

**Sermons**  
**The Manifesto of Reformation**  
**Selected Scriptures**  
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Each year on the last Sunday of October Protestant churches across the world celebrate Reformation Sunday. The reason it's the last Sunday in October is because it was on October 31<sup>st</sup> in the year 1517 that a young professor of theology nailed to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany his 95 Theses. They were simply a series of arguments against the practice of the Roman Catholic Church of selling indulgences. His 95 Theses were arguments against selling plenary forgiveness for anyone who would contribute to the building of Saint Peters Cathedral in Rome. That date, the date that he nailed those arguments to the door marks for most who understand church history the beginning of the Reformation, the sort of official beginning.

As the Reformation continued to unfold the expository preaching of men like Martin Luther and John Calvin and others led to a massive recovery of the biblical truth that had been buried for hundreds of years by the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Now the primary truths that the reformers recovered from the scripture are captured in what are called the five solas of the Reformation. The word sola is the Latin word meaning alone and that is the key word in each of these five solas. First of all they champion sola Scriptura-scripture alone. The ultimate authority they said, for what we believe and what we practice is the scripture alone. Not human tradition, not the magisterium, that is the churches interpretation of the truth, nor popes, nor councils, it is the scripture alone.

Secondly they argued solus Christus. Christ alone. And the point of this sola was that we are justified, we are declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, and not on our own righteousness whatsoever.

The third of the great solas was sola fide. We are justified by faith alone and not by any works of any kind. We contribute nothing; we are justified by faith alone.

Sola gratia – we are saved by grace alone. In other words we contribute no personal merit; there is nothing we do to earn our salvation. It is solely an expression of God’s undeserved favor. It is by grace alone.

And finally, Soli Deo Gloria. You see salvation by Christ alone, by faith alone, by grace alone ultimately magnifies the glory of God alone; and man receives no glory whatsoever. In fact let me just give you this little insight. If you want to identify the true gospel it always humbles man it never exalts him.

Now although the solas are all foundational and absolutely vital to the preservation of the biblical gospel, in reality there is yet another theological point of contention that made these five solas necessary. In one sense it was this other point that drove the reformers to craft these five solas. It was the seminal question, ‘How free is man’s will?’ That really was the flashpoint of the Reformation and in God’s amazing providence on Reformation Sunday we find ourselves in Romans chapter 3 listening as Paul answers that very question. How free is man’s will?

Let’s read it again together, Romans chapter 3, and I’m not going to read the whole passage, just a few verses to set the foundation for what we’ll study together today. Romans chapter 3 beginning in verse 9. “What then, are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

That passage is really answering the question, how free is mans will? And the answer is it's not free at all, it is completely bound, it is in bondage to sin.

So in honor of the Reformation and in honor of Reformation Sunday, today I want to step away from our verse by verse study of this text, we'll Lord willing come back next week, but I want to show you that what Paul teaches here in Romans 3 was in fact the true flash point of the Reformation. So today I want you to put on your thinking caps with me. Alright I want you to stay with me. The first part of our time together is going to have a little more of a feel of church history or systematic theology classroom than our normal Sunday study together. But be patient with me, we will get to the scripture. I just want you to have the historical and theological setting for what we are going to look at together.

This issue of man's free will has often been the flashpoint. In fact the Reformation was not the first time that this was the point of conflict. So I want to begin this morning with the battles of church history. Let's look at the battles of church history; there are two of them primarily. The first major battle over this issue occurred in the 400's AD. And it pitted two men against each other; Augustine and Pelagius.

Now let me introduce them to you in case you're not as familiar with them. Augustine was ordained in 381 AD, became a faithful pastor in the city of Hippo. Hippo is in North Africa in what is modern day Algeria. He became one of the most influential early church fathers. Much of what he taught is amazing, particularly in the area of salvation. Some of the other areas created problems for us to this day, but he was a faithful man, a faithful pastor, a brother in Christ.

The other man, Pelagius was a British monk who claimed to have professed Christ in the year 400 AD. In the year 410 Pelagius traveled to North Africa to meet with Augustine and the two

sharply disagreed. In fact, Pelagius was deeply angered by one line from Augustine's Confessions. As you know Augustine's Confessions is simply the sort of diary, the biography of his spiritual conversion. And this is what angered Pelagius, Augustine wrote, "Give me the grace, O Lord, to do as You command, and command me to do what You will. O Holy God when Your commands are obeyed, it is from You that we receive the power to obey them."

