



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“Effects of the Fall, *or* the Inability of Fallen Man”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we turn again to Thee for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and for the blessings of life that have come from him. We are thankful that in the eternal councils of God, Thou hast so planned and purposed our salvation that Thou didst send him to be the propitiation for our sins.

And we thank Thee, Lord that Thou hast through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in efficacious grace brought us to faith in him and into the enjoyment of life that is life, indeed. We thank Thee for the Word, which Thou hast left with us. And we want to thank Thee, too, Lord, for the prophets and the apostles, who have been responsible for the preservation of its truths. We thank Thee that we are able to open the text of Holy Scripture, and listen to Thy voice, through the voices of men. May the Holy Spirit, again, be our teacher and our guide as we consider the theology of the word of God. So, we commit this hour to Thee and pray Thy blessing upon us.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight, our subject is the third in our series on the effects of the Fall, which is our twelfth lecture on the doctrine of man and sin, or anthropology and hamartiology. And, first, a few words of introduction.

We are saying that as a result of the sin in the Garden of Eden, three great effects have come to pass. First, Adam’s sin has been imputed to men. And they are guilty of Adam’s sin. The fact that they die is evidence that they have come under the penal judgment of sin, and that is expressed for us in Romans chapter 5, verse 12 and verses 18 and 19 when Paul writes:

“For this cause, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death passed upon all men, for all sinned”

Now, we saw that that meant not that men have committed sins, though that, of course, is true. Nor, that men are corrupt, though that, too, is true. Nor, indeed, that men sinned in Adam in the sense that they were in him seminally. And, when he committed the act; they actually committed the act. We pointed out that a non-entity cannot act. And, thus, we did not sin in Adam in the sense that we actually committed that deed in the Garden of Eden. We said that Adam was our federal head, our representative head, and thus, he acted for us. He is our covenant head. And so, when he acted, we acted in our covenant head.

We pointed out that the parallel of Adam’s sin with Jesus Christ’s imputation of righteousness to us demands that the relationship be a representative relationship. Just as we did not, in Christ, actually die upon the cross in the physical or seminal sense; but rather, we died in our substitute. So, we also sinned in our representative first head, Adam. That’s the first thing that we pointed out as an effect of the fall.

Then, the second thing we pointed out last time was this: that Adam’s posterity inherited a corrupted nature from him. And we have called that specifically original sin. We said that original sin was used in both a wide sense and a narrow sense. In some books, you will find original sin including Adam’s first sin as well as the corrupt nature that we received, plus also, the loss of original righteousness, as a result of Adam’s sin.

But when we speak of the corrupted nature that we have received from Adam, we may also call that original sin. By the pervasive character of this sin, men, we said, may be called totally depraved.

And we said that does not mean that men are as bad as they could be; or that they have committed every sin that they could possibly commit. But rather, that sin has touched every part of their being. They are totally depraved in that sense.

Now, tonight, we want to point out a third thing. And, that is, that Adam’s posterity, since the fall, have been unable to perform any spiritual good. This inability of fallen man, we are going to study tonight. And let me say also, in my introduction tonight, that this is a very, very critical study; for it touches the question of the freedom of the will.

Now, you already know that I do not accept the doctrine of the freedom of the will. But, I do not think that it is overemphasizing the matter to say that this question touches the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, I’m not going to make such a strong statement as to say that anyone who believes in the freedom of the human will is not a Christian, but I am going to say this: That anyone who believes in the freedom of the human will is not a consistent Christian and does not really understand the grace of God in Jesus Christ as he should.

I, also, must confess that I have some questions about people who deny the free will; who affirm the free will of man and deny man’s total inability. I have some questions about them; but I’m not going to go so far as to say that they are not Christians. I just think that they are confused. I think they are just as confused as the man who believes that salvation is totally the work of Jesus Christ, but then does not believe in eternal security. For, theologically, consistently he has denied the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. For, if my salvation depends upon what he died, plus what I do after I am saved in keeping myself saved; it is obvious Jesus Christ did not do it all. So, likewise, the man who believes in the freedom of the human will; in the sense that it is a decision

of the human will by which we received Jesus Christ, unmotivated and unproduced by God, in effect, has said that there is something in man that is acceptable to God. And that is something I deny.

There are actually two systems of truth on the earth: one, salvation is of one’s own self-movement toward God. The other, salvation is of the Lord. One centers in the dogma of freewill; the other centers in the dogma of divine election and all of the processes of salvation that arise out of God’s choice of us.

