

Free Will and the Conscience

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of free will and conscience in our spiritual growth, highlighting that God gives us the freedom to choose and that we must preserve our conscience through confession and seeking forgiveness.

Duration: 24:42

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:13

Topics: "Free Will", "Human Conscience"

Description

This sermon delves into the foundational principles from the early chapters of the Bible, focusing on man's basic problem and the solution provided by God. It explores the concept of free will as a crucial gift from God, emphasizing the importance of voluntary obedience for holiness. The sermon also highlights the significance of conscience in guiding spiritual life, drawing parallels between conscience and the body's sense of pain as protective mechanisms.

Transcript

We want to continue looking at some of the foundational principles that we can learn from the early chapters of the Bible, particularly the first four chapters, so that we understand what is man's basic problem. That's what we've been considering over the last five sessions. And in this sixth session, we want to again look at some of those things that are hidden, as it were, and that the Spirit seeks to reveal to us, which can help us to identify man's problem, and then we can find, look at what the solution, the solution that God has made to deal with our problem.

We looked at God's purpose for man, his provision, Satan's tactics, the fall of man, and two types of sins. I want to say a few words today about free will. God, one of the greatest gifts that God gave to man was freedom of choice.

God did not give that freedom of choice to the planets and the stars, to the trees. They have no choice. The planets have been obeying God automatically for thousands of years, never disobeyed God, even for a split second.

If all that God wanted was obedience from man, God could have made man like those stars and planets, I mean, shaped like a man, made of flesh and blood, but programmed inwardly like a robot. You know, there are computerized robots today that can be programmed to do almost anything. And God Almighty

could have created man like a robot, programmed to obey him exactly.

He would never have gone anywhere near the tree of knowledge of good and evil because he was programmed not to go there. You know, like a computer that's programmed to do whatever we teach it to do. In the same way, God could have made Adam and Eve like that and they would have obeyed 100%.

But God did not want just obedience. He's got obedience from the planets and the stars and the trees and the seed that obeys God's laws in creation and many, many other things. He wanted obedience that was voluntary.

This is so important because without voluntary obedience, there can be no holiness. God is holy and man can never be holy unless he chooses to obey. That's why free will is the most important requirement for a man to be holy.

And God never takes it away. When a man is born again and becomes a Christian, God doesn't take away his free will. When a man is filled with the Holy Spirit, God doesn't take away his free will.

He still has complete control over himself. In fact, when a man is filled with the Holy Spirit, he has a better control over himself because the Bible says the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Galatians 5 and verse 23.

And so you've got to view with suspicion anyone who says that when he got filled with the Spirit, he was thrown from one end of the room to the other or he couldn't stop speaking in tongues or he couldn't have any control over himself. That always makes me suspicious because I've seen in the Scriptures that it's demons who take away a man's control over himself. Demon-possessed people have no control over themselves.

And I've personally seen many, many cases of demon-possessed people who have no control over themselves. The devil is out to control man. God doesn't want to control man like that to the point where he takes away his free will.

Whereas the devil seeks to take away man's free will. I've seen demon-possessed people who have no control over themselves. And that's why you read in the Bible about demon possession, but you never read in the Bible about Holy Spirit possession.

What you read in the Bible is Holy Spirit filling. What is the difference between filling and possession? The Holy Spirit fills, demons possess. Possess means total control.

And a demon-possessed person will not know what he's talking and what he's doing. They do all types of foolish things. But a man filled with the Holy Spirit is in complete, 100% control of his faculties all the time.

Like it says in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. That's a very important verse. If you're not familiar with it, let me read it out to you.

In 1 Corinthians 14 and verse 32, the spirit of the prophets are subject to the prophets. That means if the Holy Spirit fills me and I exercise a gift of the Holy Spirit, it could be prophesying, it could be teaching, it could be speaking in tongues, whatever it is, I have complete control over my faculties and I can start and stop when I want to. If I say, oh, I have no control over myself, I'm speaking here now, for example, imagine if I had no control over myself.