Now if you're having a hard time figuring out what in that line that made Pelagius angry, good for you, your theology is better than his. But here's what it had to do with, Pelagius saw in that statement of Augustine, an assault on human goodness and human freedom, which of course, it is. And therefore, he said, on human responsibility. He said if God has to give us the power to do what He commands then that means we are not inherently able to do it. As you can figure out, he denied original sin. That is he denied that the guilt of Adam's sin was transferred to us because he stood as our representative, and he denied that the moral corruption that came through Adam's sin and passed through the whole human race passed to us or passed to anyone. Adam's sin effected only him, Pelagius argued, only Adam. He argued that human nature is good at its core and able to do everything God commands us to do including repent and believe. He taught that man's will is still free enough to choose God. And this is shocking, Pelagius even said, grace is unnecessary. Pelagius says, "Though grace may facilitate the achieving of righteousness, it is not necessary to that end." In other words, we're good enough. God has given us enough capacity to choose good that we can move forward on our own.

As all of you are responding, I hope, the church responded to Pelagius with grave concern. And it was given to Augustine to speak for most of the church to present arguments against the teaching of Pelagius. Responding to the idea of human goodness and moral ability, Augustine wrote this and this is the absolute antithesis of what Pelagius taught. Augustine said, the whole mass of the human race was under condemnation, steeped and drowning in misery and it was being tossed from one form of evil to another. He went on to say that the reason that's true is because of original sin; because of what we inherited from Adam through our parents. He says, "By the evil will of that one man, all sinned in him. Since all were that one man from whom

therefore the all (that's us) individually derive original sin." That's exactly what Paul teaches in Romans 5, we'll see it when we get there. Because one man sinned we now bear the weight of that both in the guilt of our representative as well as the moral pollution that passed to us.

The church agreed of course with Augustine, that's what the scripture teaches, so in the year 418 AD, at the council of Carthage it condemned most of the teaching of Pelagius. However, not everyone disagreed entirely with Pelagius and a new sort of mediating position between that of Augustine and Pelagius began. A position called semipelagianism, you can get the description of it – it's not where Augustine is, it's not where Pelagius is, its semipelagianism. This position agreed with Pelagius that mans will is free to choose good, but only when God's grace assists the human will. And here's how this normally is taught. God in a sort of universal act gave every fallen human being as a result of the death of Christ, the capacity, the power, the grace in order to respond to God. It's a universal gift God gave all men. It's called prevenient grace. It makes it possible they teach, for all men to choose God and salvation without any further help from God.

Thankfully the Council of Orange in the year 529 AD stopped the churches further drift toward semipelagianism. It said this, the Council of Orange, "Neither a desire to believe, nor faith itself originates in us or in our wills, but is solely the result of God's grace." Sadly however some of the vestiges of Pelagianism and semipelagianism were left in place.

Now, fast forward, that's the first battle, fast forward a thousand years to the time of Luther and Erasmus. Essentially the same conflict surfaced between Martin Luther the German reformer and the Dutch humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam. Now most of us are familiar with Luther but maybe not so much with Erasmus. Erasmus was a Roman Catholic scholar who had initially been sympathetic to the Reformation. I mean you couldn't live in those times and be a thinking person and not see that the church needed some reformation. So he had been sympathetic, but because he was eventually asked to respond on the churches behalf to Luther and Luther's

teaching as he grew in popularity, he wrote eventually a work entitled *Diatribes Concerning Free Will, or Discussion Concerning Free Will*. That was in the year 1524 that Erasmus wrote this on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church. What he wrote would later become the foundation for official Catholic doctrine, codified at the Council of Trent in the mid 1500's. Council of Trent denied total depravity, denied that the human will though fallen is unable to do anything good, in fact Trent taught that the fallen human will can still cooperate with God unto salvation, can even contribute grace enabled works toward ones salvation. That was the position that Erasmus articulated in 1524.

Luther responded to Erasmus, and he responded with what he believed was his most important theological work, a book entitled *The Bondage of the Will* written in the year 1525, a year after Erasmus' diatribe concerning free will. That book is an absolutely crucial book. If you haven't read it, I strongly encourage you to read it. In fact B B Warfield the great Princeton theologian called *The Bondage of the Will* the manifesto of the Reformation. You see Luther saw free will and the discussion over free will as being about the heart of the gospel.

