

GOD'S WILL AND MAN'S WILL

By Brother Mike Sutherland

The depravity of man is a scriptural doctrine. The Calvinistic doctrine of Total Depravity as taught by the Calvinists themselves is not scriptural.

Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli were other "reformers" that held very strongly to the doctrine of predestination to heaven and predestination to hell. The logical conclusion of the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination to hell is predestination to sin. The Calvinist will tell you that since God predestined men to hell, then he must have foreordained men to sin. The Calvinist will tell you that God decreed the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The doctrine of Total Depravity makes God the author of sin. The doctrine is based in the total denial of the free will of man. The doctrine states that since God foreknows all things, that he willed them to happen. Therefore he wills both evil and good to happen. In "**The Bondage Of Will**", Martin Luther said: "The question concerning the will and predestination of God, is somewhat difficult. For God wills those same things which He foreknows. (page 122 of the PDF version)". This statement by Martin Luther contradicts the scriptures, but it well states the doctrine of most Calvinists. Time after time Martin Luther makes God the author of sin in "**The Bondage Of Will**". Martin Luther and the Calvinists believe that the will of man is so bound by God that mankind is unable to respond to the gospel without having first been regenerated and having their will overcome by God. Martin Luther appeals to "Saint" Augustine at least a dozen times in "**The Bondage Of Will**" where this incredible statement from page 34 of the PDF version is made:

"What (you say) can be more useless than that this paradox should be proclaimed openly to the world — that whatever is done by us, is not done by Free-will, but from mere necessity. And that of Augustine also — that God works in us both good and evil: that He rewards His good works in us, and punishes His evil works in us."

Martin Luther in his conclusion to his book "**The Bondage of Will**" made the following statement:

I SHALL here draw this book to a conclusion: prepared if it were necessary to pursue this Discussion still farther. Though I consider that I have now abundantly satisfied the godly man, who wishes to believe the truth without making resistance. For if we believe it to be true, that God fore-knows and fore-ordains all things; that He can be neither deceived nor hindered in His Prescience and Predestination; and that nothing can take place but according to His Will, (which reason herself is compelled to confess;) then, even according to the testimony of reason herself, there can be no "Free-will — in man — in angel — or in any creature! (page 203 of the PDF version)

"**The Bondage Of Will**" quite likely formed much of the basis for John Calvin's doctrine of free will as put forth in his "**Institutes of Christian Religion**". John Calvin appealed to Augustine 368 times in this work. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin constantly appeal to the arch heretic Augustine of Hippo to prove their unscriptural doctrines. The foundation of Calvinism is built upon the

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destruction of the free will of man. So what does the Bible say about the will of man? Does man have a free will?

If man does not have freedom of will, then he is not a morally responsible agent. If men and women do not have freedom of choice, then they cannot be held responsible for, or declared guilty of, sin. A declaration of guilt or innocence implies that a choice was possible. Guilt (or innocence) without having had a choice is an affront to the perfect justice of God. The sovereignty of God and man's free will are not conflicting concepts. They are precepts that are clearly identified and taught in Scripture. Both are copiously and firmly declared in Scripture. Only a God that is truly sovereign can grant free will. Only a God who has no fear of his subjects will grant free will to his subjects. The will of man can only operate by the grace of God. If freedom of choice (will) is denied men and women by God, that makes God the author and cause of all sin. That also would make God the biggest hypocrite in existence since he would have sent Christ to the cross to pay the penalty for something for which God himself was responsible. The theology of John Calvin and Arthur Pink (and all other Calvinists) that makes God either the author, or the cause, of all sin is repulsive and is an attack upon the perfect holiness of God. *James 1:13-14* says:

¹³ Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: ¹⁴ But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. *James 1:13-14*

If man does not have free will, then God has created a hopeless state of confusion where men perish that God is not willing to perish and yet he denies those that perish the free will to make the choice that keeps them from perishing. *2 Peter 3:9* says:

⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. *2 Peter 3:9*

When that hopeless state of confusion exists, God's will, foreordination, and foreknowledge come into conflict. This results in a problem for which there is no solution unless one of two situations exists. These are either: (1) God is the author and cause of all sin, or (2) God has granted all men free will. If God is the author and cause of all sin, then a myriad of contradictions are set up in the Bible. The Cross would be useless. The doctrines of atonement, justification, propitiation, etc. would be farces.