I wouldn't be able to stop speaking when the program is over. It's ridiculous. But if a demon-possessed person were standing here, he wouldn't be able to control himself, he wouldn't know when he would start, when he would finish.

But the spirit of the prophets are subject to the prophets. And every gift of the Holy Spirit is given to us, but for us to exercise according to our own choice. If God gives a man a gift of teaching, God's given me a gift of teaching.

If you wake me up at 3 o'clock in the middle of the night and tell me to speak for 1 hour or 10 minutes, I can teach because the gift has been given to me. And the spirit of my spirit is subject to me. So free will is something God gave Adam.

And God needed Adam to make a choice in order to be holy. And that's why when he sent him into the Garden of Eden, he didn't tell him, do whatever you like. Then how would you know whether he's exercising his will on the side of God? So God said there are 10,000 trees there or more than that, but there's one tree I don't want you to take part of.

Now is that a difficult command? If you're permitted to do 10,000 things in a room, but only one thing you should avoid, you can't say that's a difficult command. That's the easiest thing in the world. If God on the other hand had told Adam, there are 10,000 trees there, you shouldn't touch any of them.

You're only permitted to eat of this one tree. That would have been difficult, but it wasn't like that. God's commands are not burdensome.

His commands are easy. 1 John 5 says, His commands are not a burden. It's the devil who tells us that God's commands are heavy and a burden.

Jesus said, my yoke is easy. My burden is light. He said in Matthew chapter 11 verse 29 and 30, take my yoke upon you because it's easy.

But the yoke of the devil is heavy. The yoke where you choose your own way in life, that's heavy. So we see here that free will is something God never takes away till the end of your life.

You can be the most spirit-filled person on earth and you have complete control over your faculties and you can choose till the end of your life whether you want to follow the Lord or not. God is not going to hold you in such a way as if to say, well now you have to go to heaven whether you like it or not. Some people teach that.

That once I've given my life to Christ, God holds you in such a way that I have no freedom now. I have to go to heaven whether I want to or not. They say once you're saved, you're saved forever whether you like it or not.

How could that be? Because that would mean that man's free will has been taken away now. Jesus said in John chapter 10 verse 27 to 29, He said, my sheep hear my voice and they follow me. And when they follow me, I give them eternal life.

He doesn't give it to everybody. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me and I give them eternal life and no one will pluck them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than I am and no one is able to pluck them out of His hand.

So, we believe with all our heart that Jesus is almighty, God the Father is almighty and if we are in their hands, no power on earth in this universe can pluck us out of Jesus' hands or the Father's hands. But, we can jump out ourselves. That's the thing that makes us lose our salvation where we decide, I don't want to follow the Lord anymore.

Just like a man can divorce his wife, he can divorce Christ and say, I've had enough. I don't want to go this way. And people have done that.

Now if God were to take away a man's free will and possess a person like demons possess a person, then of course the man would never be lost. He'd be like a robot from that moment onwards. And there are some people who teach something very similar to that.

That God, when a man accepts Christ, he becomes like a robot. He can never be lost again. It's ridiculous.

Or a man filled with the Holy Spirit has no control over himself. There are all types of wrong teachings because people have not understood the importance of free will in holiness. And now, apply this to yourself.

You have to choose whether you want to be holy or not. And like someone has said, every man is as holy as he wants to be. You may not realize the truth of that statement, but it's absolutely true.

If you are not more holy today, the real reason is, you want to hear it? It's because you did not want to be more holy. You're not interested in more holiness than you actually have. If you were, you would be more holy.

You would have made those choices in life that made you more holy. But you haven't made those choices because you're not interested in more holiness. So, everything depends on choice.

And the decisions you make determine what you'll be ten years later. For example, Jesus said in Luke 9, and verse 23, If anyone hears my voice, rather, if anyone wants to follow me, let him take up his cross daily. Only then can he be my disciple.

No one can be my disciple if he does not take up his cross, deny himself, and take up his cross every day. So what does that mean? That means every day I'm faced with choices. And in those choices I have to say no to my own will and say yes to the will of God.