Now, why? Why would this be the issue? Why did Erasmus decide when he attacked Luther on behalf of the church, why did he make free will the issue? Well Luther explains it very well. Listen to Martin Luther in *The Bondage of the Will*, this is quintessential Luther. He's talking now to Erasmus, he says, "I give you hearty praise and commendation on this further account that you alone in contrast with all others have attacked the real thing." That is the essential issue. "You've not wearied me with those extraneous issues about the papacy, purgatory, and indulgences and such like; trifles rather than issues. In respect of which almost all today have sought my blood, though without success. You and you alone have seen the hinge on which all turns and aimed for the vital spot." Luther says, Erasmus you get it. You see what the Reformation is really about. You see the central issue, the hinge.

You see at the core of Martin Luther's theology and his view of sin was an utter rejection, not only of Pelagianism but of semipelagianism. He taught that man's will is not free, hence the title *The Bondage of the Will*. Listen to Luther, "With regard to God and in all that bears on salvation or damnation, man has no free will, but is a captive prisoner and bond slave either to the will of God or to the will of Satan." Because he believed man's will was bound he believed that man was unable to contribute to his salvation in any way. Salvation instead must be completely of God's grace. Man can't contribute his works; he can contribute nothing because his will is in bondage.

Now Luther's favorite way to illustrate the bondage of the human will was by picturing your will and mine as a horse; kind of think along with Luther here. He argued that because of our slavery to sin, we don't ride on the horse of our own will. In other words, I don't pull the reins on my will and there are only two possible riders, he said. Before salvation, Satan rides it and after salvation, God rides it. Luther writes, "If God rides it, it wills and goes where God wills, if Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. (Here's the key) Nor may it choose to which rider it will run or to which it will seek. But the riders themselves (that's God and Satan) fight to decide who will have and hold it." In other words, he saying, look you are born and I am born by nature and our wills are ridden by Satan. He takes us where he wants. This is what Jesus said in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and you do the desires of your father." Luther was saying our only hope was for God who has the power to change our corrupted wills, to step in, cast aside Satan who rides them and become the rider Himself and enable us to choose Him and good.

So, those are the two great battles of church history and in both cases the central issue was the same. So I want to move past the battles of church history to consider secondly the crux of the conflict. In those historical conflicts the key issue centered on this question. To what extent is man's will affected by original sin? Or let's put it as it is more popularly asked. Does man have a free will? Do you have a free will? And if you have a free will in what sense is it free?

Now let me tell you that this is a confusing question, because the words free and will can be used in different senses and often are so we kind of talk around each other on this issue. So for clarity let me start with a couple of foundational definitions. By will, we mean that faculty of the soul that chooses, that makes choices. Or we could follow Jonathan Edwards, I like him a little better, he says the will isn't like a separate mechanism in your soul, he said, "The will is simply the mind choosing." That's your will; it's just your mind making choices. I think he's right. We're not talking about a separate compartment of your soul; we're describing the reality that because we are made in God's image our minds have the capacity to choose, even as God chooses. That's the will.

But when we say that the mind's capacity to choose is free, what exactly do we mean by this? Now here's where you're going to have to put on your thinking hat with me, okay, and stay with me, I promise I'll wrap it up, I think you'll see it come together, but you're going to stretch here a little bit with me for a few minutes. Okay? When we talk about free will there have historically been three views of free will. The first view is that free will means we make moral decisions free of any influence whatsoever. This is often called the Freedom of Indifference or the Neutral Will Theory. This by the way is the most common non-Christian definition of free will. R C Sproul describes this view, "As the ability to make choices without any prior prejudice, inclination, or disposition." In other words, this view argues that we make decisions free of any influences. In other words we approach moral decisions utterly objective. This is both irrational and unbiblical. So, no respecting Christian takes this view. Instead, Christians have historically landed on one of the other two views of free will.

