

## PERSONAL HUMAN AGENCY: FREE WILL.

Freedom.

The prevenient grace of the Spirit is exercised on the natural man: that is, on man as the Fall has left him. As the object of that grace man is a personality free and responsible, by the evidence of consciousness and conscience. As fallen he is throughout all his faculties enslaved to sin; but knows that sin is foreign to his original nature, and that the slavery is not hopeless nor of necessity. His will is still the originating power or principle of self-determination, under the influence of motives originated in the understanding and feeling, but capable of controlling those motives. And his whole nature, as fallen, whether regarded as intellect, sensibility or will, is under some measure of the influence of the Holy Spirit, the firstfruits of the gift of redemption.

These several propositions are in themselves clear and simple and true. They are in harmony with all sound psychology; with common sense; and with the tenour and tendency of all Scripture. Their difficulty is felt only in relation to the theological speculations which have been connected with the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the metaphysical speculations with which the doctrine of election has surrounded them.

1. **Prevenient grace is exercised on the personality of man, free and accountable: not upon any particular element of his nature, but upon himself.** That personality is the *Suppositum Intelligens*, the responsible author of all that he does: not his will, nor his feeling, nor his intellect; but the hidden man, the *αὐτὸς ἐγώ*, the central substantial person who is behind and beneath all his affections and attributes. That influence of the Spirit, directly or through the Word, is exercised upon the agent whom St. Paul describes as the active I or the passive Me of every religious feeling that precedes regeneration.

Personality.

2. The person or personality of the natural or unregenerate Free Will

man is free, inasmuch as no power from without controls his will. It is the very nature of will to originate volition: otherwise, if constrained, will is no more will; the possessor of it is not accountable; and volition is only a misnomer for the obedience, only in appearance spontaneous, to a natural or physical law. Consciousness and conscience alike attest that the sinner—~~for~~ of the sinner we are now speaking—is free and responsible: his consciousness in its first elements is that of a free agent; and his conscience, or MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS, asserts his responsibility, not only for actions but for words and thoughts and the whole posture of the mind.

Bondage  
to Evil.

3. Again, **that person is bound and enslaved to sin.** Naturally the bias to evil and the aversion from the moral law are so universal that, even apart from New-Testament teaching, common consent allows that human nature is bound to what is wrong: so bound that none can escape without a direct Divine intervention; and bound so universally in actual experience as to warrant the induction that none will ever be born without it. In the case of actual transgressors, the effect of habit invariably both proves the original innate bondage and deepens its strength.

Not  
Absolute.

4. **But the slavery is not absolute.** It is conscious slavery, and not submitted to without reluctance. It is not so much a fetter on the will itself, as the ascendancy of a sinful bias over the motives that actuate the conduct by governing the will: the feelings and desires of the affection, and the thoughts of the mind. **The will is not bound; but the understanding which guides it is darkened, and the affection which prompts its exercise is corrupted by sense.** Now here comes in the doctrine of Prevenient Grace. It is not needed to restore to the faculty of will its power of originating action: that has never been lost. But it is needed to suggest to the intellect the truth on which religion rests, and to sway the affections of hope and fear by enlisting the heart on the side of that truth.

Grace and  
Freedom.

THE RELATION OF GRACE TO THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL.

**The Grace of God and the human will are co-operant, but not on equal terms.** Grace has the pre-eminence, and

that for many reasons. First, the universal influence of the Spirit is the true secret of man's capacity for religion; secondly, His influence, connected with the Word, is universal, inevitable, and irresistible, as claiming the consideration of the natural man; and, lastly, He gives the power, whether used or not, to decide against sin and submit to God. These facts assure to grace its supremacy in all that belongs to salvation. But the co-operation of the will is real: because in this last stage it rests with the free agent himself whether the influence of the Spirit be repelled or yielded to. This is the uniform and unfailing testimony of Scripture; the consideration of which will prepare the way for a brief review of ecclesiastical opinions and dogmas on the subject.

I. The general truth of a co-operation between the Spirit and the will of man is a postulate of the entire Scripture. Like some other fundamental truths, it is not demonstrated but taken for granted; and that very fact is sufficient evidence of our proposition. This co-operation may be viewed negatively or positively.

Co-operation.