Now, I want to also say this, that it is not the history in the history of the Christian church, it is not -- it is not found that those who stand in the center of Christian tradition were confused over this point. They were not confused over it. Take a man like Martin Luther, whose theology I do not accept thoroughly, completely -- He was one of the greatest minds of the whole Christian era. There’s no question about that. But there are one or two points that I think Martin Luther was weak on. Well, there is one thing that he was not weak on and that was his attitude toward the human will.

He says this: “If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation; even the very least, to the free will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace and he hath not learned Jesus Christ aright.”

So, it appears that Luther is so strong as to say that if a man ascribes any of his salvation to human free will he doesn’t know anything about grace. He doesn’t even -- He has not learned Jesus Christ aright. I’m not so sure but what he might not stand up after I said those words a few minutes ago and say, well, if you won’t say they are not saved, I will -- Because that seems on the face of it to be what he is saying. Although, there are other things that suggest that Luther’s view was really more like mine on that point.

The greatest evangelist that America has ever had was George Whitfield, and that includes all down to the present time, in my opinion. And this is no attempt to attack Mr. Moody or Mr. Graham or anyone else. I just think George Whitfield was the greatest

evangelist we’ve ever had in this country. He was not an American, but I think he’s the greatest evangelist who has ever preached in this country.

This is what he said. “I hope we shall catch fire from each other and that there will be a holy immolation amongst us who shall most debase man and exalt the Lord Jesus. Nothing but the doctrines of the Reformations can do this. All others leave free will in man and make him, in part, at least, a savior to himself, by so come not thou near the secret of those who teach such things. I know Christ is All-in-All. Man is nothing. He hath a free will to go to Hell, but none to go to Heaven till God worketh in him; to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Now that it seems to me expresses very plainly what Mr. Whitfield felt about this question, and I wholeheartedly agree with him.

These two gospels, if ‘you will,’ as over against, ‘God makes us willing’ these two gospels are the two systems of thought that abound. I know that people say there are only two religions; the religion of that which has been done, and that religion which says that we must do. But, actually, we can go back beyond that to the two religions of “if you are willing” as over against “God is the one who makes us willing.”

Well, now, let’s turn to our subject and, Roman 1, the inability of man.

And, let me give you, just briefly again, an historical orientation. This is as *nota bene*. That is what N.B. stands for, remember? And before we look at point A: the Pelagians (our friends, the Pelagians), they have taught that man had full ability to do all that God requires. Pelagians are modern legalists, or ancient legalists. They are the equivalent of modern “good works” men. They believe that we can do anything by our own power to please God.

The semi-Pelagians who came along a little later, believed that man’s powers were weakened by the fall; but not entirely. In fact, the Resmonstrance, the Dutch Arminians, they felt that man’s powers were not really weakened by the fall at all. But the Wesleyan Arminians, the semi-Pelagians of that character, well, they felt that man’s capacity was lost

but as a result of God’s prevenient grace -- that is, the grace that comes to all men before we are saved -- by prevenient grace, we have now the ability to come to God if we cooperate with the ability which God has given us. So, the Wesleyans believe that men were lost, that they lost everything. That they fell -- truly fell -- but God has come, in prevenient grace to every man, and so, every man today has it within him -- Has within him the ability to come to God, if he cooperates with the grace that has been given him.

Now, the Augustinians, from Augustine down through the Reformers, such as Luther and Calvin, that is, the Lutheran side of the Reformation as well as the Presbyterian or Reformed side, they have believed that man was not only fallen in Adam, but he is fallen today; and further, that he is unable to turn to God or he is unable to do anything spiritually good in the sight of God. He is totally depraved.

Now, they do not deny that man may not do natural good; they may do things that men praise; benevolent acts -- They do not deny that men may do civil good. Men may do great things for the community. Men may be great statesmen. And they do not deny that a man may do externally religious good. What appears to be religious good to us -- But, they cannot do anything that is spiritually good, acceptable to God in the spiritual sense. Now, capital A, the nature of man’s inability. Man’s inability arises from original sin; which has corrupted his understanding. 1 Corinthians 2:14 states that, remember.

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually concerned.”

Now, notice that little clause in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “Neither can he know them, for they are spiritually understood” or examined.

So, man’s inability arises from original sin, which corrupts his understanding; it corrupts his emotions, and it corrupts his will. His will is affected by the fall. His

emotions are affected by the fall. His mind is affected by the fall. And so the nature of his inability is total.

Now, this is not something -- and I want to stress this because, frequently, I find that when I bring up the subject of free will, people now act as if this is some “new” doctrine. They act as if this is something that Christianity does not really proclaim down in its central confession down through the centuries. They think it’s something that S. Lewis Johnson thought up just a few weeks ago or a few years ago. And that he’s teaching this peculiar doctrine of the inability of the human will or the inability of human nature.