Let's look at the second one. The second view of free will is that free will means we are completely free to make moral decisions that are opposites of each other or contrary to each other. In other words I can make any moral decision. I can decide to sin or I can decide for Christ and everything in between. I have the power. That's free will in this definition. This view teaches that our wills, though damaged by the fall; still every human being is able to cooperate with the Spirit unto salvation. That through this grace that God has given every sinner,

the effects of original sin are erased or reversed and every sinner is enabled by God to respond to the gospel, to respond to God. This view says the unregenerate sinner can choose on the one hand to reject Christ and to remain in his sin, or this same sinner has the power to make the contrary choice to receive Christ and everything in between. He can choose whatever he wants at both extremes. This, by the way, is the view that is usually held by Armenians. But it's based on a fallacy. It's based on a fallacy that free will must mean; I have the power of contrary choice. But that's not true. Let me prove that to you.

Let me ask you a question. Does God have a free will? Does God have a free will? Absolutely. God can make choices. But does God have the power of contrary choice? No. God can and does choose to do what is good and righteousness. But God cannot make the contrary choice and choose to sin because it's contrary to His nature. He can't choose to do anything sinful. He is forced to make certain choices not by anything outside of Himself, but by His own character. So understand then, the essence of free will is not the capacity to make contrary choices even God doesn't have that. So this is not the biblical view. Cairns writes this, "God's freedom consists in choosing and acting according to the disposition of His will without the power of contrary choice." So we have to reject this second view as well.

The third view of free will is in fact what the scripture teaches and it's this. Free will means that we are free to make moral decisions that are in keeping with our own desires. In other words, this is sometimes called the freedom of self-determination. I can determine what I want to do. The ability to choose according to the disposition of your own will without external control. Charles Hodge says, "Man is free not only when his outward acts are determined by his will, but also when his volitions (what's going on inside of you) are truly and properly his own determined by nothing outside of himself but proceeding from his own views, feelings and imminent dispositions. So that his decisions are the real intelligent and conscious expression of his character or of what is in his mind." That's free will.

Every human being has a free will in this sense. His mind is able to choose what he wants. You're not an automaton. You're not a robot. You choose what you want. You have a free will in that sense. Jonathan Edwards says, "The will always chooses according to its strongest inclination at the moment." That's how we act, isn't it? We make a choice at every moment based on the strongest desire at that moment.

Now here's where it gets to the key in the crux. Listen carefully, this means that every moral choice you and I make is at the same time both free and every choice is at the same time determined. Here's what I mean. Your choices are free in the sense that they are really and truly your own choices. Nobody's forcing you to make that choice. But your choices are determined by your own desires. And here's where the real problem comes; because our desires are all corrupt. That's why Augustine said we have a free will in the sense that we make real choices but we still lack liberty. It's a great comparison. We can choose what we want, but we never have the liberty to want God and to want righteousness and even to want salvation. Robert Raymond says, "Man is incapable of changing his character or of acting in a way that is distinct from his corruption." You see, when you understand that we have free wills in this sense, we have to agree with Martin Luther that free will is a bit too grandiose of a term for what we have.

So, so far we've considered the battle of church history, we've considered the crux of the conflict. I want us to look thirdly at the clear statements of scripture. Is this what the scriptures teach? Turn with me to Romans chapter 3 again if you're not still there. It's amazing in God's providence that in the battles of church history that I outlined for you this morning, this passage figured prominently. Because this passage answers the question, 'is man's will free to choose God?' Now as I noted for you last time that we studied this together. Paul begins verse 10 with a summary of our depravity of our condition as it is written, "there is none righteous, not even one." Righteous means to conform to a standard. There isn't a single person that conforms to God's standard. Apart from justifying grace, not one person who's ever lived has met God's standard. None of us has.

And then he goes on in verses 11 through 17 to sort of outline the extent of this depravity, the depth of depravity. Through a series of Old Testament references he explains just how profoundly sin has affected each one of us. I noted for you in verse 11, ‘we have darkened minds.’ There is none, not one who understands. Nobody gets it. Nobody understands God, nobody understands His truth, nobody understands His true condition, nobody understands how to be right with God; no one who truly understands.

We have enslaved wills; verse 11 goes on to say “there is none who seeks for God.” Here it is the bondage of the will. There’s none, not one. It’s shown in our rebellious lifestyles as well. At the beginning of verse 12, “all” without exception “have turned aside” that is from God’s path. The idea here is of direction, the direction of our lives. We’ve all turned to our own path, our own lifestyle. “Together we have become useless.” That is we no longer function for the purpose for which we were made. We’re like sour milk is one way this word is used in the Old Testament. No good for anything but to be thrown out.