1. Negatively, there is no reference in the only authority to an arbitrary Divine power reigning over the things that accompany salvation. He who works in us to will is never represented as working so absolutely upon us that nothing is left to personal responsibility. *Turn Thou me!* is followed by *and I shall be turned!* And both parts of the sentence must have their force. There is no saying in the Word of God which, fairly expounded, represents the Divine Spirit as overruling the energy of the human object of His grace.

Negatively Viewed.

Jer. xxxi. 18.

2. Positively, and in the most express manner, the Scripture represents Divine prevenient grace as operating through and with man's free concurrence. Figuratively this is expressed by the *good ground* which receives the seed: everywhere it is assumed that the first application of truth is probationary, detecting a character in the hearer which in some sense decides all. But it must always be remembered that this hearer of the Word has a

Positively

Matt. xiii. 23.

preliminary grace in the roots of his nature which he yields to or resists in the very act of resisting or yielding to the appeal of Heaven. We find it, literally, in all those passages which declare that believers themselves voluntarily receive the Word of God or of Christ or of grace. So, in the Thessalonian *Having received the word* (δεξάμενοι answering to παραλαβόντες). This last expression is used concerning the reception of Christ: *As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord*. Another and cardinal text is: *We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain*. Here there is a co-operation of the Apostles with God; but it is equally certain that there is a co-operation of believers with both.

**The Spirit has Pre-eminence. Freedom is of Grace.** II. That the Spirit has the pre-eminence is equally the doctrine of all the Scripture, as indeed it is of common sense.

1. The fact that man is, since the Fall, still a free agent is not more essentially a necessity of his moral nature than it is the effect of grace. Redemption is universal, and goes back to the root of the nature. Its universality has this for its result that all who are born into the world are born into a state of probation: otherwise the human spirit would have fallen back under the law of physical necessity, or into that of diabolic bondage to evil. Unredeemed spirits are responsible; but their responsibility is no longer probationary: they are responsible for a state of guilt that has become determined by their own first act become habitual. The difference put between them and us is the mystery of redeeming mercy. The children of men are in bondage to sin; this is the character which is stamped upon them by inheritance. But the bondage is not hopeless nor is it to any mortal necessary; they have a natural capacity of freedom to act as well as to choose, to perform as well as will; and this their very nature is itself grace.

**Influence Inevitable.** 2. Grace has the pre-eminence inasmuch as its influence when the Word is preached, whether directly or indirectly, is inevitable and irresistible. Prevenient grace moves upon the will through the affections of fear and hope; and these affections are necessarily moved by the truths which the understanding perceives. But the understanding is under the necessary influence of the Word, while, apart from the understanding, in some sense, the

passions are under the control of the Spirit. However obstinately and effectually the truth may be resisted as a ruling power, as truth it cannot be resisted.

3. Moreover, in the secret recesses of man's nature the grace is given disposing and enabling him to yield. Though the will must at last act from its own resources and deliberate impulse, it is influenced through the feeling and the understanding in such a manner as to give it strength. It is utterly hopeless to penetrate this mystery: it is the secret between God's Spirit and man's agency. There is a Divine operation which works the desire and acts in such a manner as not to interfere with the natural freedom of the will. The man determines himself, through Divine grace, to salvation: never so free as when swayed by grace.

Ultimate  
Secret of  
Grace.

#### CONVERSION, REPENTANCE, FAITH.

Conversion is the process by which the soul turns, or is turned, from sin to God, in order to its acceptance through faith in Christ. This is its strict meaning, as distinguished from that broader sense in which it is applied to the entire history of the soul's restoration. As the turning away from sin it is closely allied to Repentance, though not synonymous with it; as the turning to God it includes or is merged in Faith.

Conver-  
sion.

#### CONVERSION.

I. The term Conversion stands here for a few equivalents in Hebrew and Greek which express the same religious idea; that of the change by which the soul is turned from sin to God. The fact that it is thus common to the two Testaments gives it a great importance. It is the general description of the restoration of the sinner that runs through the Bible; and therefore has been very often regarded as including much more than the mere crisis of moral and religious change. Sometimes it is thought to represent the whole course, through all its stages, of the return of the soul to God: this is the case especially in the works of

The Term