

Of Grace and Free Will (427)

Chapter 1

... Since there are some persons who so defend God's grace as to deny man's free will, or who suppose that free will is denied when grace is defended, I have determined to write somewhat on this point ...

Chapter 2

... Wherever there is the express statement not to do this or that, and whenever the performance of the will is required to do or refrain from some action, in keeping with God's commandments, that is sufficient proof of the free choice of the will ...

Chapter 6

... "Cursed is the man who has hope in man, and makes strong the flesh of his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord" (Jer. 17:5). Understand, my brethren, I pray you, this passage of the prophet. Because the prophet did not say, "Cursed is the man who has hope in his own self," it might seem to some that the passage, "Cursed is the man who has hope in man," was spoken to prevent man having hope in any other man but himself. In order, therefore, to show that his admonition to man was not to have hope in himself, after saying, "Cursed is the man who has hope in man," he immediately added, "And makes strong the flesh of his arm." He used the word "arm" to designate power in operation. By the term "flesh," however, must be understood human frailty. And therefore he makes strong the flesh of his arm who supposes that a power which is frail and weak (that is, human) is sufficient for him to perform good works, and therefore puts not his hope in God for help. This is the reason why he subjoined the further clause, "And whose heart departs from the Lord." Of this character is the Pelagian heresy, which is not an ancient one, but has only lately come into existence ...

Chapter 10

"Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you" (Zech. 1:3). One of these clauses – that which invites our return to God – evidently belongs to our will. The other, which promises His return to us, belongs to His grace. Here, possibly, the Pelagians think they have a justification for their opinion which they so prominently advance, that God's grace is given according to our merits ... Now the persons who hold this opinion fail to observe that, unless our turning to God were itself God's gift, it would not be said to Him in prayer, "Turn us again, O God of hosts"; and, "You, O God, will turn and quicken us" ... For, with respect to our coming unto Christ, what else does it mean than our being turned to Him by believing? And yet He says, "No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (Jn. 6:65).

Chapter 14

Would it not be the height of absurdity for us to maintain that there was some antecedent good merit in any man's good will to bring about the removal of his stony heart when, in fact, this

stony heart simply signifies a will that is obstinate and absolutely unbending in its opposition to God?

Chapter 17

... “I have obtained mercy that I might be faithful” (1 Cor. 7:25). He does not say, “I obtained mercy because I was faithful,” but “in order that I might be faithful,” thus showing that even faith itself cannot be had without God’s mercy, and that it is the gift of God. This he very expressly teaches us when he says, “For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). They might possibly say, We received grace because we believed; as if they would attribute the faith to themselves, and the grace to God. Therefore, the apostle having said, “You are saved through faith,” added, “And that not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God.” And again, lest they should say they deserved so great a gift by their works, he immediately added, “Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:9) ...

Chapter 29

Now if faith is simply of free will, and is not given by God, why do we pray for those who will not believe, that they may believe? This it would be absolutely useless to do, unless we believe, with perfect propriety, that Almighty God is able to turn to belief wills that are perverse and opposed to faith. Man’s free will is addressed when it is said, “Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” But if God were not able to remove from the human heart even its obstinacy and hardness, He would not say, through the prophet, “I will take from them their heart of stone, and will give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19) ... “I will give them another heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, says the Lord” (Ezek. 11:19–20). Now can we possibly, without extreme absurdity, maintain that there previously existed in any man the good merit of a good will, to entitle him to the removal of his stony heart, when all the while this very heart of stone signifies nothing else than a will of the hardest kind and such as is absolutely inflexible against God?

Chapter 31

... We should remember that He says, “Make you a new heart and a new spirit,” who also promises, “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit will I put within you” (Ezek. 36:26). How is it, then, that He who says, “Make you,” also says, “I will give you”? Why does He command, if He is to give? Why does He give if man is to make, except it be that He gives what He commands when He helps him to obey whom He commands? There is, however, always within us a free will – but it is not always good; for it is either free from righteousness when it serves sin – and then it is evil – or else it is free from sin when it serves righteousness – and then it is good. But the grace of God is always good; and by it, it comes to pass that a man is of a good will, though he was before of an evil one. By it also it comes to pass that the very good will, which has now begun to be, is enlarged, and made so great that it is able to fulfill the divine commandments which it shall wish, when it shall once firmly and perfectly wish ... Then is the will of use when we have ability; just as ability is also then of use when we have the will. For what does it profit us if we will what we are unable to do, or else do not will what we are able to do?