Verse 12 describes as well our sinful behavior. This is where Lord willing we’ll pick up next time. Our sinful behavior, “There is none who does good.” This is our daily behavior. Listen before you came to Christ, nothing you did, nothing I did met God’s standard of good. Nothing. There is none who does good. There is not even one. Paul’s point in this passage is that not even one person chooses God, chooses God’s path, chooses to actually do what God considers good. This passage is devastating to the traditional interpretation of free will. In fact listen to Martin Luther in *The Bondage of the Will*, commenting on this very passage, this is quintessential Luther, listen to this, “Let him that dares” that’s the way he starts, “Let him that dares defend free will against these indictments and I will gladly recant and be a confessor of free will myself.” His point is you can’t do it; you can’t come to this text and end up thinking that I have a free will that can respond to God.

But there's another source of scripture that documents the bondage of the will and I'll call it scriptures categorical negatives. Throughout the New Testament there are passages that use a most unusual or actually it's a very common Greek word, but they use it in a most unusual theological sense. The word is dunami. We get our English word dynamite from it, it's not that it means dynamite, but you recognize it. The word simply means to have the power, to have the ability to do something. It's like the English word can. As your Mom taught you when you were learning grammar, not may but can. That's the Greek word. And in the New Testament the writers combine that word to have the power or ability with a negative to say 'we do not.' In each case the point is that apart from Christ, man has no ability, no power to do certain things. First of all, he has no ability to act contrary to his nature. He can't.

In Matthew 7 verse 18, in the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord's talking about false teachers. These are men who are unbelievers. And He says this about them, "A good tree cannot" there's our word, dunami, doesn't have the power; a good tree doesn't have the power or capacity to produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree have the power or capacity to produce good fruit. What is Jesus saying? He's saying we can't change our nature. If you're a bad tree, you can't become a good tree, you can't do that, you don't have the power to do that. Nor if you're a bad tree do you have the power or capacity to act contrary to your nature and produce good fruit. You can't do it. Cannot.

Number two, man does not have the ability to enter God's kingdom. In John chapter 3 our Lord's talking to Nicodemus as you remember, and in that conversation He says to him in chapter 3 verse 3, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again" literally born from above, in other words unless God brings new life to that person, he cannot, dunami, he does not have the power or capacity to "see the kingdom of God. In verse 5 Jesus said, "unless one is born of the Spirit he cannot (he doesn't have the power) to enter into the kingdom of God." Unregenerate man does not have the capacity to enter into the kingdom over which God rules.

Thirdly, man doesn't have the ability to do anything spiritually good. In John chapter 15, you remember Jesus is in the Upper Room discourse, He's describing the reality of those branches that are true branches, true believer in Him and they stay, they continue, they persevere in following Christ, versus the false branches that are going to cast off and burned up and in context it's talking about Judas who just left the upper room to go betray Christ. And He's talking about the fact that apart from ones connection to Christ, you don't have certain capacity. John 15:4, Jesus said, "Abide in Me," that is, stay with Me. Remain in Me, don't leave, "and I in you. As the branch cannot (does not have the capacity) to bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who remains in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit," and then he says this, "for apart from Me" you do not have the capacity or power to do anything. He doesn't mean you don't have the power or capacity to function physically, in the ultimate sense that's true because in Him we live and move and exist, but He's talking spiritually. He's saying you don't have the power apart from Me to do anything good in the sight of God.

Number four, man apart from Christ, apart from grace cannot believe or even understand the truth of God. Definitive passage on this of course is First Corinthians chapter 2 verse 14; the whole chapter is about God's revelation. And as he finishes that chapter he says this, 'a natural man, that is an unregenerate person, does not accept, that is welcome or receive the things of the Spirit of God, or the truth of God, you just don't have a voice for it. Listen, if you're here this morning and you're not in Christ, you couldn't care less about what I'm talking about this morning. You don't have any interest in it, you don't welcome it, you don't accept it. Jesus said, 'My sheep hear My voice' they want to know what I said. But those who aren't My sheep, they don't listen to My voice. They don't have any interest in My voice. And so he says, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him;" and then he says, "and he cannot (dunami, he doesn't have the capacity or the power) to understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." He lacks the ability to understand the implications and the application of the truth to his own life, the value and importance of it. He can grasp mentally what it's saying, but he can't grasp the reality of it.