That is what it means to deny myself and take up the cross. That means put my self-will to death and do the will of God. Now think of a person, two people who are converted on the same day, going to the same church, with the same opportunities, and they attend the same meetings.

Ten years later, you find one is way ahead of the other person spiritually, even though they both attended the same number of meetings, attended the same church, read the same Bible, had the same opportunities. Why? Because in those ten years, in all the different situations that these two men faced, and the choices they made, one brother denied himself frequently and chose the will of God. The other one was more careless and indulged himself more often.

The result is the other brother, the first one, is miles ahead of the other one spiritually, even though they both started at the same point. What is it that made the difference? The choices they made. Free will determines how holy you are going to be.

Free will is going to determine what your reward will be in heaven. Your choices are going to determine how close you'll be to Jesus in heaven. That is the greatest reward that God offers to man.

So we see, the free will that God gave to Adam is a very, very precious gift. And to me, one of the greatest characteristics of God, which I really appreciate and have learned to value, is the fact that He allows me freedom to choose. Now when I'm gripped by this, you know, it produces a result in our life.

We become like the God we worship. If the God you worship is unholy, you become unholy. If the God you worship is holy, you become holy.

In Psalm 115 it says that a man who makes idols ends up becoming like Him. Psalm 115 and verse 8. Those who make idols become like them. We become like the God we worship.

So, if the God I worship, the true God, is one who gives me complete freedom to choose, it's going to make me like that in relation to my co-workers and those who work with me or under me. I will give them complete freedom. I will give my brothers in the church where I'm an elder freedom to choose and I will not sort of sit on them and control them like the cults do.

The people in the cults do that because they don't know the true God. They worship a false God. They may call Him Jesus, but it is another Jesus.

Anyone who seeks to control your life in any way has not understood the first thing about God. He's only understood the devil's way. Demons possess.

Cult leaders try to possess your mind and your emotions and your will. But godly men will give you the freedom that Almighty God Himself gives. This is such an important principle and if you don't understand it, you can be a prey to pastors and leaders and Christian leaders and preachers who want to control your life.

Don't ever yield to them. That's the way of the devil. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 7, you are bought with a price.

Do not become the slaves of men. Very, very important to remember that. The other great gift that God has given to man is a conscience.

This is a tremendous gift. Conscience is what tells us when we do something wrong. Immediately or when you're about to do something wrong, your conscience will tell you, hey, that's wrong.

You shouldn't be doing that. Now, it is conscience that keeps us on the way of spiritual life. The conscience is compared with the eye, the human eye.

Jesus said, if a man's eye is clear, his whole body is full of light. If you want to know what blindness is, just shut your eyes for 15 seconds and you will know what blindness is. It's a terrible thing to be blind.

Because we have light, because we have vision, everything outside, the light that falls on objects outside comes into our brain and we can see objects, we can see people. And if our eye is spoiled by cataract, by blindness, by sickness, all that light stops coming in and we are not able to see anything. This is what happens when a man is careless with his conscience.

All of us will recognize that eyesight is a very precious gift. We got two eyes, even one is good enough for a lot of things, to do a lot of things, but we don't want to lose even one eye. We want to use both eyes because we get three-dimensional vision because of two eyes.

Why then are so many people careless with their conscience? The conscience is to our spirit exactly what the eyes are to our body. Jesus said, the lamp of the body is the eye. Your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.

He said, be careful that your eye does not become darkness. He said that in Luke chapter 11, the middle of that chapter. So, how does this apply to our conscience? When you get a speck in your eye, you know, dust gets into our eyes sometimes, what do you do? It irritates your eye.

Your eye keeps blinking frequently and even if you are doing some very important work, you'll stop it. Go to a wash basin and wash off that dust and if you don't wash it off, gradually, if dust keeps on accumulating in your eye, it can become blind. People with leprosy sometimes, they are not able to close their eyelids and if the eyelids remain open all the time, part of the problem is dust keeps accumulating there and they become blind.

It's not the leprosy that causes the blindness, it is the dust accumulating on the eye and they are not able to close their eyelids because of leprosy having killed those the muscles that control the eyelids. And so, just like we are careful with our eyesight, we need to be careful with our conscience. Think if, for example, you've done something wrong, it's like dust on your conscience and you don't cleanse it away.

