

The Ability to Respond

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Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 00] Thank you. A couple of verses I would like to emphasize that Gary read, and the first is verse 16. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

And for any believer who might read that and say, well, that all sounds nice and ideal, but I can't do that. Yes, you can. You have the ability to do that, because God has given you the ability to do that. And then, the last in verse 25, if we live by the Spirit, and that could very well be rendered a first-class conditional clause in the Greek, since we live by the Spirit, and we do, that is, we have a newfound spiritual life in Christ, and that has resulted in the Spirit of God regenerating us and making us into the likeness and the image of Christ.

So, if we live by the Spirit, and we do, let us also walk by the Spirit. And the point that needs to be made is that this is well within the capability of every believer.

However, we may say, if we choose, I don't want to do that. And there are believers who are that brazen about it.

[1 : 26] But we cannot say, I can't do that. It is beyond me. Yes, you can. We all can. In fact, this is supposed to be the norm for every believer who is in Christ.

Now, what we are engaging, and today I intend to conclude this series, has to do with the mystery and makeup of the human will.

We all have one. We all utilize it. We do so every time we make a choice about anything, whether it is a moral choice, or whether it is selecting something from the menu that you're going to have for lunch.

It all has to do with using your volition, exercising your will. And in the examination of this human will, I have discovered that I don't know nearly as much about it as I would like, even though I've got one and have been operating with it for 75 years.

Human volition, the willfulness, the capacity to will and to choose, with which God endowed every human being, appears to me to be the first divine institution created by God.

[2 : 51] Human volition. The second is marriage. And the third is family. And the fourth is human government. And the fifth institution created by God.

And to the best of my knowledge, these are the only five institutions he has created. The fifth one is the church, which is the body of Christ. The freedom and power of choice, right or wrong, right and wrong requires the existence of morality.

And the existence of morality requires a moral base or a moral lawgiver. We all know that we are supposed to do good.

What is good? How do you define good? Is that just a relative term? Is that which is good, good to one person, not good to another?

Is there such a thing as an absolute good? Is there such a thing as evil? Because you cannot have the existence of one without the other. You need one to define the other.

[4 : 04] You need good to define evil and evil to define good. So we are back to the first cause who is an uncaused cause. And that is the God and creator who created all things, including human beings and endowing them with volition.

I've often used the term in the past, although I'm not happy with it. It is not a good term to assign to God, but I use it for lack of having a better term. God took a risk when he created human beings and angelic beings and gave them a power of volition.

In a sense, it was a risk because there is always the possibility that those who have the opportunity of going either way can go the wrong way. On the other hand, it is not a risk because God knew full well what choices men and angels would make.

He was not blindsided by it. He was not in some way taken aback that man decided to rebel against him. But God has even provided for and allowed for that rebellion.

And built into this whole scheme of creation is the theme of redemption. Because redemption was provided for before there was ever a fall.

[5 : 24] Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. Think of that. All of this is part and parcel of the program of God.

And of course, the natural question that arises is, well, why would God create Lucifer if he knew he was going to rebel against him? And why did God create human beings and give them a will if he knew they were going to rebel against him and bring as a result of the fall?

Death, disease, heartache, conflict, disappointment, you name it. All of those things flow from the fall of humanity.

In Genesis chapter 3. And I can only give you one answer. It's not a terribly satisfying answer. But it's the only one there is. And it's found in Revelation 4.

I think it's verse 11. We won't go there. But it says that, Worthy art thou, O Lord, to receive honor and glory and wisdom and power and majesty, etc.

[6 : 30] For thou hast created all things. And by thy pleasure they were and are created.

We cannot give any other reason apart from the fact that God was pleased to create. And to create volitional beings who have the ability to walk away from him.

Why he was pleased to do that is reserved unto himself. But I do know that he ultimately is going to be glorified and honored through it.

So, with man's volition, he could choose to obey or disobey. But, he could not choose the consequences that come from his decision.

Choices to make are within our personal power. The consequences that follow our choices are not within our power.

[7 : 42] The upshot of that? Of course. Choose wisely. You are going to have to live with the consequences, whatever they might be.

