

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

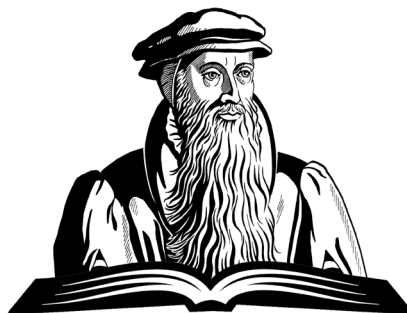
STUDY GUIDE

Module 3:

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

Lecture 4:

THE FREEDOM OF MAN'S WILL



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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

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STUDY GUIDE

Module 3

The Doctrine of Man

1. Introduction
2. The Nature of Man
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Lecture 4:

The Freedom of Man's Will

Introduction

There are many complex factors, various layers of motivations within us that influence our decisions. It is true that circumstances outside us, including other people, may impact us. But in the end, we decide to do what we do. They are our decisions that flow from our own motivations. Ultimately, we do what we want to do, and what we want is the real issue. Consequently, we have to know something about our heart to ascertain the reason behind our actions. Jesus notes this in reference to our words. He says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34). The heart is the source for our speech. The mouth is a window to the soul. As someone aptly said, the matter of the heart is the heart of the matter. The exercise of our will is the fruit, but our spiritual nature is the root from which our will springs.

Theme: *The doctrine of the Freedom of Man's Will.*

I. Scriptural Basis

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Romans 3:10–12)

1. The natural man's character.
2. Man's natural ignorance.
3. Man's hostility and alienation from the Lord.
4. Man's inability to do what is pleasing to the Lord.

Questions:

1. How do the Psalms speak of the depravity of man? Can you name two Psalms that put this forth? Meditate on them, then sing them, and pray for these Psalms to drive you to Christ.

2. What knowledge of man are we taught in Romans 3, verses 10 to 12? Why did the Apostle Paul discuss this doctrine of man’s depravity in the opening chapters of his epistle to the Romans?

II. Doctrinal Overview

As summarized in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 9.

1. Defining man’s free will.

a. Man makes his own choices without compulsion.

WCF chapter 9, paragraph 1: “*God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.*”

b. False definition 1: Man can do things contrary to God’s choosing; God cannot interfere with man’s will or determine what is within his choosing.

c. False definition 2: Unregenerate man has the ability to do what is morally good or evil.

2. Man’s will considered in the four states of man’s existence, as summarized by Augustine.

a. First state—in the garden of Eden, prior to the fall, man was able not to sin:

WCF chapter 9, paragraph 2—“*Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good, and well pleasing to God; but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it.*”

b. Second state—after the fall, man was not able not to sin:

WCF chapter 9, paragraph 3—“*Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.*”

c. Third state—post conversion, after a person is born again and brought in faith and repentance to be in Christ, man is able to sin and not to sin:

WCF chapter 9, paragraph 4—*“When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.”*

d. Fourth state—the believer in heaven is not able to sin:

WCF chapter 9, paragraph 5: *“The will of man then is made perfectly and immutably free to do good alone, in the state of glory only.”*

3. Why it helps to think about the freedom of man’s will in each of these four states.

Questions:

1. What are the typical notions or definitions of the free will of man? Which of these are biblically true, and which are wrong?

2. What are Augustine’s four states of the will of man? How does he summarize each in terms of man’s free will?

3. What is the situation of man’s will in the first state? Was his ability not to sin immutable?

4. What is the situation of man’s will in the second state? How does the Bible prove this, and how does the Westminster Confession define this?

5. What about the situation of man's will in the third state? What is the "war" that goes on within the believer?

6. What is the situation of man's will in the fourth state? Does the believer in heaven have the ability to sin? Why?

7. How is it helpful to think about the freedom of man's will in each of these four states? How does man's free will relate to man's nature in these four states?

III. Polemical Exposition

Error 1: *Man's will is uncaused, so that nothing determines what we do.*

Error 2: *Arminian theology objects to the bondage of man's will. They argue that this means that man is subject to external compulsion, and does not freely choose what he wants. They fail to see that man's fallen nature means he can only choose what is displeasing to God.*

Error 3: *Some assert the power of contrary choice, saying that man has the power to choose what is contrary to his inclination. They say this is the supreme moral value.*

Questions:

1. Why do we say that the assertion in Error #1 is illogical and unreasonable?

2. How does thinking of God’s nature, attributes, and actions help us to see, by parallel, that natural man is sinful, and does what is sinful? What is the fault in Arminian theology about the free will of man?

3. What is the meaning of “the power of contrary choice”? What biblical truth does this error ignore?

IV. Practical Exposition

1. We must recognize the relationship between a high view of God and a low view of man.
2. The wonder of the gospel.
3. The inescapable necessity of the Holy Spirit.
4. The believer is left with the hope, joy, and anticipation of heaven.

Questions:

1. What view of God and view of man does the unbelieving world hold? What does the Bible teach us about how to view God and man?

2. What is the bad news that we learned about in this lecture? Why is the gospel known as “the good news”?

3. Why do we emphasize the great necessity of the Holy Spirit when we come to study the Doctrine of Man?

4. What kind of affection does the believer have towards heaven? How does that affection motivate him or her about how to live in this world?

V. Self-Reflection

There is also an excellent book which discusses the four states of man: *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, by the Scottish minister, Thomas Boston (1676–1732). Try to obtain this book, and, as you read it, prayerfully ask the Lord’s blessing on your heart. All living people are either in the second state or in the third state. What about you? Do you know how a man can be transferred from the second state into the third state? Have you experienced the saving work of the Triune God? Do you understand the spiritual war experienced by Christians?
