The Extent of Human Freedom

Crossroads Theological Institute - God's Sovereignty and Human Freedom – May 16-17, 2025

Humans are created in God's image as moral beings who are free such that a.) they make decisions in accordance with their capacities and desires without coercion, b.) they are responsible for their decisions and held morally accountable by God, and c.) their decisions cooperate with God's sovereign will to bring about his good desire in every action.

Outline

- What Is The Extent of Human Freedom?
  - Humans Are Created in God's Image as Moral Beings (Genesis 1:27, 2:16-17)
  - Human Beings Freely Make Decisions in Accordance with Their Nature and Desires Without Coercion (John 8:34, James 1:14)
    - Free Will Is Bound By Nature (Gen. 1:27, Luke 6:45)
    - Free Will is Bound By Desire (John 8:34)
  - Human Beings Are Responsible for Their Decisions and Held Morally Accountable by God (Gen. 2:16-17, Romans 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Deut. 30:19, Gal. 6:7, Ecc. 12:14)
  - Human Beings Cooperate with God's Sovereign Will to Bring about His Good Desire in Every Action (Gen. 50:20, Prov. 16:9, Isaiah 46:10, Acts 2:23, 1 Cor. 15:10)
    - Sovereignly Caused and Freely Chosen
- Four States Of Human Freedom Throughout History
  - Before The Fall - Able to Sin, Able Not to Sin (Gen. 2:16-17)
  - After the Fall - Not Able Not To Sin (Romans 3:10-12, Romans 8:7-8, Ephesians 2:1-3, 4:17-24, Romans 14:23)
    - The Flesh Cannot Please God (Romans 8:7)
    - Functional Capable, Morally Incapable
  - After Regeneration - Able Not To Sin (Ezekiel 36:26-27, 2 Cor. 5:17, Romans 6:14, 2 Cor. 3:18, Gal. 5:16-17),
  - After Glorification - Unable to Sin (1 John 3:2, 1 Cor 15:42-44)
- Implications of God's Sovereignty and Human Freedom
  - God Is Completely In Control and Completely Good (Romans 8:28)
  - Our Actions Have Real Consequences
  - Confidence to Follow God's Moral Will in Courage and Leave the Results to Him in Faith (2 Samuel 10:12, John 19:11)
  - Steel in the Backbone of Faith and Joy in the Heart in Suffering (Romans 8:18-23)
  - Salvation is All of Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

What Is The Extent of Human Freedom?

God decrees all things including the choices of moral creatures in such a way that does not violate their will or agency, but accomplishes his good decrees through them.

Humans are created in God's image as moral beings who are free such that
a.) they make decisions in accordance with their nature and desires without coercion ,
b.) they are responsible for their decisions and held morally accountable by God, and
c.) their decisions cooperate with God's sovereign will to bring about his good desire in every action.

Humans Are Created in God's Image as Moral Beings (Genesis 1:27, 2:16-17)

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27)

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:16-17)

Human Beings Freely Make Decisions in Accordance with Their Nature and Desires Without Coercion (John 8:34, James 1:14)

Free Decisions = Willfully Chosen by Reason / Desire not Coercion

Free Will Is Bound By *Nature* (Gen. 1:27, Luke 6:45)

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil… (Luke 6:45)

Free Will is Bound By *Desire* (John 8:34)

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. (John 8:34)

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. **14** But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. **15** Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15)

Human Beings Are Responsible for Their Decisions and Held Morally Accountable by God (Gen. 2:16-17, Romans 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Deut. 30:19, Gal. 6:7, Ecc. 12:14)

Genesis 2:16-17 in the day you eat thereof, you will surely die…

Romans 14:12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

Human Beings Cooperate with God's Sovereign Will to Bring about His Good Desire in Every Action (Gen. 50:20, Prov. 16:9, Isaiah 46:10, Acts 2:23, 1 Cor. 15:10)

Proverbs 16:9 The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Gen. 50:20)

declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose,' (Isaiah 46:10)

"come let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18)

"Choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15)

Sovereignly Caused and Freely Chosen

God's sovereignty does not negate human responsibility.

Free will is doing what we *desire* to do, according to our *nature*, without *coercion*, and experiencing *real consequence*, and real *moral culpability.*

Four States Of Human Freedom Throughout History

Before The Fall - *Able to Sin*, *Able Not to Sin* (Gen. 2:16-17)

After the Fall - *Not Able Not To Sin* (Romans 3:10-12, Romans 8:7-8, Ephesians 2:1-3, 4:17-24, Romans 14:23)

After the fall–mnd you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2:1-3)

The Flesh Cannot Please God (Romans 8:7)

7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:7-8)

Functionally Capable, Morally Incapable

After Regeneration - *Able Not To Sin* (Ezekiel 36:26-27, 2 Cor. 5:17, Romans 6:14, 2 Cor. 3:18, Gal. 5:16-17),

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. Ezekiel 36:26-27

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Galatians 6:16

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

After Glorification - *Unable to Sin* (1 John 3:2, 1 Cor 15:42-44)

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. (1 Cor 15:42-43)

Implications of God's Sovereignty and Human Freedom

God Is Completely In Control and Completely Good (Romans 8:28)

Our Actions Have Real Consequences (Philippians 2:12)

Confidence to Follow God's Moral Will in Courage and Leave the Results to Him in Faith (2 Samuel 10:12, John 19:11)

Steel in the Backbone of Faith and Joy in the Heart in Suffering (Romans 8:18-23)

Salvation is All of Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 8:28-32)

Recommended Resources

Providence - Three Views - Article by Chris Priestley
https://docs.google.com/document/d/0B0eDAooc20rFdHM1MmNtTmV0bUE/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=107875969704949743293&resourcekey=0-l5LKdt2ZQ-vdc1BHDVsoBg&rtpof=true&sd=true
Chapter 16 "Providence" - *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem
Spectacular Sins and Their Global Cause in the Glory of Christ by John Piper
Chapter 11 "The Mystery of Providence" in *How Long O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* by D A Carson
God's Greater Glory by Bruce Ware
Defeating Evil: How God Glorifies Himself in a Dark World by M. Scott Christenson
Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom by D A Carson
Providence by John Piper
Essay "The Problem of Evil" https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-problem-of-evil/
What About Free Will? by M. Scott Christenson
The Will: Fettered but Free Essay by Sam Storms summarizing Jonathan Edward's *Freedom of the Will*
http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/files/2013/07/Storms-A-God-Entranced-Vision-of-All-Things.345636.Ch9_.pdf