Let me point out to you that this is the standard doctrine of the great Christian confessions. Let me read you a couple.

The Episcopalian Creed, the 39<sup>th</sup> Article says, quote: “The condition of man, after the fall of Adam, is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith.”

The Book of Common Prayer, which all Episcopalians are acquainted with, says: “O, Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men.”

Now, I’m not suggesting to you that you go get a prayer book and that you read the prayer book and carry it with you and in the morning service, say the prayers in that book in order to get straight in doctrine. But, let me assure you, if people did really believe what was in that prayer book, they would believe a lot of good Biblical doctrine.

For the Baptists and the Presbyterians, let me read the Wesminster Confession and the London Confession – for they are very similar -- “Man, by his fall into sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation. So as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good and dead in sin is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself; or to prepare himself, thereto.”

The Reformed Confession, the Belgic Confession says, “Therefore, we reject all that is taught repugnant to this concerning the free will of man; since man is but a slave

to sin and can receive nothing except it hath been given him from Heaven. For, who may presume to boast that he, of himself, can do any good since Christ says, ‘No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.’”

So it’s clear that, so far as the statement of the Christian Church has been, they have not believed in the ability of man.

Capital B, the proof of man’s inability. Let me just suggest a few of the more common arguments. There are many of them. First of all, negatively -- Now, I don’t think I put this on the outline, so this is something not up there. As I’ve said, I don’t tell you everything I know. [Laughter] But this is something I want to stress, for a moment.

The proof of the inability of man. Negatively, you’ll notice in the study of the Scriptures that the Bible never attributes to men the power to change their hearts. Nowhere in the Bible is that ever suggested.

Now, the fact that there is nothing in the Bible that ever suggests that, should speak rather loudly to us. Of itself, of course, that is not a complete argument. But, second, positively, there are scriptural statements that affirm the fact that man is unable. Let’s turn to a couple of them now -- John chapter 15, verses 4 and 5. John chapter 15, verses 4 and 5 -- This is the great passage on abiding in Christ, and in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus says, in verse 4:

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine; so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit: for apart from Me ye can do nothing.”

Now, it is evident that Jesus claims to be the absolute source of all spiritual life. “Apart from Me, ye can do nothing.” That means that you cannot even express a positive spiritual thought, or idea, toward God apart from our Lord Jesus Christ. Every single



spiritual thought -- much less, every spiritual act that you ever perform that is acceptable to God -- is something that has come through Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians, chapter 2:14 -- The passage I referred to just a moment ago -- 1 Corinthians 2:14 -- Very important text.

“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

My text has -- now, I want you to notice two or three things here. First of all, I want you to notice that the natural man, the unsaved man, does not receive the things of the spirit of God. That’s very plain.

Second, I want to you to notice that they are foolishness to him. He not only does not receive them, they are foolishness to him.

And, thirdly, I want you to know that he cannot know them. It does not say that he does not know them; but he “cannot” know them. He is hindered from knowing them.

And, fourthly, the reason for that is his want of spiritual discernment. They are spiritually appraised, and he does not possess any capacity for understanding spiritual things.

Now, if there is a text that teaches the total blindness of man, that surely teaches the total blindness of man. A man outside of Jesus Christ, in his natural state as a result of the fall, is just as incapable of understanding spiritual truth as a deaf man is of judging a music contest – except more so -- Only when the Holy Spirit comes and enlightens us are we able to understand anything spiritual.

Have you ever seen stones under natural light and then have seen them under ultraviolet light? You know that stones under natural light are very ordinary looking. But when you shine ultraviolet light rays upon them, they glow with all kinds of beauties and

colors that you never dreamed were there. They’re the same old stones, but the light has revealed something that you could not see.

Well, now, the action of ultraviolet rays is a beautiful illustration of the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment of the word of God for the man who has received Him.

And, we may look at the Bible -- it’s the same old Bible, but really see nothing in it spiritual. But when the Holy Spirit has come; and when he enlightens us, then, this flashes with all of the lights and the beauties and the colors of the revelation of the word of God. But, until that happens, we are blind. We cannot know spiritual things. Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that you could not know spiritual things, then you would realize that you must be born again by a power outside of yourself.

And then, we may argue, also, for the inability of man based on the biblical teaching of the necessity of the Spirit’s work. Take one Old Testament text, which expresses a principle throughout the Bible. Just as we have said Jesus said, “Without Me, you can do nothing,” So in Zechariah chapter 4 in verse 6, the prophet there says, “It is not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord.”