Number five, man without the grace of God, cannot obey God. Turn over to Romans chapter 8 verse 6; Paul is here contrasting the believer and the unbeliever. And he says in Romans 8:6, “The mind set on the flesh (that’s the unbelievers mind) is death, but the mind set on the Spirit (that’s the believer) is life and peace, because (verse 7) the unbelievers mind is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is (dunami) not even able (it doesn’t have the power) to do so.” It doesn’t have the capacity to obey God. Unbelievers can’t obey God. Oh they can be hypocrites and ostensibly outside, externally do what God commands but it’s not really obeying God, because to obey God it has to be from the heart, it has to be with a motive for you love of God and the glory of God. They can’t, they can’t do it. They’re not able.

Number six, they’re not able to please God. Stay here in Romans 8 and look at verse 8, “for those who are in the flesh (that is unbelievers) cannot (they do not have the capacity, they do not have the power to) please God.” Why is that? Because the writer of Hebrews says without faith, it is impossible to please Him. If you don’t believe God, if you don’t believe in His Son, then it’s impossible to please God.

Number seven, without Christ, without grace, without the work of the Spirit of God, it is impossible for man to come to Christ for salvation. We looked at this verse John 6:44 a couple of weeks ago, so I’m not going to take you there and walk through it as carefully as we did then, let me just remind you. No one, Jesus says, this is our Lord talking, no one without exception can, dunami, has the power or capacity to come to Me, that is to approach Me for salvation, unless the Father who sent Me compels him, draws him. The word means to irresistibly compel. Sometimes in the New Testament it’s translated as drag – as dragging a prisoner to jail. Jesus is saying, no human being without exception has the power or ability to approach Me for salvation unless the Father is irresistibly compelling him to come, drawing him.

Now look at those seven can not that we’ve just gone through. Those describe the bondage of the human will. Those describe why man is not free, his will is not free. We cannot act contrary

to our nature. We cannot enter God's kingdom. We cannot do anything spiritually good. We cannot embrace the truth, obey God, please God, or even come to Christ for salvation. Now you tell me, can man of his own free will choose God? The obvious answer is no. Scripture confirms what both Augustine and later Luther taught. We have a free will; in that we can choose whatever we desire, but left to ourselves we have a will that's bound and we will never choose anything but sin.

Now why is this so important? Why was this the flashpoint of the Reformation? And why should it matter to you? Let me give you the implications of the bondage of the will. And I want to do that in sort of two perspectives. First of all, when people don't understand the bondage of the will, how does it skew their perspective? Okay, if you don't understand the bondage of the will, then you will believe that we take the initiative in salvation. You know this view sort of has God sitting in heaven having made salvation possible for all men and now He's just sitting up in heaven hoping against hope, wringing His hands that somebody will take Him up on His invitation. This is completely contrary to the spirit of the New Testament, the whole scripture.

Turn to Ephesians chapter 2 that we read this morning. I want you to see the contrast here. Ephesians chapter 2 verse's 1 to 3 describe what we were when God found us. He says, "You were dead." Dead. I lived in a mortuary when I was in graduate school; they paid me to live there. I got a lot of experience with death. Okay, death is marked by an inability to respond. "We were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you formerly lived according to the course of this world." You were in lockstep with the mindset of the age, the zeitgeist. You were in slavery "to the prince of the power of the air," Satan who's all about false religion. That's "the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience." You were enslaved and I was as well to our lusts, verse 3. And the end of verse 3, we "were by nature children of wrath." We were headed towards God's wrath. Now you tell me, how does a person in that condition extricate himself? They're dead. But, God. God has to take the initiative. That's our only hope. If you understand the bondage of the will, if you understand verse's 1 to 3, you hope and pray God acts because that's our only hope.

If you don't get the bondage of the will, you also can come to the conclusion that we contribute in some way to our own salvation. It may be like the Roman Catholic Church teaches; you conclude that you actually will contribute good works to your own right standing before God. Listen if you think that, you have completely misunderstood your true condition. Your will is bound, as I showed you just a moment ago, the scripture is clear. Nothing you have ever done meets God's standard of goodness. That is a hopeless pursuit.