One of the preeminent Calvinists, Arthur Pink, said that God's will is always done. Even a precursory reading of the scriptures will reveal that that statement is an outrageous contradiction of the scriptures. Why would the Lord Jesus Christ teach men to pray that God's will would be done in earth as it is in heaven (*Matthew 6:9-10, Luke 11:2*)?

⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

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Matthew 6:9-10

² And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. *Luke 11:2*

It obvious from the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden and all the sin that follows that the will of God is not done most of the time by most men and women. Sin is the failure of mankind to do the will of God. In fact, I think we may say that the origin of sin for mankind was when Adam and Eve sought to do their own will rather than the will of God. Men and women continue in sin because they continue to seek to do their own will rather than the will of God. Christians seek to do their own will when they jump into sin. The will of God for Christians is their sanctification (*1 Thessalonians 4:3*). So, why is it that Christians are not sanctified? It is because they are doing their will and not the will of God. The battle for the will of the Christian is best illustrated in *Romans 7:14-24*. We would strongly emphasize that this battle between the will of the flesh and the will of the Spirit took place after Paul was saved. This means the battle took place after he was freed from the bondage of sin.

³ For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: *1 Thessalonians 4:3*

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. ¹⁶ If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is good*. ¹⁷ Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. ¹⁹ For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. ²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? *Romans 7:14-24*

Words and phrases relating to the human will occur thousands of times in the Scriptures. If mankind had no free will it would draw into question almost every "if" in our Bibles. "If" is generally the word of choice. It occurs in our King James Bibles 1,595 times. The problem is that the human will is directed from a heart that is deceitfully wicked (*Jeremiah 17:9*).

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? *Jeremiah 17:9*

In every case where the word believe is used in Scripture (143 times) and believed (116 times) it

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involves pure human choice (will) of one fashion or another. In addition to these, phrases like “ye will not”, “would not”, “ye would not”, “if ye will not”, “would none”, “would none of me”, “will not”, “if ye be willing”, and “if ye will” are a recurring theme in Scripture.

The phrase “ye will not” in John 5:38-40 by Christ is a very strong statement concerning human will and unbelief. Christ said:

³⁸ And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. ³⁹ Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. ⁴⁰ And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. *John 5:38-40*

Notice that Christ did not say that they could not come to him, but that they will not come to him. Theirs was a willful act of unbelief.

In the following verses, the phrase “will not” is a recurring theme. This phrase occurs 363 times in our King James Bibles. These verses are expressions of human will resisting and refusing to do the will of God. The words “will not” are words that indicate a choice is possible. Look at the following examples:

¹And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee. ⁸ And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. ⁹ And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land. *Exodus 4:1,8-9*

¹⁰ And the taskmasters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spake to the people, saying, Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw. *Exodus 5:10*

³⁰ But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God. *Exodus 9:30*

⁴ The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. *Psalms 10:4*

⁹ That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: *Isaiah 30:9*

¹⁶ Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. ¹⁷ Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken

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to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. *Jeremiah 6:16-17*

¹³ But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the LORD your God, *Jeremiah 42:13*

⁴⁸ Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. *John 4:48*

In each of the verses just cited, there is not one indication that those involved could not have done the will of God. They chose to do their own will instead.

The phrase “if ye will not” is used 19 times in the Scriptures. Human will and God’s will and judgment has perhaps its strongest presentation and contrast in Leviticus 26 where we see the phrase “if ye will not” used four times, the word if is used nine times and the phrase “will not” is used four times. The phrase “if ye will not” is also used in *Numbers 32:23*, *Numbers 33:55*, *Deuteronomy 11:28*, *1 Samuel 12:15*, *Isaiah 7:9*, *Jeremiah 13:17*, *Jeremiah 22:5*, *Jeremiah 26:4*, *Ezekiel 20:39*, *Daniel 2:5*, *Daniel 2:9*, and *Malachi 2:2*.