And so, when things are done -- When things are accomplished -- When spiritual acts come to pass; it is the work of the Father through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and man is totally helpless.

Now, there are objections to this. If you have not felt some of them, you haven’t been thinking. You’ve just been sitting here saying, “Whatever Dr. Johnson says, I accept. I don’t even want to bother to think about it.” Well now, if I was to turn around and be the Devil’s Advocate for a moment, I might say, “Well, I don’t like this doctrine of the inability of the human will because it is inconsistent with moral obligation.”

I might say, “Man cannot be required to do what he has no ability to do.” If he has no ability to believe, then how can you say that he is required to believe?

Can a blind man be required to see? Can a deaf man be required to hear? Well, now, I think that objection would be a valid objection if God were responsible for our

blindness. If God were responsible for the obtuseness of our will, we could say that. But since we are responsible for it, since we men are responsible for our hardness of heart, then our inability is a self-imposed inability, not a divinely imposed inability. It arises out of the corruption of our own nature, and it’s something that we want. It’s not the case of men saying, “Oh, I wish I could be free from this.”

No, we love it. We like it. Whenever the Gospel comes, we get mad at the Gospel, because we like our condition of blindness and hardness and meanness, and rebellion against God. So I don’t like that objection. I don’t think it really says anything. It comes from the natural man.

Well, the second objection: this weakens motives for exertion, spiritually. Why use the means of grace? After all, if I should understand that I, a sinner, being enlightened by the Holy Spirit should understand that I am unable, well, why shouldn’t I just cease from effort?

Well, my dear friend, that’s exactly what’s necessary -- cease from effort. Because, it’s when we realize that we cannot do anything and must cease from our effort that we are ready to be saved. Because, there is someone who can save us.

But, further, this kind of reasoning, you know, would prevent a farmer from farming -- Because, he might say, what’s the use? If I go out and sow my seed and plow my fields and take care of them, I cannot produce the crops that I intend to produce because it’s ultimately dependent on something God does. He’s got to give the rain. He’s got to give the right kind of weather. So, why farm?

Well, we know, as a farmer -- I’ve never been a farmer, you know, and some of you in the audience, you’ve been farmers, you know how little I know about this. But we know as farmers, we farmers, that we can depend on -- normally, we can depend on God to supply the rain and the weather and the other things that make possible a crop. And so, we do that dependent on something beyond our own power. Every farmer learns that.

Well, now, in the case of the word of God, it’s very much like that too. We know that we are unable, but God has commanded the use of means. He has commanded that we believe on Jesus Christ. He commands men everywhere to repent. And, furthermore, he’s given great promises. If we repent, believe, we shall be saved. And so inability is no weakening of motive for exertion.

That leads me to the third objection which is, this kind of thing encourages delay in conversion. If it’s true that we can’t do anything, well, why bother? Why not just sit down here in the pew and wait until the Holy Spirit hits me over the head with his conviction? And then I can turn to God. In the meantime, I’ll just have a good time. Because, if we’re unable, and can’t do anything, it’s hopeless. If God’s pleased to do something, fine. If he’s not pleased to do anything, well, what can we do about it?

Well, again, my friend, that’s the reasoning of the natural man. Just the opposite is really the case. Well, you might think, “I’ll just wait God’s time and see what happens.” And so -- But we hear the preacher saying, ‘God’s time is when? Now.’

Now is the day of Salvation. Now is the accepted time, God says. So it’s obvious, whatever we might think, that our reasoning is out of harmony with God. Furthermore, if I know that I’m unable, then all the more reason for me to turn there. And so, the very doctrine of inability, which some say weakens exertion and causes delay in conversion, should create the exact opposite impression. It should impress itself upon me that I can only be saved by God, and he calls upon me to be saved now. I better turn to him immediately.

In fact, if you think that you can turn to God any time you want to, then you will just keep about your fleshly efforts as long as you think that’s possible. As a matter of fact, the doctrine that I have freewill and that I can turn to him any time I want to; that’s the doctrine that delays conversion. That’s the doctrine that weakens exertion because it impresses upon us that there is something that we can do when we want to.

You don’t like my doctrine, do you? I love it.

Let me give you an illustration, which I have given here to some of you before. You may remember two, three years ago, when I was preaching regularly here on Sunday morning, we went through the Book of Acts. And when I came to Acts chapter 15, preaching on Salvation by Grace I commented upon the fact that people are inclined to think, when I preach the grace of inability, and total ability on God’s part in my salvation, people say, well, we will just sit back and do nothing. And I said at that time that that doctrine is a doctrine of the pit of hell. For, that is the doctrine, the doctrine that we can turn any time we want to, that’s the doctrine that causes us to sit back and do nothing.