And we have already noted that because of the fall, the moral failure of humanity, and all of the human race, please understand this, this is critical.

All of the human race, corporately, was locked up in the loins of Adam. We all existed in Adam. All of the progeny that has flowed throughout the world over the last several thousands of years came from the loins of Adam.

We are all related by blood. We are all children of Adam. Think of that. Every human being on earth is a member of your family.

[8 : 51] Someone said that's why we fight so much. We're all family. But we are. We are all related. Regardless of language or ethnicity or color or whatever, we are all related.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if man were to wake up one day and discover that every woman is his sister and every man is his brother and treat them with the love and respect that each requires? Wouldn't that be something if it changed the whole world overnight? But don't hold your breath.

That's not likely to happen. But in reality, there is a valid basis for it.

Because we're all kin. And scripture makes that very clear. There is a corruption mode as a result of the fall.

And we've read in Romans chapter 8 that those who are unbelievers are referred to as being in the flesh. That means the fallenness that was experienced in Adam and was transmitted to every succeeding member of every generation is an infectious disease and it is a moral contaminant.

[10 : 17] None of us has escaped it. The only one who escaped it who is human is our Lord Jesus Christ.

And he escaped it because he was born of a virgin. And God implanted in the womb of the Virgin Mary a sinless seed as opposed to a contaminated seed.

This seed was from God himself. Incorruptible. And Christ derived his humanity from Mary. His deity, of course, was prepossessed.

And that holy thing which shall be born of thee, the angel told Mary, shall be called the Son of God. And everyone who is born of woman is born of the flesh.

And if we are not regenerated by the Spirit of God, the flesh, that contaminated nature, is all we've got.

[11 : 28] We act out of that. That's our only base of operation, is the contaminated flesh. And it produces all of the works of the flesh.

That ugly list that Gary read for us earlier from Galatians 5 is derived from the flesh. But please don't confuse it with your body tissue.

That also is called flesh. Skin and bone and blood vessel and nerves and all of that, that's called flesh too. That's physical flesh. That's different.

We are talking about that which is the spirit nature of our being, which is not material and not physical. But it is very real.

And it is what the scriptures call the flesh. And the apostle said in chapter 8 of Romans, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

[12 : 31] Doesn't matter what they do. They can give thousands of dollars to charity. God is not impressed. They can be kind to their neighbor.

They can help little old ladies across the street. They can pay their taxes and never kick their dog. God is not impressed. They are operating out of the flesh. And that cannot please God.

But once you become a believer, your spirit, your human spirit is re-gened. Renewed.

Made over. It is miraculously born again. You've got a whole new beginning. A whole new start.

That is a spiritual operation.

Only the spirit of God can do it. And once you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have the spirit of God dwelling within you. And you may and you should walk in the spirit.

[13 : 30] That means you order your life and your priorities and your values in accordance with that which the spirit of God has provided in the word of God.

We are talking about living by biblical principles. We are talking about living a life that is honoring to God. And it is well within the capacity of every believer. It is not in the capacity of an unbeliever.

They cannot do that. It is simply beyond them. So, one lesson that ought to be learned from that is that Christians should not be demanding and have unreasonable expectations of non-Christians that they should live like you do.

They can't. They don't have the ability. Oh, they can be nice. They can be sweet. They can be kind. They can be gentle. Nobody is denying that. I know people who are not regenerate who would even consider themselves atheists who would give you the shirt off their back.

They are generous people. Kind people. But none of that pleases God because it has that moral contaminant.

[14 : 46] A believer has the capacity to walk in the spirit as he orders his life in accordance with biblical dictates.

It means you take your faith very seriously. It is an important thing to you. Where you go, what you do, what you expose to your eyes and ears, it matters.

It matters a lot. You take it seriously. You are a child of God. You want to conduct yourself accordingly. That is walking by the spirit.

And if you walk by the spirit, you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. I'm not talking about some kind of wild fanaticism or some kind of mysticism.

I'm just saying you find out what the biblical principles are. They are clearly set forth in scripture.

