

Augsburg Confession

Fall 2025 – Winter 2026

Session 15 – Article XVIII – Free Will

Introduction

Scenario

Consider 1 Corinthians 8:13 in discussing this situation.

Free Will (Pg 17-18)

[1] Our churches teach that a person's will has some freedom to choose civil righteousness and to do things subject to reason. [2] It has no power, without the Holy Spirit, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness. For "the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14). [3] This righteousness is worked in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word [Galatians 3:2–6].

[4] This is what Augustine says in his Hypognosticon, Book III:

We grant that all people have a free will. It is free as far as it has the judgment of reason. This does not mean that it is able, without God, either to begin, or at least to complete, anything that has to do with God. It is free only in works of this life, whether good or evil. [5] Good I call those works that 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 various useful arts, or whatsoever good applies to this life. [6] For all of these things depend on the providence of God. They are from Him and exist through Him. [7] Works that are willing to worship an idol, to commit murder, and so forth, I call evil.

[8] Our churches condemn the Pelagians and others who teach that without the Holy Spirit, by natural power alone, we are able to love God above all things and do God's commandments according to the letter. [9] Although nature is able in a certain way 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, and so on.

God's Will

Question 1 - How do the following verses describe God's will?

Exodus 20:1-17

Deuteronomy 4:2

1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18

Romans 12:2

John 6:40

1 Timothy 2:3-4

Ezekiel 33:11

2 Peter 3:9

Man's Will

Question 2 – *What is the will of mankind since the fall of Adam and Eve?*

Genesis 8:21

Romans 8:7-8

1 Corinthians 2:14

Psalm 14:1-3

- ❖ In Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, he writes, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them." God gives these gifts to all people- Christians and non-Christians alike.

Question 3 – *Which one of the following statements are God's will (GW) or man's will (MW).*

God's Will or Mans Will	
	Decide which car to buy
	Decide what to plant in one's garden
	Decide whom to marry
	Decide where to live
	Decide to be a volunteer for hospice
	Decide to serve in the military
	Decide to murder an enemy
	Decide to rob the liquor store
	Decide to bully a coworker

Question 4 - *How does one go about seeking God's guidance and wisdom when wrestling with making a decision concerning the ordinary things of this life?*

BONDAGE OF THE WILL

- ❖ Consider once again the first lines of Article XVIII: "Our churches teach that a person's will has some freedom to choose civil righteousness and to do things subject to reason. It has no power, without the Holy Spirit, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness.... This righteousness is worked in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word" (AC XVIII 1-

LUTHERAN (L) OR NOT LUTHERAN (NL)

__Gus is a member of St. James Lutheran Church. The Holy Spirit works faith in Gus with every sermon preached in Gus's ear, each time Gus receives the Lord's body and blood, and during his Thursday afternoon men's Bible class. When Gus was asked to serve on the Board of Elders, he agreed. Gus agreed to serve because of the faith worked in him by the Holy Spirit. Because of the Holy Spirit working faith in Gus, Gus's service on the Board of Elders was because of his love for God as the new man in Christ (Galatians 3:2-6).

__Suzanne was very troubled. She would lie awake at night wondering where God wanted her to go to college. She prayed that God's will would be revealed to her. Suzanne was not going to go to college until she knew where God wanted her to go. As the time drew near to decide, she couldn't understand why God was not giving her a sign. Without knowing God's will for which college to attend, Suzanne concluded that God did not want her to go to college.

__Casey is a medical doctor. He is not a Christian. He says he doesn't really believe in anything. The other day, when Casey was driving home from work, there was a car accident right in front of him. Casey did not offer any assistance. Because Casey had no free will to do a good work, he simply drove home and had dinner with his family.

__Peter is a member of a Lutheran church. He is very good with the youth. Peter also enjoys work projects at church, such as cleaning the yard, painting the church, and doing general maintenance. Some of the men were talking about Peter the other day, and Jack said, "If anyone deserves to go to heaven, it sure is Peter! He's great for the church!"

__Pat and Lois are members of Trinity Lutheran Church. On Friday, a couple weeks before Easter, they decided to go to McDonald's for lunch. When Pat ordered a fish sandwich, Lois asked, "Why are you having that?" Pat said, "Well, during the season of Lent, I've decided not to eat meat." Lois said, "Lutherans don't do that!" Pat replied, "I know I don't have to, and I certainly don't think it will forgive my sins. I'm just doing it during Lent to think about Jesus dying on the cross for me."

Question 5 - Summarize below what the following passages say about human traditions, the human will, and salvation through Jesus Christ alone?

Matthew 15:3

Matthew 15:10-11

Romans 14:17

Colossians 2:16-21

Acts 15:10-11

THE WHOLE TOPIC OF "FREE WILL" CAN BE COMPLICATED.

- ❖ In 1525, Luther published *On the Bondage of the Will* to explore this topic (Luther's Works, vol. 33). This was Luther's response to Erasmus, a scholar who believed in free will. If you would like to dig deeper into the issue of the will of God and man, this would be an excellent resource.

Next Lesson –

Church Authority – Can other people in the church tell us what to do?

Civil Government - What is the church's role and responsibility?

References

Lutheran Doctrine and Practice Today, A Study Based on Scripture and the Augsburg Confession, Rev. Dr. James A Baneck, North Dakota District President. 2015. CPH.

The Augsburg Confession, <https://www.lutheranchurchcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Augsburg-Confession-Study-Guide.pdf>

Book of Concord Online, The Original Home of the Book of Concord, <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/>

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