

**§ 10. Doctrine of Man**  
**Lecture 28**  
**Freedom of the Will and Romans 10**

As we continue to bring our Defenders lessons to you from my home office, I'm glad that you could join us today.

Last time I explained that Protestants and Catholics agree on the necessity of God's prevenient grace in the process of salvation, and I think quite rightly so.

I then proceeded to argue that the Catholic view is correct that at some point along the line human beings have the freedom either to accede to the working of God's grace and to let it have its effect or to resist it and refuse to let God's grace of salvation produce its effect in a person's life.

With respect to Romans 9, I argued that the burden of that chapter is not to narrow down the scope of salvation to a select few but rather to broaden it out to include Gentiles as well as ethnic Jews. God is sovereign and has mercy upon whomever he wills. And who is it that God has chosen to have mercy on? Those who have faith in Christ Jesus. So it is through faith that one becomes a true child of Abraham, a member of that elect body that will inherit the Kingdom of God.

If you look at the book of Galatians, which is almost like a précis of Paul's argument in Romans, you see this very nicely summarized in Galatians 3:6-9. Paul writes,

Thus Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

So who are the true sons of Abraham? Not simply those who are physically descended from Abraham; rather it is those who have faith in Christ Jesus.

That is why Paul can then go on in Romans 10 to write in verses 8-13,

The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For, "every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

Now, you can't make sense of Romans 10 on the interpretation of Romans 9 that construes it as God's electing some minority of people irrespective of their free will, entirely dependent upon God's unilateral choice. The only way that I think you can make sense of Romans 10 is by interpreting it along the lines as I have done. God has chosen to save not just ethnically Jewish people; he has chosen to save everyone who has faith in Christ regardless of their ethnic background. That is why everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

If I'm understanding Romans 9 correctly, this chapter is not teaching a kind of predestinarianism that takes no cognizance of the human free response to God's grace. Quite the contrary, it seems to me that it is broadening out the scope of God's election to say that it is going to include everybody who meets the condition of having faith in Christ.

That is the free human response to God's grace. God's grace comes preveniently, that is to say, it seeks out sinful, alienated, spiritually estranged people, and draws them to himself to that point where one can make a free response by faith or not.

You might say, but didn't we read in Ephesians 2:8-9 that faith is a gift of God, not something that we can produce? Look again at Ephesians 2:8-9. Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast." Doesn't this show that faith is simply God's gift to you and not something that you do on your own?

No. In Greek every noun has a gender. There are three genders – masculine, feminine, and neuter. Now, what is the gender of the Greek word "faith" (*pistis*)? It's feminine. What is the gender of the pronoun *touto* ("this") in verse 8? Neuter! So the antecedent of "this" is not the word "faith." You would have to have a feminine pronoun in order for that to refer to "faith." Rather, what the word "this" refers to is the whole antecedent clause, namely, salvation by grace through faith. That is not your own doing. That is the gift of God. This is the way that God has chosen to set it up; he is going to save by grace through faith everyone who places his faith in Christ.

I want to say something here about the way our Reformed brethren treat the idea of faith. For many of them, if I exercise faith in Christ, if I respond to God's grace through faith, that is somehow my meriting or winning salvation. It is something that I do; I have faith, and so I have done some meritorious work, which is excluded by Paul because salvation is by grace not by meritorious works. But in so saying, I think that they have completely misunderstood Paul. When you read Paul, he always opposes faith to works. For Paul, faith is the antithesis of works. He does not think that placing your faith in Christ is a work, much less a meritorious work. Paul always contrasts faith and works. So, in receiving Christ by faith by acceding to God's grace, you are not doing anything

meritorious to save yourself. You are simply yielding, as it were, to the grace of God and allowing it to do its justifying work in your life. This is not in any sense a meritorious work.

So I want to agree with the Roman Catholic view that there is prevenient grace of God that seeks out sinners and that we have the freedom to respond to that. So I would substitute for the second step in the process of salvation “the free response of the creaturely will to the grace of God.” It is simply acceding to the grace of God in your life rather than resisting it, not a meritorious work that you perform, but simply a grateful and humble reception of God’s grace.

It would follow from this that God’s grace is not irresistible – it can be resisted. Those who resist it separate themselves from God and so have no one to blame but themselves for their fate. Those who do not resist do not do anything to merit God’s grace; they just allow it to do its work in their lives. So there is no credit that accrues to you for responding to God’s grace. It is not a meritorious work that you do. Faith is in fact the antithesis of works.

I’ve argued that God has sovereignly chosen to elect and save all of those who have faith in Christ Jesus. The result in receiving God’s grace is justification. So we may agree with Catholics on the third step: God’s bestowal of justifying grace. Now Protestants and Catholics have important differences in how they understand justifying grace. But we’ll delay our discussion of that question until we come to our next locus – the doctrine of salvation. At this point we can say at least that Catholics and Protestants agree that crucial to salvation is justification by grace through faith.

But then we come to the fourth and fifth steps, that by God’s grace we are enabled to perform good works which merit salvation. Certainly God gives us the ability to do good works. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” But to think that our good works then merit salvation seems to me utterly unacceptable. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:9, “this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast.” Salvation is entirely of God’s grace.

The only way one could possibly defend the idea that we perform good works that then merit salvation would be to say the God’s grace turns us into marionettes, into puppets on strings, so that the works that we do are wrought by God’s pulling the strings and we don’t really do anything. But then that view excludes human freedom. The whole point of this analysis was to include human freedom along with God’s grace in the process of salvation.

So it seems to me that instead of the merit of good works, what we ought to substitute for step (5) is perseverance. If one doesn’t persevere in faith to the end of one’s earthly life,

then one will not experience eternal salvation. Perseverance is necessary in order to obtain eternal life. Perseverance will be the working out of God's grace in your life and sanctifying you, filling you with the Holy Spirit, conforming you to the image of Christ, as you walk in the Spirit. God will help you to persevere in faith to the end and so finally be saved and inherit eternal life. Whether we have the freedom to fall away from faith is again a further question which we'll take up when we come to the doctrine of salvation. But for now we should insist that there is nothing of our own doing that earns salvation.

By way of summary, here is how I would analyze the 5 steps in the process of salvation:

1. God's prevenient grace.
2. Human free response to God's prevenient grace.
3. Justification by God.
4. God enables us to perform good works.
5. Perseverance in God's grace until death.

There is no work that we perform that merits eternal life, but there is in the process of salvation an element of human freedom that makes us more than passive puppets in God's hands.

That brings us to the conclusion of the doctrine of man. Next time we'll move on to our next locus and begin to talk about the doctrine of salvation.

Until then, may God richly bless you as you walk with him and serve him in his Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ?Total Running Time: 16:29 (Copyright © 2020 William Lane Craig)