And you say, I take these things seriously and I'm going to order my life in accordance with these values that are set forth here.

[15 : 45] That's supposed to be the normal Christian life. So, if believers have this capacity, this ability, why don't we do it?

Why don't we do it consistently? Why is it that so many believers live a lifestyle that is scarcely any different from their unsaved neighbors? So that sometimes by a person's behavior, you wouldn't even know that they were a believer.

Can a Christian do that? Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. A Christian can walk in the flesh. It's all about me.

It's a self-centered life. It's what I want. And you know something? It comes natural to the flesh. You don't have to work at it to crank it up.

It's always there lurking, ready to spring into action. That's the flesh. And it will be with you until you breathe your last.

[17 : 02] But if you are aware of that, if you are forewarned, if you know that you can't trust you any further than you can throw you, you will be well-advantaged.

It's the person who underestimates their flesh who thinks, oh, I could never do that. I'm too holy. I'm too sanctified.

I could never do. You would be surprised, given the right circumstances, what you are capable of doing, both for good and ill. I suspect we could all surprise ourselves.

So, believers are not in the flesh, but in the spirit. However, we may resort to that. Point is, we have no excuse.

We cannot say, I can't help it. I'm just a human being. I'm just weak. It's not my fault. The temptation was too great.

[18 : 11] Nonsense. That's just cop-out talk. We are accountable. We are responsible. And once we understand that, the ball is in your court.

Someone said, the buck stops here. Me. Tendency is to find somebody else to blame when I don't live as I ought to live.

My boss. My mate. My neighbor. My kids. My parents. Somebody. It's got to be somebody else's fault, because it can't be mine. But more often than not, it is.

And again, recognition of that will stand you in good stead. So, you walk in the flesh. It is a life that is dominated by and characterized by the flesh.

And to walk in the spirit is in the sphere and the domain of the Holy Spirit. We still have a will. Our volition remains neutral.

[19 : 15] And we can go either way as a believer into obedience or into disobedience. One pleases God. One does not please God. Unbelievers have no option.

Everything they do displeases God. Because of where they're coming from. There's a verse in Proverbs that says, even the plowing of the wicked is an abomination to God.

What? You mean God isn't even pleased with the way an unbeliever plows his field? Nope. He isn't pleased with the way an unbeliever does anything.

Because it's an unbeliever operating strictly out of the contaminated flesh. Nothing they do can please God. We have the option, however, of yielding.

And we saw that in Romans 6 in an earlier study. And the yielding is ours. The power is his. I've expressed before, not original with me.

[20 : 17] I read it somewhere in one of my books. Living the Christian life is not difficult. It is impossible. And it really is. Because we have to live this supernatural God-endowed life by the power that this God also provides.

And that is the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is what Paul meant when he said, I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I. Yet not I.

But Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, as opposed to the one I used to live. I live by the faith or by the faithfulness of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

And here's where I get into a foggy area. Because I don't have a handle on this to the extent that I would like, for sure. And it's very difficult for me to teach it. I can't teach it with any real dogmatism. But I'm warning you that this is the way I see it. As of now, with the limited light I have, this is the only way that it computes with me.

[21 : 29] And that is, the will and the decision-making is yours. It is up to you. Nobody else can invade your volition and make you do something.

And by the way, that's what a tyrant does. A tyrant. A tyrant is somebody who commandeers other people's wills and volitions.

And imposes his will upon their will and makes them be subject to him. We call that tyranny. That's what a tyrant does.

He overrides other people's volition and takes it from them. So that they no longer have the power of choice. They have to do his will. That's tyranny.

God is not a tyrant. God has not given you the ability to exercise your will and then take it from you. Frankly, there have been times when I wish he would have.

[22 : 36] In some cases. Don't you have some regrets? Some decisions? Have you ever said something really super stupid?

Like, now God, if you don't want me to do this, you close the door. And the door isn't closed. So you walk through it. And disaster lies on the other side.

And you, why did you let me do that? Where are you when I need you? Why didn't you stop me?