¹⁴ But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; ¹⁵ And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, *but* that ye break my covenant: ¹⁶ I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. ¹⁷ And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. ¹⁸ And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. ¹⁹ And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: ²⁰ And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. ²¹ And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. ²² I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your *high* ways shall be desolate. ²³ And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; ²⁴ Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. ²⁵ And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of *my* covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. ²⁶ *And* when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver *you* your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied. ²⁷ And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; ²⁸ Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. ²⁹ And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and

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the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. ³⁰ And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. ³¹ And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. ³² And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. ³³ And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. ³⁴ Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye *be* in your enemies' land; *even* then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. ³⁵ As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it. ³⁶ And upon them that are left *alive* of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth. ³⁷ And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies. ³⁸ And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. ³⁹ And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them. ⁴⁰ If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; ⁴¹ And *that* I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: ⁴² Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. *Leviticus 26:14-42*

²³ But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out. *Numbers 32:23*

⁵⁵ But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. *Numbers 33:55*

²⁸ And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. *Deuteronomy 11:28*

¹⁵ But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers. *1 Samuel 12:15*

⁹ And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son.

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If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. *Isaiah 7:9*

¹⁷ But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD'S flock is carried away captive. *Jeremiah 13:17*

²⁷ But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched. *Jeremiah 17:27*

⁵⁵ But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. *Jeremiah 22:55*

⁴ And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; If ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, *Jeremiah 26:4*

³⁹ As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols. *Ezekiel 20:39*

⁵ The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. ⁹ But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can shew me the interpretation thereof. *Daniel 2:5,9*

¹ And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. ² If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. *Malachi 2:1-2*

In other than *Daniel 2:5,9* none of these Scriptures even remotely indicate that it was a matter of could not. In *Daniel 2:5,9* it was obvious that the Chaldeans could not because they had neither the mind of God or the direct revelation from God that was latter given to Daniel.

Perhaps some of the most tragic narratives in Scripture use the phrases “would none” and “ye would not”. These two phrases are used 13 times in our King James Bibles. We quote 10 of these here including *Deuteronomy 1:26*, *Deuteronomy 1:43*, *Deuteronomy 8:20*, *Psalms 81:11-15*, *Proverbs 1:23-33*, *Isaiah 30:15*, *Jeremiah 29:19*, *Matthew 23:37*, and *Luke 13:34*.

²⁶ Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the

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LORD your God: ⁴³ So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD, and went presumptuously up into the hill. *Deuteronomy 1:26,43*

²⁰ As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God. *Deuteronomy 8:20*

¹¹ But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. ¹² So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. ¹³ Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! ¹⁴ I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. ¹⁵ The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever.

²³ Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. ²⁴ Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; ²⁵ But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: ²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; ²⁷ When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. ²⁸ Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: ²⁹ For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: ³⁰ They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. ³¹ Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. ³² For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. ³³ But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. *Proverbs 1:23-33*

¹⁵ For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. *Isaiah 30:15*

¹⁹ Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the LORD, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the LORD. *Jeremiah 29:19*

³⁷ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! *Matthew 23:37*

³⁴ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent

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unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! *Luke 13:34*

Then we have the phrase “why will ye” that is used in *Ezekiel 18:31* and *Ezekiel 33:11*.