I illustrated it this way. Let’s suppose a man is in a house and suddenly word comes out, “Your house is on fire.” Well, he knows he has some valuables and, so, he goes upstairs with the sure confidence that he is going to be able to gather his valuables to himself and get out safely because he remembers that from his second story window from his house, he has a little wooden fire escape outside his window, right down to the grass. So he doesn’t have to come back in the house, but he can go right outside on that fire escape and escape.

And so, knowing he has that way of escape, he wanders around the room picking up the things that he wants to. He goes and gets his jewels and gathers them together. And then he looks in his closet and selects the suit, the clothes, that he needs and the other things. And so he’s wandering around in the house doing all these things because he knows he has that way of escape. And he gathers his things together, and he happens to walk by the window and he looks out. And low and behold, the fire escape is on fire. And so, what does he do? Well, I said that he would immediately throw up the window and he would shout, “Help! I’m perishing.”

That’s exactly what should happen to the man when he realizes he’s totally unable. Because, if he’s totally unable to come to God, then there’s nothing that he can do and only God can save him. And so, like the man who pulls up the window and shouts, help, he should shout, “O God, I’m lost! Save me!” And so the doctrine of

inability is the doctrine that should lead us to salvation. So, I don’t like these reasons. They don’t make sense to me.

So let’s come to the bondage of man’s will and get into this a little deeper. Let me point out something here. We’re inclined to think that the will is a primary aspect of our nature; that is, that we really determine things by the exercise of our will.

Now, those of you that have been with me through these studies, you know that that is false because I pointed out the difference between the inclination of the will, the volitions of the will and the actions of the will. And I pointed out that the actions are produced by volitions and that the volitions arise out of the basic inclination of the man’s inmost being. And that his will belongs to his person and is really a secondary aspect of human nature.

I pointed out that the will is determined by the motives of the soul. We could say that the actions or volitions of the will arise out of our understanding; or as the theologians say, our understanding and our appetency, that is, our desires. And so, we decide on the basis of what we like. I gave you simple illustrations like: I was last night at the football game seeing the Detroit Lions and the Dallas Cowboys, because in -- some time ago, I decided I will go to that football game being totally in equilibrium, so to speak. I didn’t do that because I was totally in equilibrium. I said I will go to that game because I love football. And I can also say that I go because I love the Dallas Cowboys. Now, I went to the football -- I made the decision, in other words, because of something deeper within.

And that is true of the human will. The human will is a secondary agent; always a secondary agent.

There are three conditions of the will. Now, I have put them on the board as: **non passé picara** -- Not able to sin. That expresses the will of God. That expresses the will of Jesus Christ. That expresses the will of the Holy Angels. God is not able to sin.

Now, I want you to notice, his will is absolutely certain in everything, but he cannot sin. He is free, but he cannot sin.

Then, the second condition of the will is: *passé non picara* -- Able not to sin -- That was the condition of the will of Lucifer before he fell. He was able not to sin; but he might. That was the condition of Adam. He was able not to sin; but he might. In both cases, they did. Able not to sin --

What is the condition of the human will after the fall? Well, *non passé non picara* -- Not able not to sin -- In other words, now he must sin. Now, I don’t like to use the term “must” because that is really un-theological. But he is not able not to sin.

Now then, in dealing with the bondage of the human will, I want to point out first the myth of natural freedom.

I want you to think for just a moment. Do you believe in the freedom of the will? All right. Let’s just think about some natural things. Did you determine your parents? Well, you didn’t determine your parents. You discovered your parents. If you determined your parents, not any one of you would be what you are. We’d have an auditorium of Ford’s and Rockefellers, I feel sure -- [Laughter] because we all would be rich. We all would be born rich. We would be born rich. I want to be a Rockefeller -- I want to be a Ford. Or, if we had a little more discernment, we might say, we’re all Beethoven’s, or Bach’s -- Why anyone would want to be that, I don’t know? But, nevertheless, there are people that strange. In other words, we do not determine our parents.

Let me ask you another question: Did you choose in what age to be born? No, you didn’t. If I’d chosen in which age to be born, I would select the age when our Lord was here. And I would want to be the son of Paul’s father -- [Laughter]

We don’t select things like that. Our wills are not free. Did you select the place where you were to be born? No, you’d never be born in Texas -- [Laughter] Would you? You can tell, how many of you are not Texans because you laughed --

So we don’t determine our parents. We don’t determine our age. We don’t determine our place of birth. Can you escape natural laws? No, you cannot. Can you jump off of the 30<sup>th</sup> story of a building and at the 15<sup>th</sup> story as you are passing down, toward the pavement, say, ‘I will to be back on top?’ No, you cannot do that. You don’t have the freedom of will to do that.