Why didn't you prevent that? God is not going to give you a volition and then cancel it out and make

you do it his way.

You and I are responsible. We are accountable to him for the choices that we make. Choose wisely. Choose wisely.

The power to yield is his. The will to yield is ours. Now let me explain that.

[23 : 43] If I can. This is the only way I know of putting this together. I illustrated it before with a firearm.

When you put a round in the chamber of a pistol and you pull the trigger, the hammer comes back. You pull the trigger and the hammer goes forward and it hits the projectile and ignites it, causing an explosion in the chamber.

And that round, we would call it the slug, the projectile goes out through the end of that because that's the only way it can escape.

And the explosion requires an outlet for that which is pent up. And the shell is going out through the muzzle, out through the barrel of that gun to wherever it's aimed.

The power is in the explosion. But that which generated the explosion was the pulling of the trigger.

[24 : 55] That's your will. That's the volition. Nothing happens unless you pull the trigger. When you pull the trigger, you exercise your volition.

You make a decision. You do not have the responsibility of creating the power. You just have the responsibility of pulling the trigger or not pulling the trigger.

And once you do, you see, once you pull the trigger, there are consequences. You have no control over the consequences.

You do have control over whether you pull the trigger or not. But once you pull the trigger, it's out of your hands. Then that round goes and does its thing.

That's a consequence. The power to live a Christ-like life is not yours. It is Christ's who indwells you.

[26 : 01] But he does it at your behest. What? This means Jesus Christ will not make you live a life that pleases him.

He will enable you to do so. But he will not make you. I know this sounds strange. It probably sounds like heresy.

I don't know how else to put it. You have to give him permission to unleash his power on your behalf.

Because if you don't, he won't. That may not be right. But I don't know what's wrong about it.

This thing called human volition is a very, very precious commodity. God holds it very highly. And it allows humanity to run amok.

[27 : 09] And to murder and maim. It's a very, very important thing. And God does not reach down and take it back and say, I gave you a will and you're not using it correctly.

Give that back. He's not doing that. He hasn't done that. And as a result, there's a lot of sadness and a lot of injustice that's going on in this world because of our misuse.

Humanity's misuse of the volition that God has given us. We are an incredibly powerful instrument. We are. It is amazing how much havoc one individual through the utilizing of their volition can cause.

And we've seen that. So, when Paul says, Yield your members as instruments of righteousness unto God, you do the yielding.

You do that. When he says, Walk in the Spirit and you'll not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, that means you can do that. Do you think for a moment the Spirit of God is saying, Walk in the Spirit.

[28 : 23] Well, actually, I know it's not very practical. Most of you people, you're not up to that. You just can't handle that. But it would be a great ideal if you could.

None of that. We are accountable. We are responsible. We cannot provide the power to overcome temptation. But Christ can.

And we need to give him the right to do so. He has the right to do so. We need to give him the opportunity to do so. And how do you do that? That's what Romans 6 is all about.

Yield the members of your body, eyes, arms, legs, ears, under righteousness. You do that with your will. It is the power of volition.

You don't have to go to that place. You don't have to watch that on the screen. You don't have to bring that up. You don't have to engage in porn. You don't have to engage in drugs.

[29 : 25] You don't have to do that. You choose to do that. When you do that, it's because you want to. And when we relinquish to him the right to provide the power, he does.

I have no idea how he does that. I have no idea how it works. But I know in myself, I don't have any more willpower than anybody else. And by the way, please understand, we are not talking about sheer willpower.

We are talking about Christ's power. But you still have your finger on the trigger. And it is an amazing thing and a tremendous responsibility to realize that we give him, we give him the opportunity to exercise his power, which is where the explosion comes from, on our behalf. I don't know how else it works. The believer can behave in a way that pleases God, but the unbeliever cannot.

Belief is not a behavior or a work. Belief is a non-meritorious act of the human will.

[30 : 50] Belief, or faith, if you will, is a mental attitude and act of the will that initiates from a sphere of intellectual neutrality and can go either way, positive or negative.