Then you do another thing that's wrong, dust on your conscience. You allow dust to accumulate on your conscience over a period of time, it's just like allowing dust to accumulate on your eyes. You know what will happen after some time? You will become spiritually blind.

You won't be able to see. When you read the Bible, you won't get anything out of it. You won't be able to see the reality of God.

You won't be able to see spiritual truths. You won't be able to get divine revelation to enable you to live life on this earth. You're going to have many problems if you are not careful with your conscience to preserve it pure.

And that's why I recommend to people, just like we would do with our eyes, as soon as your conscience convicts you of something, cleanse it away. Go to God, confess it, and say, Lord, I'm sorry I did this. Take the blame.

Don't put the blame on other people like Adam. Say, Lord, I did this. I'm sorry.

Please forgive me. And there the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. The Bible says, if we confess our sin, 1 John 1.9, God is faithful and just, righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we walk in the light, 1 John 1.7, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another. And the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. So, conscience is a very, very important part of our spirit.

It is the most important part of our being. And you must preserve it just like you preserve your eyes. Let me use one more illustration.

The prick of conscience is like pain in our body. When a thorn pokes your foot, immediately you feel pain. That pain is a blessing.

Because if you didn't feel that pain, the thorn would remain in your foot. You wouldn't even know there's a thorn there. Your foot would get infected and it will become full of pus and you wouldn't know it because you don't feel any pain.

It's at the bottom side of your foot. And finally your foot becomes gangrenous and has to be cut off. What is it that saves our feet from being cut off? Pain.

Do you know that pain is one of the greatest blessings that God has given us in our body? Pain when you have a stomachache. Supposing you have a repeated stomachache. That would cause you concern.

It may indicate there's something wrong with your body. That pain makes you go to the doctor. And the doctor looks at your body and says Hey, yes, you've got a sickness, but here's a tablet and that can cure you.

And you take the tablet, you take the antibiotic, whatever it is, and your problem is solved. But you detected the problem by pain. Think if you did not have pain.

Something's wrong inside your body and you don't have a stomachache. Now you think life is great because you never get stomachaches, you never get headaches. But without pain, you don't feel it, but the damage is still taking place and your body is being destroyed.

Only thing you don't feel it. Thank God for the gift of pain by which you feel things. If you didn't have it, your body would die very soon.

Pain is what protects us from sickness. Now, conscience is like that. When your conscience convicts you, Hey, you did that thing wrong.

It's painful. If you ignore it, you kill it, kill it, kill it, by rejecting it after some time, you will not hear the voice of conscience anymore. I'll illustrate that for you.

Think of a two-year-old trying to tell a lie to his mother. His mother asks him something. Listen, son, did you do this? And little boy looks up and he says, No, mommy, I didn't do it.

But you can see in the way he says it, all over his face it's written, I'm telling you a lie. Because he's not very clever at concealing his lie, the way he says it itself. Because his conscience is telling him, you did wrong.

But you see that same child after 20 years, he's told so many lies that by the time he's 20, 25, he can tell you a lie with such a straight face that you'll believe it. He can tell you, Oh, I didn't know, what are you talking about? In such a way that you believe this absolute lie. Men are good actors.

And you and I know how easy it is for us to act and tell a lie about something. How have we come to this place? Because we have killed the voice of conscience for many, many, many years. And you have destroyed yourself in the process.

This is the reason why many people can never become spiritual. Because they have killed the voice of conscience in area after area after area. They have lusted and lusted sexually with their eyes in all types of forbidden ways till conscience has been killed.

And it's impossible for them to be pure now. But there is hope. If we open our beings to God's Holy Spirit, He can resensitize our conscience and make it little by little more and more sensitive over a period of time that we can once again become spiritual.

This is the good news of the Gospel. And it's available for you. You come to Jesus Christ and say, Lord, I'm a sinner.

Forgive me. Cleanse me. Fill me with your Spirit.

He'll answer you. May God bless you.

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