Craig Norton, when he fades back to pass and he throws, and he sees that pass is going right into the hands of one of the opposing men, he does not say, “I will that ball back. I’m gonna throw it again.” Cannot do it. Once it’s thrown, it’s lost, sad to say.

So, the idea that we have natural freedom is just a myth. We don’t have it.

Now, second, the myth of ethical freedom -- This idea that man’s will is free to choose between good and evil. Well, from what is it free? What is it free to choose?

Professor Berkoff, one of our finest theologians said, “Man has, by nature, an irresistible bias for evil.”

Our choices arise out of our nature. Our choices do not guide our nature. Our nature guides our choices. Our will is free from outside force. No one forces us to make the decision that we make. But, it is not free from within ourselves because we are the possessors of original sin. We have a corrupted nature.

Now, this is biblical doctrine. I’m not giving you things that are not biblical. These are biblical things. Let me read a text from Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 13 in verse 23. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to do evil.”

So if the Ethiopian can change his skin and the leopard can change his spots, then you can do good who are accustomed to do evil. “There is none that seeketh after God -- -- No, not one,” Paul says in Romans chapter 3, verse 11.

The myth of spiritual freedom -- Does the human will make the ultimate choice of life in Christ? Yes, no question about that. The human will makes the ultimate choice. I don’t deny that. The human will does act in receiving Christ, but the question, remember,



is what? Tell me. After all these months, tell me. The human will does make the decision, but the question is what? Hmmm?

[Inaudible]

All right. Who initiates the choice? Not simply who made the will but who initiates the decision of the will? We do make the decision, but who initiates it? Hmmm -  
- The Holy Spirit, of course -- What are our texts? Let’s look at a couple of them again.

John 1, verses 11 and 12 and 13 -- John 1:11

“He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of bloods (that’s what that says literally) nor of the will of the flesh (notice, who were born --) nor of the will of man, (do you see that -- underline it if you haven’t underlined it before.)”

We were born not of bloods, not of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man, but we are born of God. Now, is anything plainer than that? I don’t know of anything plainer than that. Except, possibly Romans chapter 9, verse 16 -- over in Romans 9, verse 16, Paul says, speaking about these great things that he’s talking about in Romans chapter 9, election by grace, he says, in his concluding statement in verse 16:

“So then it does not depend on the man who wills or on the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”

Now, to express it positively, James expresses it positively in James chapter 1 in verse 18, for there he says -- Turn there, I want you to see it with your own two eyes. James 1:18. Remember, I’m reading from the New American Standard Bible.

“In the exercise of His will (capital H -- God, in the exercise of his will) He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.”

So, the text plainly states it is God’s will that is responsible for our salvation. Now, someone says at this point, “But Dr. Johnson, what about those texts that seem to say the opposite? What about that text in John chapter 5 in verse 40, which says, “And you will not come unto me that you might have life”? You will not come unto me that you might have life -- John 5:40. This is one of the great guns of those who object to this teaching which is the teaching of the New Testament. This is one of the rockets which is set on Cape Arminius, and fired by all who believe in free will. “You will not come unto me that you might have life.”

Now, notice that text -- Will you look at it for just a moment? I learned a long time ago that when you study the Bible, you’d better look at the texts carefully. First of all, it says, ‘Men are by nature, dead.’ “You will not come unto me that you might have life.” So, they are dead. They are legally dead, they are spiritually dead, and if they persist in it, they will be eternally dead. The text also says, “In Christ there is life.” It says, “You will not come unto me that you may have life.”

The text also states that, “Eternal life is for all who come.” “You will not come unto me that you may have life.” Now, let me be careful to point out it does not say that everybody is going to be saved. It simply says, everybody who “comes” will be saved.

Now, people accuse Calvinists of preaching a narrow gospel. How can you have a narrower gospel than, “Every man who comes to Jesus Christ will be saved.” How can it be narrower than that? Are you going -- how can it be broader than that? Are you going to preach a gospel that men will be saved if they do not come to Christ? What kind of a gospel is that? But, if I preach that everybody who comes to Jesus Christ will be saved, how can you be broader than that?

Not everybody is going to be saved. But, everybody who comes will be saved. I don't say to you that there is life for you. I don't know. But I know this, if you come, there is life for you. Because, you see, that's the issue; whether a man comes.