But maybe you take the more evangelical approach. You say well I don't contribute any works to my salvation, but I believed, I repented - I can take some credit for that. No, you can't. Right here in Ephesians 2 verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that (could mean salvation or it could mean faith) and that not of yourselves, (either way it includes faith) it is the gift of God." Listen the only reason, if you're sitting here this morning and you believed in Jesus Christ, the only reason you believed is because God as an act of His grace gave you faith. Same thing is true of repentance. In Acts chapter 11 verse 18, they say God grants, God gives repentance. But if you're wrong about the bondage of the will, you're wrong about this. You think you can contribute.

But let me take the other side of it. When people do understand the bondage of the will, when they get that, then what's the fruit of understanding that? Well, first of all it demands that salvation be a sovereign act of God. That's our only hope. If you understand the bondage of the will, you hope and pray that God acts and that's what happens here. In verse 1, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins." Verse 5, But God, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive." It has to be a sovereign act of God, because dead people don't respond, they're marked by the inability to respond and the only hope we have is for God to give us life and then give us repentance and then give us faith. It has to be a sovereign act of God. We were dead and He made us alive. Salvation has to be an entirely a work of God from beginning to end, because we could contribute nothing. We were dead, our wills were bound, we were without hope.

If you understand the bondage of the will, you'll also understand that salvation flows solely and completely from the grace of God. Look here at verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...made us alive." Verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." It's God's grace. Listen the only reason you're in Christ is because there is in God an attribute, a quality, a characteristic there is this part of God that delights in doing good to those who deserve exactly the opposite, and that's why you're a Christian. It's grace alone.

It also, if we understand the bondage of the will and we understand that it's by an act of God and we understand that it's by the grace of God and that it's by faith alone, then it gives glory to God alone. Notice verse 9, God designed salvation to be by grace, He designed our spiritual rescue to be by grace alone, so that it would not be a result of works. God didn't want salvation to be a result of works of any kind. Why? Notice verse 9, "So that," here's why, here's why God designed salvation the way that He did, so that no human being could boast before Him. And what that means is, God gets all the glory. If you're in Christ, if you understand your will was bound, if you understand that you were dead, if you understand that you could not respond to God, that God had to make you alive and that you did nothing that God did everything then you don't have anything to boast about before God, you stand before Him glorying in God alone. And He did it that way on purpose.

Now let me just say, if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, you're not in Christ – you're dead, you're dead to God, you probably even sense that, you probably know that. So how does a dead person who can't respond, what do you do? Well, our Lord described it beautifully in the first Beatitude. He said blessed are the beggars in spirit. That's how you come to God, you come as a beggar. You fall on your face as all of us here who are believers have done. There was a point in our lives when we fell on our face before God and we came as beggars. Oh, God, I deserve nothing from You, I have been a rebel against You my whole life, You've given me everything good and all I've done is give You is evil. Oh God, be merciful,

show mercy and grace to me because of what Christ did. And here's the good news, our God never turns away a truly repentant heart. He is by nature a Savior. He is by nature a rescuer. And He responds to people who come to Him like that.

If you're a Christian my prayer is that you will come to understand how important this truth is that we've studied together this morning. It is the flashpoint, the crux of the Reformation. It is the hinge on which the Reformation turned in the battle to recover the biblical gospel. If you're going to have a biblical gospel you've got to understand the bondage of the will. But let me apply it on a very personal level. If you're here this morning and you're in Christ, you were dead and God in His mercy and grace made you alive through the work of Jesus Christ alone, received by faith alone, accomplished by grace alone – so that you would give glory to God alone. Soli Deo Gloria. Let's pray together.

Father, we are humbled by what we've learned this morning and at the same time our souls are thrilled. Lord, we thank You, we do praise You, we give You glory alone. Lord, we realize we were dead, we were hopeless, our wills were bound by sin. But thank You O God that when we were dead, in Your grace You made us alive. You gave us faith, You gave us repentance, You brought us to Yourself. Father, we bless You. Help us to think rightly about this so that Lord, in the end we don't get any of the glory for our salvation, You get it all because You alone deserve it. Father, I pray for those here this morning who are not in Christ, help them to see their true condition, they're really hopeless condition this morning, they're dead to You. And may they become beggars in spirit. Where they sit this morning or this afternoon in their homes, Father may they cry out to You as a beggar and plead for Your forgiveness in Christ and thank You O God that it's just like You to rescue the truly penitent person. We bless You in Jesus name, Amen.