³¹ Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? *Ezekiel 18:31*

¹¹ Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? *Ezekiel 33:11*

What do all these impassioned pleas in *Psalms 81:11-15*, *Proverbs 1:23-33*, *Ezekiel 18:31*, *Ezekiel 33:11*, *Matthew 23:37*, and *Luke 13:34* from the Lord our God do for the Calvinistic doctrine of irresistible grace?? They prove that the Calvinistic doctrine of irresistible grace is not Scriptural. Men and women — saved and lost — do resist the grace of God. Why is it stated that God is longsuffering ten different times in the Bible. It is even stated that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation (*2 Peter 3:15*). If God's grace were irresistible in salvation, he would not need to be longsuffering! How many times have the elect resisted the grace of God in salvation? On a more personal level, how many times did you and I resist the grace of God in salvation before we were saved? How many times do Christians resist the sanctifying grace of God in their lives? The phrase “would not” is also used quite frequently in the Bible. God was constantly having heartaches and problems with Israel because they would not. Take a look at *Judges 2:17*, *2 Kings 17:13-14*, *2 Kings 18:11-12*, *2 Chronicles 24:18*, *Isaiah 28:9-13*, *Jeremiah 13:11*, *Ezekiel 20:8*, and *Zechariah 7:8-13*.

¹⁷ And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so. *Judges 2:17*

¹³ Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. ¹⁴ Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. *2 Kings 17:13-14*

¹¹ And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: ¹² Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all

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that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them. *2 Kings 18:11-12*

¹⁸ And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. ¹⁹ Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear. *2 Chronicles 24:18-19*

⁹ Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. ¹⁰ For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: ¹¹ For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. ¹² To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. ¹³ But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. *Isaiah 28:9-13*

¹¹ For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear. *Jeremiah 13:11*

⁸ But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. *Ezekiel 20:8*

⁸ And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, ⁹ Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: ¹⁰ And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. ¹¹ But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. ¹² Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. ¹³ Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: *Zechariah 7:8-13*

The problem for the nation of Israel in these Scriptures and throughout the Old Testament was not that they could not, but that they would not.

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Then we have the expressions “if ye be willing” and “if ye will” in *Isaiah 1:16-20* and *Psalms 95:7-11* (see also *Hebrews 3*).

¹⁶ Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; ¹⁷ Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. ¹⁸ Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. ¹⁹ If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: ²⁰ But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. *Isaiah 1:16-20*

⁷ For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, ⁸ Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: ⁹ When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. ¹⁰ Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: ¹¹ Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest. *Psalms 95:7-11*

Why would God want to reason with someone who had already been unconditionally elected (reprobated) to hell (*Isaiah 1:18*)? In fact, how could God reason with someone who lacked the ability to exercise free will? Reasoning indicates the possibility of alternative outcomes from different choices. If there is no free will, there is no alternative for choice. If there is the commandment to “harden not your heart”, then there must be the option to harden, or not to harden heart.

In contrast to all of these is the Biblical expression of “could not”. The phrase “could not” is used 115 times in the Bible and is used in the context of a discussion about salvation three different times. These three different times occur in *John 12:39*, *Acts 13:39*, and in *Hebrews 3:19*.

³⁷ But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: ³⁸ That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? ³⁹ Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, ⁴⁰ He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. ⁴¹ These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. ⁴² Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: ⁴³ For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. *John 12:37-43*

John 12:37 indicates that those called out in verses 38-43 had many opportunities to repent and believe. Yet, they did not believe. Some of the Jews, including the chief priests and Pharisees, sought

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to murder Lazarus and stir up other trouble (see *John 12:9-19*). They could not believe because they had already rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. They had hardened their own hearts.

³⁸ Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: ³⁹ And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰ Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; ⁴¹ Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

⁴² And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. ⁴³ Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. ⁴⁴ And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. ⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. ⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. *Acts 13:38-49*

The context of *Acts 13:39* is the preaching of the gospel to the Jews in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. Verse 39 is a simple statement that the Jews there could not be justified by the law of Moses. They were obviously being given the opportunity to repent. Otherwise, the warning of verses 40 and 41 would be useless. The Jews rejected the offer of salvation (verse 46) and Paul preached the gospel to the Gentiles the following Saturday. A contrast is set up in this chapter of Acts between a group of Jews who refused to believe and a group of Gentiles who were obviously willing and eager to believe. *Acts 13:48* will be discussed in a study on unconditional election. Now let us read *Hebrews 3:7-4:11*:

⁷ Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, ⁸ Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: ⁹ When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. ¹⁰ Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in *their* heart; and they have not known my ways. ¹¹ So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) ¹² Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another daily, while it is called To