Now, the very text, which is the Arminian rocket, "You will not come unto me that you may have life." See, all we've got to do is will -- As a matter of fact, this text teaches the precise opposite. It says that men, by nature, do not come. It says, by nature no man will come. Look at it. I'm going to read it in my text. "And you are unwilling to come to me." "You will not come unto me that you may have life." The very text that is supposed to teach that all we need is freewill to come to Christ, says, that "no man will come." "You will not come unto me that you may have life."

Why? Because men are fallen. That's why. Most preachers believe Adam tripped and sprained his ankle. But the Bible teaches that he "fell" and as a result of falling, he is unable -- His will, his emotions, his intellect, all of these things are affected by the fall. And his will is in bondage.

Now, you know, one of my greatest friends was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. In fact, I think one of the greatest joys that I've had in the past ten years is reading everything I can that Mr. Spurgeon wrote. And I've only read about half of what he wrote, maybe two-thirds. He preached for many years and his sermons were published all over the world; and I recommend that everybody read the things that Mr. Spurgeon has written. He was a Baptist. But, in spite of that, he was a great preacher.

Now, this is what he says in one of his sermons. He says, "You've heard a great many Arminian sermons, I dare to say, but you never heard an Arminian prayer. For the Saints and prayer appear as one in word and deed and mind. An Arminian, on his knees, would pray desperately like a Calvinist. He cannot pray about free will; there's no room for it. Fancy him praying -- Now, this is his prayer. 'Lord, I thank Thee I am not like those poor presumptuous Calvinists. Lord, I was born with a glorious free will. I was born with power by which I can turn to thee of myself. I have improved my grace. If

everybody had done the same with their grace that I have, they might all have been saved. Lord, I know thou dost not make us willing, if we are not willing ourselves. Thou givest grace to everybody; some do not improve it, but I do. There are many that would go to hell; as much bought with the blood of Christ as I was. They had as much of the Holy Ghost given to them; they had as good a chance and were as much blessed as I am. It was not thy grace that made us to differ. I know it made a great deal. Still, I turned the point. I made use of what was given me and others did not. That’s the difference between me and them.” Now, Mr. Spurgeon says that’s a prayer of the devil and not a prayer of man.

But, you see, that is exactly what a man prays who traces his salvation to his free will. Now you see why I get so excited about this, because I listen to preaching, and I hear the same old kind of preaching. God has done everything that he can do for men to be saved. I have done everything that I can do in bringing the message to you. And now, the decision rests with you.

Now, my dear friend, if you do not say in a few moments that you cannot make that decision of yourself, you have preached an Arminian false gospel.

Remember, my friend, Mr. Reed, sitting right over there when a preacher finished like that -- He said he was a Calvinist. The preacher was an Arminian. He said he had preached a “noble sermon” until he came to that point. He said, he then called on me to pray. And I thought, now, what shall I do? God has done everything that he can do. The preacher has done everything that he can do. Everything now rests with the hearers. I think I should pray to them, that they make the right decision.

He said, “What’s the use of praying to a God who has exhausted his resources?” [Laughter] But he says, “You know what I did? I did exactly what the preacher expected me to do. I prayed, ‘O God, do more than you have done and bring them to Christ.’”

That’s what we’re talking about when we say that the will is in bondage to sin.

So you don’t like it and when you get hold of the fact that your salvation is not even traceable to that free will of yours, then you have rooted out the last vestige of self-righteousness that still is there. Then you will begin to praise the Lord for sovereign grace -- sovereign grace -- What a wonderful thing that is, to know that God has saved me totally by his sovereign love.

Boy, that’s enough to thrill you, isn’t it?

Now, free agency. Five minutes. Obviously, a person at this point may say, “Well, Dr. Johnson, what you’ve said seems very persuasive, but in what sense are men free?”

There are different theories of the will: there is -- the theories that may grouped under the necessity; that is, that there is no freedom at all, that we do not have freedom for anything. God has arranged everything that is going to come to pass. Fatalism, for example, is a very popular form of the doctrine of the necessity of the will. Everything is already determined. There is no free agency at all. And, of course, no responsibility, because if everything is determined totally, in that sense, then there is no responsibility. God has done it. And so we cannot have freedom.

On the other hand, there is the Arminian or Pelagian theory which may be called “contingency.” That is, the will has self-determining power. The will exists in an equilibrium. It may just as soon decide this way, as this way. Contingency -- that’s the other extreme. It is opposed to necessity. And it is opposed to certainty.