Belief. What I mean by that is when you hear the gospel, if you are hearing the gospel for the first time or for the umpteenth time, Christ died in your place for your sin, your faith and your trust need to be deposited in him and in him alone.

When you hear that, it sets off a process in your mind whereby you begin evaluating that information.

You think about it. You mull it over. You are literally processing data. And as a result, you reach a conclusion.

And your conclusion is, alright, I buy that. I accept that. I take that as true. And consequently, I want to commit my life to Jesus Christ.

[32 : 07] Because he bought me and paid for me. And it's the right thing to do. Or, you can say, don't want anything to do with that.

This is my life. I want to run it the way I please. I never had much use for that religious stuff anyway. I know some people who go to church all the time and they're a bunch of hypocrites and I don't want to be like them.

So, I reject all of that nonsense. I just don't buy it. Or, you may say, that may or may not be true. I have to think about that. I have to give that some more thought.

Don't want to make any hasty decisions. And you may put it on the back burner. And it can be reactivated tomorrow or next month or next year or maybe never. But this is the way the will works. As best as I can understand it. And I guess I'm trying to use mine as a model. Assuming that yours is pretty much like mine. And it's probably not a whole lot different.

[33 : 03] The human will, I think, doesn't differ that much from individuals insofar as their capacity and ability to utilize it is concerned. So, belief or the exercising of faith is, I am saying, something that we are capable of doing.

And there is a verse that I want to share with you in Acts chapter 17 that I think is very powerful and speaks to this particular issue. It is the Apostle Paul confronting a bunch of intellectuals.

These are philosophical intellectuals on Mars Hill in Athens, on the Areopagus. And understand he is talking to people who are steeped in paganism and in Greek philosophy as it existed at this particular stage.

And the Apostle says in verse 30 of chapter 17, Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, and I'm not completely sure what that means, except it suggests that there was a time when man was not as accountable and responsible to his maker as he now is.

And I think the Apostle is here indicating that there is a line of demarcation and that something happened in human history that results in man being more accountable as a human being than he was before that particular event happened.

[34 : 45] And as the text reads, Having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now. Now, declaring to man that all everywhere should repent.

There is a contrast being drawn between before and now. Previous to this event, there was a time of ignorance, and God, one translation, I think it's the King James says, God winked at it, overlooked it, did not hold man to the same standard that he does now.

What is that event? That event is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. After that event, mankind is far more accountable to God than he was before the death, burial, and resurrection.

He now declares to men that all everywhere should repent because he has fixed a day. We call that judgment day.

He has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom he has appointed.

[36 : 12] That's none other than the Savior. Having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead.

This is the essence of the gospel. This is the good news. Death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for the sins of the world. And when that message is proclaimed, it can be rejected or it can be accepted.

And man is accountable for his response. Now, here is where we got stuck last time. So whether man has the ability to respond.

Our Calvinist friends who are of the Reformed persuasion, good men, capable men, love the Lord, love the Word of God, simply disagree with us on this matter.

And they take the position that was set forth by St. Augustine in the 4th century that man does not have the ability to believe.

[37 : 23] He can't believe because he is dead in trespasses and sins. And dead people can't do anything. They can't believe anything. Our contention is that the analogy does not hold true.

So you cannot equate physical death and the inability of a corpse to respond with spiritual death and the inability of a human being to respond to a spiritual message because we are persuaded that death does not mean a cessation of being.

Death means separation. If it is physical death, it is a separation of your spirit from your body. Spirit without the body, the body without the spirit is dead.

If it is spiritual death, it is separation of your spirit from God. That's spiritual death.

And we believe that's what spiritual death means. Separation. It doesn't mean that an unsaved man does not have the ability to respond to the gospel.

[38 : 33] It means that he is separated from the God of the gospel. But when he hears that gospel and believes that gospel, he is joined with that living God in the person of Christ and becomes a member of the body of Christ.

And this verse in chapter 17 seems to say it and there are so many others that says it, I think, very, very clearly. God demands that all men everywhere repent.

And there is no sidebar whereby God is saying, except in the case of those of you who are not elect. And I know that because you are not elect, you can't repent no matter if you wanted to, you can't because it just isn't within you.

