of man through the Word of God—has kindled new light and knowledge in the understanding, and has awakened in the heart and will such new desires and inclinations, as are in harmony with the divine law; and because the Holy Spirit effectually inclines the will to do those things which are in accordance with this knowledge, and with these desires and inclinations. It is in this way that the will recovers both the power of willing that which is acceptable to God, and the use of this power, so that it commences to obey God according to these declarations of his word: "The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart." "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." (Deut. 30:6, Exod. 36:26, 2 Cor. 3:17, 1 John 3:9) The reasons, on account of which the will in this third degree chooses and does in part both the good and the evil, are the following: 1.

Because the mind and will of those who are regenerated, are not fully perfectly

renewed in this life. There are many remains of depravity which cleave to the best of men, as long as they continue in the flesh, so that the works which they perform are imperfect, and defiled with sin. "I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." (Rom. 7:18) 2. Because those who are regenerated are not always governed by the Holy Spirit; but are sometimes forsaken of God for a season, that he may thus either try, or humble them. Yet, although they are thus left to themselves for a time, they do not finally perish, for God, in his own time and way, calls them to repentance. "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me." "O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear. Return, for thy servant's sake." (Ps. 51:13, Isa. 63:17) In short, after regeneration, there is a proneness to choose partly the good, and partly the evil. There is a proneness *to the good*, because the mind and will being illuminated and changed, begin, in some measure, to be turned to the good, and to commence new obedience. There is a proneness *to the evil*, because the saints are only imperfectly renewed in this life—retain many infirmities and evil desires, on account of original sin, which still cleaves to them. Hence the good works which they perform are not perfectly good.³

Therefore, in this state of grace, the regenerated believer freely chooses good, yet that good is mixed with evil because of his remaining sin. Using his freedom to perfectly choose good will only come under the fourth state.

The State of Glorification or The State of Perfect Regeneration

In this state of perfect and glorious liberty, the will of man will be perfectly restored and perfectly regenerated. Another quote from Ursinus will be helpful.

In this state, the will of man will be free to choose only the good, and not the evil. This will be the highest degree, or the perfect liberty of the human will, when we shall obey God fully and forever. In this state we shall not only not sin, but we will abhor it above every thing else; yea, we shall then no longer be able to sin. In proof of this we may adduce the following reasons: First, the perfect knowledge of God will then shine in the mind, while there will be the strongest and most ardent desire of the will and heart to obey God; so that there will be no room left for ignorance or doubt, or the least contempt of God.

Secondly, in the life to come, the saints will never be forsaken, but will be constantly and forever ruled by the Holy Spirit, so that it will not be possible for them to deviate in the smallest respect from that which is right. Hence it is said: "They are as the angels of God in heaven." "We shall be like him." (Matt. 22:30, 1 John 3:3) The good angels are inclined only to that which is good, because they are good; just as the bad angels, on the other hand, are inclined to that which is evil, because they are evil. But we shall be like the good angels. Our condition will, therefore, be one of far greater excellence than that of Adam before the fall. Adam was, indeed, perfectly conformed to God; but he had the power to will both

the good and the evil; and therefore, with all his gifts, he had a certain infirmity, viz: the possibility to fall from God, and to lose his gifts. He was changeably good. But we shall not be able to will any thing but the good. Just as the wicked are inclined and led to do evil only, because they are wicked; so we shall be inclined to that which is good, and love and choose it alone, because we shall be unchangeably good. We shall then be so fully established in righteousness and conformity to God, that it will not be possible for us to fall from him; yes, it will then be impossible for us to will any thing that is evil, because we shall be preserved by divine grace in that state of perfect liberty in which the will will choose the good only.

From these things which we have now said in relation to human freedom, it is manifestly a foul slander to say that we take away the liberty of the will. And although those who are renewed and glorified will not be able to will any thing but the good, after their glorification; yet their power of choice will then be free to a much greater extent than it now is; for God, also, cannot will any thing but the good, and yet he possesses perfect freedom of will. So on the other hand, we do not take away the power of choice from the ungodly, or such as are unregenerated, when we affirm that they are not able to will any thing but that which is evil; for they will and choose the evil freely—yea, most freely. Their will is inclined and carried with the greatest impetuosity, to evil only; because they continually retain in their hearts, hatred to God. Hence, all the works which they perform of an external moral character, are evil in the sight of God, as we have already shown in our remarks upon the doctrine of sin.

There are six things related to this Eternal State:

1. *Death*: “For I know that You will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23).
2. *The Difference between the righteous and the wicked in their death*: “The wicked is banished in his wickedness, but the righteous has a refuge in his death” (Prov. 14:32).
3. *The resurrection*: “Do not marvel at this: for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28—29).
4. *The general judgment*: “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed...’ [but] to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed...’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:31—34, 41, 46).

5. *The kingdom of heaven*: "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matt. 25:34).
6. *Hell*: "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matt. 25:41)

It can be seen that the Bible teaches that man has no ability to save himself, and indeed, has lost the power that Adam had to choose to do good. He is perfectly free to choose and act in accordance with his own nature, just as the glorified man will freely choose to please God in all things. For now men have no power to please God without having his nature radically changed by the Holy Spirit. Our methods and message of evangelism should be greatly impacted by this fact. It is all so vitally important to the Christian faith.

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