Now, by the way, a man whose will existed in equilibrium, you can never trust; because one moment he might decide this way, and the next moment he might this way. The idea of a will that can never exist in certainty is something that is absolutely immoral. But, we’ve already talked about that so I need not labor that point. Certainty – and by certainty, I mean, man is free but, nevertheless, there are things that are certain about him; and specifically, his will -- It is certain that his will is unable.

Now, we confuse liberty and ability. We think that if we are unable, we, therefore, are not free. But that is a false conclusion -- Let me just show you why. Well, I’ll wait just a moment.

When we say, free agency, and we say ability, we want to be sure to keep these distinct. Ability is the power to change our character by a volition -- ability -- The ability to change our character by a volition -- We do not have ability -- we have seen.

Free agency? What is free agency? Not freedom of the will. Free agency is the power to decide according to our character. Free agency, the power to decide according to our character. That is why, we’re not forced from the outside in making decisions. We decide according to our character. That’s free agency. In that sense, we can say we are free agents -- our decisions are our own. They are not forced upon us. We make them; and we sense that we are making them. And we do make them. We know that they are ours. But at the same time, we are unable to change our character of ourselves.

Now, our claim that liberty and certainty are harmonious. Necessity in act would overthrow our morality. But certainty does not. May a free act be inevitably certain as to its occurrence? Augustinians say, yes. And, I’m going to suggest two or three things that prove that certainty is harmonious with liberty. I want you to think for just two or three minutes now about certainty and the Trinity.

Is God a free agent? Is God a free agent? Hmmm -- Well, you’re defining free agent in a little different sense. But, does in my sense of a free agent -- Free agency is the power to decide according to our character. Is God a free agent?

Yes, he’s a free agent. But is there anything more certain than that God will not, will not ever, sin. It’s absolutely certain that he will never sin. But, at the same time, he is free. Is Jesus Christ free? Is he a free agent? Yes. But is it -- is there anything as certain as the fact that Jesus Christ will always do the will of God -- will always do that which is right? No. Nothing is more certain than that. The Saints in Heaven? Are they

free? Yes. They’re free. But it is not certain that they will never sin? Certainty is not inconsistent with free agency.

Well, let’s think about theology for a moment. Do you believe that God foreknows everything that’s going to come to pass? Oh, yes. If we acknowledge a sovereign God, absolutely. He knows everything that is going to come to pass. Well then, are those things going to come to pass? Yes. They’re absolutely certain.

Does God foreordain? Yes, he foreordains everything that’s going to come to pass. What about his providence? Is his providence such that it affects certainty? Does he control the acts of men? Does he control the lives of the Saints? Yes.

There is absolute certainty there. But at the same time, is there not free agency? Well, yes, on the human side there is free agency. And yet, there is certainty. My dear friend, if God does not control the acts of free agent, then there is no prophecy, there is no prayer, there is thanksgiving. There are no promises. There is no security. There is nothing. You see, certainty is harmonious with free agency.

And, finally, in the final analysis, all men are conscious of liberty when they perform their voluntary acts. When I received Jesus Christ as my Savior, I wasn’t dragged, screaming into the kingdom of God.

Now, I know the text of Scripture tells me, “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him --” But that’s the drawing, the wooing of efficacious grace. That’s not something against my will, except in so far as God’s love so works on my unwillingness as to make me willing.

But when that decision is made, that’s the -- That’s not only the decision I want to make, that’s the decision that I’ve come to the place that I must make it. Must receive it.

Now, I’ve said often, it’s like falling in love. When you become the victim of some woman’s charms and she has changed the unwilling to willing. That’s my beautiful illustration of efficacious grace.

The decision I made for Jesus Christ was my decision -- But it was produced by him. I was free. I felt it. I know I was free. But, at the same time, it was the product of God’s grace.

So then, let me sum it up. Man is free and responsible because he’s the author of his own acts. He determined to enact by nothing outside of himself, but his will is not free. It’s in bondage to sin.

What’s wrong with free will, in the final analysis? Well, it enables the wrong person to get the credit, to start with. We get the credit for our salvation instead of God. It denies the true nature of sin and guilt. It says that we are almost totally depraved, but our wills can respond of themselves. And, actually, it causes us to look within ourselves - - to something that is within ourselves, rather than to look off to God.

So man is totally unable; his will is in bondage, although he is a free agent. His decisions are his own, and he is responsible for them, and he knows it.

Time’s up. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the truth of the word of God. Deliver us from all lurking sins of self-righteousness such as trust in our own free will. Enable us, Lord, to see the purity of the grace of God. And enable us to praise Thee and worship Thee out of the sense of being the recipients of wonderful, particular grace shown to me. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.