You're not one of the elect, so forget it. There is no provision made for that. So this simply indicates that you have the ability and because you have the ability, you also have the responsibility to respond because God has enabled you to respond.

Everybody can respond. And for me, philosophical proof that they can respond with a positive is that they also respond with a negative.

[39 : 54] What do they use to negate that with? They use their will. They use their ability to respond to say, no, I will not have this man to reign over me.

That's an exercise of the will. That's a response. very much alive and able to do so. I am sure that they have good intentions in saying that there are those whom God elects and he elects them and then he makes them alive.

He gives them spiritual life. They may not even know it. They're not even aware of it. but God makes them alive because he has elected them and then as a result of their being elected and having been made alive spiritually, then they are able to believe and then they do.

So, in the Calvinist scheme of things, salvation is in this order. You are made alive spiritually and then you believe. But what the scriptures teach unequivocally in passage after passage after passage is that you believe and you are made alive.

The life follows the belief. It is God so loved that he gave that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[41 : 26] It isn't we have everlasting life and then we believe. It is always in the order of we believe in accordance with the message that is preached and receiving life is a result or a consequence of having believed.

Now, this may not be a very big issue to a lot of you here and some of you probably haven't even heard of this doctrine of election. It goes with the predestination and foreknowledge, etc. but in upper echelons of theological circles it is an issue that is very much alive and it has bedeviled the Christian community from the 4th century when Augustine who is probably one of the greatest intellects who ever lived and by the way this doctrine of election, predestination, all the rest that places all of the emphasis on the sovereignty of God minimizes the responsibility of man. This is not for what shall I say well just let me put it this way it has a far greater appeal to the more intellectual to the super intellect and in their estimation this is the only way that God can be sovereign is if he exercises all control but do not the scriptures from Genesis onward provide an unmistakable impression that God is pleased to partner with his creation not because he has to not because he is somehow limited if he doesn't but he partners with his creation because he chooses to he is a

God of grace he is a God of generosity he is a God of love and he often involves his creation in ways that he doesn't have to but he chooses to and more often than not it is for the great richness and blessing of those with whom he partners he partnered with Adam he partnered with Noah he didn't have to use Noah to do that he could have done it some other way he partnered with Abraham partnered with Moses partnered with Joshua God involves himself with his creation in ways that he doesn't have to but chooses to and he partners with each and every individual by providing them with a gospel to which they can respond and they can say in a positive way yes I embrace this gospel

[44 : 27] I think it is an absolute magnanimous and wonderful thing it is a generous act of a very gracious God that he is pleased to do that and I don't think that detracts one bit from his sovereignty he is still completely in charge always has been always will be I really don't think that this need be the conflict that many see it to be bottom line is this as best as I understand this and I admit like I said that my grasp of it is woefully lacking but we are accountable we are responsible and God is sovereign we have a will God allows us to exercise that will for good or ill we can do some really dumb things we can do some very noble things with the utilization of that will and he does not invade us and override our will but he is available to provide the strength that we don't have when we are confronted with temptation and tempted to walk in the flesh as opposed to the spirit and for me

I see this as the best of both worlds we have got a really really awesome God in charge and we have got very responsible and accountable human beings in charge who ought to take our life as a gift from God very very very seriously thank you father for what is provided here we look to you for further light in areas where we are not as clear as we would like to be but you have in your word you have revealed yourself with great clarity about the more important issues and we are so grateful that the things that matter most are most clearly revealed and we thank you for that grand glorious gospel whereby if a man or woman boy or girl responds and says yes I want what Jesus did on that cross put to my account because I know in myself I could never be pleasing to a holy and righteous God but I know that Jesus Christ is really pleasing to his father and I want what he did put to my account thank you for making yourself available so that I could believe in you and trust you as my savior Lord Jesus I want to exercise my will right now and say yes to you you're the only one that has a right to really rule this life and I want to hand it over to you for the working out of your will in my life thank you for doing what you did to be my savior your wonderful name amen