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day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; ¹⁵ While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. ¹⁶ For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. ¹⁷ But with whom was he grieved forty years? *was it* not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? ¹⁹ So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. ¹ Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. ² For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*. ³ For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For he spake in a certain place of the seventh *day* on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. ⁵ And in this *place* again, If they shall enter into my rest. ⁶ Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: ⁷ Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. ⁸ For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹ There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. ¹⁰ For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his. ¹¹ Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. *Hebrews 3:7-4:11*

Notice the phrase “could not” in *Hebrews 3:19*. The reason they could not enter into the rest (salvation) of the Lord was that they willingly dwelt in unbelief because they hardened their own hearts. The Bible clearly indicates that it was an action of their will whereby they refused to enter into the rest of God. The basis for entering into God’s rest was not unconditional election or irresistible grace, but rather belief (faith). It is clear that they resisted the grace of God because it was God’s will and desire that they enter into His rest. Yet they provoked (*Hebrews 3:8,15,16*) and tempted Him (*Hebrews 3:9*). In doing so, they rejected the grace of God. It was not that they had not been offered a genuine offer of salvation because *Hebrews 4:2* indicates that the offer was genuine. There is no unconditional election, limited atonement, or irresistible grace there! The reason that they could not enter into the rest of the Lord was because the word of God did not profit them because it was not mixed with faith. Faith is always an act of free will. If it were not an act of free will, it could not be called faith. The terms “unbelief” and “believed not” occur five times in this short passage of Scripture and is identified as the cause of the “could not”. Their “would not” came before God’s “could not”. They chose to rest in their works rather than the finished work of God (*Hebrews 4:10*).

I have a sovereign God, but He is not the capricious god of Calvinism. He is omnipotent. He is omnipresent. He is omniscient. He set the conditions and provided the means for the salvation that

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he has so graciously and mercifully given me. I was given light from the word of God (*John 1:9*). I was convicted of my sin by the Holy Ghost (*John 16:7-8*). I was drawn to Christ by Christ (*John 12:32*). I was regenerated by the Holy Ghost (*John 3:3-8*) and granted repentance unto eternal life (*Acts 11:18*). Hallelujah! I looked (*John 3:13-16*) and now I live by the power of Christ that dwells in me (*Galatians 2:20*) None of these benefits of salvation were granted unto me until I exercised faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. None of the events that were, are, or that could be pleasing unto God following my faith were a work of my flesh. They were strictly a work of God (*Philippians 2:13*). Regardless of what Calvinism teaches, by Scriptural definition, faith is not a work (*Ephesians 2:8-9*). If faith is a work, then we may as well cast Romans chapter 4 and Galatians chapter 3 out of our Bibles.

⁹ That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. *John 1:9*

⁷ Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

⁸ And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: *John 16:7-8*

³² And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. *John 12:32*

³ Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ⁴ Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? ⁵ Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. ⁸ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. *John 3:3-8*

¹⁸ When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. *Acts 11:18*

¹³ And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: ¹⁵ That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. *John 3:13-16*

²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and

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the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. *Galatians 2:20*

¹³ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. *Philippians 2:13*

⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We deserve hell. We can take no credit for God's having allowed us to exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is submitting our will to God's will believing that he will do what he says he will do.

We close this study by stating that we can only come to salvation when we submit our will to the will of God. The act of submitting to the will of God is an act of freewill. Otherwise, how could we, or why would we, be commanded to repent? Further, how could we be commanded to "obey the gospel" if there is no choice in obedience? Believing in and worshiping God is all about submitting our will to God's will. The reason that we do not have more worship in the house of God today is that Christians will not submit their will to the will of God. Worship is all about yielding to the mighty hand of the convicting power and leadership of God the Holy Ghost that he might bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ through us. When we reach that point, we can, and will, worship God in the beauty of holiness. When we respond to the Holy Ghost of God, we will worship the Lord Jesus Christ. **Take the opportunity to respond to God and he will respond to you. GLORY TO HIS NAME! HALLELUJAH!**