

## The Augsburg Confession

### *Talking About Faith with Family and Friends*



#### Article XVIII: Of Free Will

**Discussion:** Does our intelligence and education lead us to challenge the belief that God is omniscient and omnipotent and calls us to faith and salvation? If you are having a discussion with someone on this topic, is your discussion directed by you or God? Who determines the outcome of a sports game, a presidential election, an offer of employment, membership in a church, acceptance of a proposal for marriage?

**"Of Free Will** they (our Lutheran churches) teach that man's will has some liberty to choose civil righteousness, and to work things subject to reason. But it has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness; since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, [1 Cor. 2:14](#); but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word.

These things are said in as many words by Augustine in his *Hypognosticon*, Book III: We grant that all men have a free will, free, inasmuch as it has the judgment of reason; not that it is thereby capable, without God, either to begin, or, at least, to complete aught (sic) in things pertaining to God, but only in works of this life, whether good or evil.

**"Good"** I call those works which spring from the good in nature, such as, willing to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry a wife, to raise cattle, to learn diverse useful arts, or whatsoever good pertains to this life. For all of these things are not without dependence on the providence of God; yea, of Him and through Him they are and have their being.

**"Evil"** I call such works as willing to worship an idol, to commit murder, etc. They condemn the Pelagians and others, who teach that without the Holy Ghost, by the power of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things; also to do the commandments of God as touching "the substance of the act." For, although nature is able in a manner to do the outward work, (for it is able to keep the hands from theft and murder,) yet it cannot produce the inward motions, such as the fear of God, trust in God, chastity, patience, etc."

**Importance:** The debate over free will continues with philosophers today. On one end of the spectrum God knows everything and is all powerful and at the other end of the spectrum it was the decision of Adam and Eve (man) to sin.

St. Augustine and the Roman Catholics taught that man had a free will and the ability to make decisions in matters of life and faith. But the Catholic Church also teaches that God is working in all decisions for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Martin Luther attempted to take a “balanced” position in recognizing that in “civil righteousness” man makes decisions regarding marriage, food, education, work, etc. But, that in matters of faith, only God through the Holy Spirit acts and directs. Luther will further state that in all of man’s earthly or civil decisions he disappoints God; unless he has faith. Our faith changes everything because through faith we are regenerated into a new creature and recognize the Holy Spirit as an intimate part of us. Luther calls this our “spiritual righteousness.”

Luther accepts that all people are predestined to salvation while rejecting predestination as a source of salvation for only the “elect.” He also rejects the teaching that man has complete freedom in this life.