



Can We Choose
Against Our
Strongest Desire?

The Choice You Never Made

How Desire Governs the Will

The Strongest Desire Governs the Choice

When a person refrains from acting on a temptation, there *must* be a reason: some stronger motive that overrules the lesser one. If someone resists pornography, perhaps fear of being exposed outweighs the pleasure sought; perhaps love for a spouse or reverence for God becomes the stronger impulse. If one refuses adultery, perhaps concern for children, reputation, or conscience intervenes. In every case, the final decision flows from whatever consideration in *that* moment, which is supreme in the heart. Regret may follow a choice that was “in the moment” chosen, but that does not negate the fact that *when* the choice was made it *was* the strongest desire or motive of the heart.

Only when the tempting desire itself rises to become the strongest desire does a person yield. James said, “But each one is tempted *when* he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” (James 1:14). Note the word “when” – for that is the precise field in which the seed of temptation flourishes. Jesus taught, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:19).

The Pattern Is Universal:

- You resist temptation → **Why?** Stronger motive outweighs it
- You yield to temptation → **Why?** No stronger motive to resist
- You make **any** choice → **Why?** It was your strongest desire **in that moment**

Test this in your own life. You’ll find no exceptions.

This is why David, who succumbed to temptation with Bathsheba, later asked God, “*Create* in me a clean heart, O God... and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me” (Psalm 51:10-13). Pay attention to the verbs he used – “create”, “grant,” for they reveal a much deeper truth about the human condition than

most understand and many debate – it’s known theologically as total depravity.

Correcting Falsehoods, Caricatures

The term often conjures images of deranged psychopaths wielding an ax, and for that reason the truth of the meaning is often either misrepresented or obscured. The real meaning is that sin has affected *every* element of our constitution – our thoughts, desires and choices are all “enslaved” to sin’s power Jesus said (John 8:34). Thus, “total depravity” means sin has affected *everything* – which is *why* as Jesus told Nicodemus “You *must* be born-again” (John 3:3). Jesus said only He can set the slave free (John 8:36). Even acts that *appear* to be socially responsible or acceptable, or benevolent or charitable – if not done *through* the power of the Holy Spirit *by* the grace of God *for* the glory of Jesus Christ, are all deemed “sin” by God. This is because *motives* matter to God as much as outward actions do.

- “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able *to judge the thoughts and intentions* of the heart.” (Heb 4:12)
- “For whatever is not of faith is sin.” (Rom 14:3)
- “And without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Heb 11:6)

David who once prided himself on his devotion to God and love of His law and word, had now learned that *only* divine re-creation of “the heart” could alter the reality of his sinful desires which overcame his will. God affirmed this principle repeatedly in the Old Testament (Jer. 24:7; Eze. 36:24-26; Ps. 86:11). But when the bible talks of “the heart” in these passages, is it referring to the physical pump of the blood? Of course not. It means the internal part of us that thinks, feels, knows and chooses. And for those who suppose that sin has not affected the will, that it alone remains inviolate and pristine, in absolute neutrality, one simple question exposes such an un-biblical view; *why* does every

person since Adam all without exception *choose* to sin? If sin does not affect “the will” – *why* are people using their will to sin?


Eve Was Deceived in Her Desires, Jesus Was Not

Likewise, Eve ate the forbidden fruit because she saw that it was “good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6). Deceived by the tempter, she acted upon her strongest desire. Adam did likewise, though I am sure many misunderstand his reply to the Lord when he said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12).

Most see this as Adam merely passing the blame, either to his wife or to God. But I am persuaded there is more beneath his words. Adam’s statement can also be read as the tragic logic of love without light: “You gave her to me as my wife; we are one flesh by Your own design. She has eaten, and our bond cannot be undone. Her fate seals mine.” In essence, Adam perceived the ship was already sinking and chose to go down with it.

If that was his reasoning, it was love untethered from truth, a fatal tenderness that leapt into darkness, rather than stay in the light of faith and obedience. For in God’s perfect counsel, creation was complete. He would not unmake Eve or start again with another woman.

When Eve fell, half of humanity fell; when Adam followed, the whole of it did.

 **His act was not noble, but necessary within the mystery of God’s decree: a will *freely* exercised by Adam, yet foreordained to reveal humanity’s need for grace.**

Both Adam and Jesus, “the second Adam” act for their brides: the first leads her into curse, the Second lifts her into grace. Where the first said, “I will *join* her,” the Second said, “I will *save* her.” **Thus, the line between the “two Adams” becomes the heartbeat of redemptive history.**

Both acted according to their strongest desire in that moment. The first Adam desired union with his bride above obedience to God. The second Adam desired obedience to the Father above all, and the salvation of His bride above His *own* physical life.

✚ **What Adam lost through love distorted, Christ regained through love divine: the union restored not by rebellion shared, but by righteousness bestowed.**

✚ **Adam *followed* his wife into ruin. Christ *rescued* His bride from her ruin**

Christ, by contrast, though tempted in all the external ways we are, was inwardly impeccable. He declared of Satan, “He has nothing in Me” (John 14:30). *There was nothing within Christ that the enemy could entice or corrupt. In Him, desire and obedience were one.*

And in similar, though righteous principle, Christ as the “second Adam” acted according to His strongest desire – to obey and honour the Father, resulting in the saving of His “bride” (Eph. 5:25)

The Heart Is the Fountain of Both Sin *and* Faith

Biblically, the heart encompasses reason, understanding, and desire. Jesus said that sin proceeds from the heart (Matthew 15:18), and Paul declared that it is “with the heart that one believes” (Romans 10:10). What we understand and *treasure* determines our choices. Only when a *greater* consideration overtakes our understanding can we choose something contrary to our prior inclination. This is why the answer to the question, “Can we choose against our *strongest* desire?”, is No. We cannot. That principle holds both in sin and in salvation. Here is why and how it is true concerning salvation.

Believing the Gospel Is Not a Casual Choice

To believe that God became man in Jesus Christ, requires rational and volitional acceptance of the following propositions concerning Him. That He

was: virgin-born, sinless, crucified, buried, risen, ascended and now reigning. Therefore, it is manifestly not like choosing between cereals or restaurants. Or alternatives in clothing options for the day ad infinitum. True faith is not mental preference; it is genuine spiritual persuasion. The heart cannot truly believe what it does not accept as true. This why Paul said, “It is with the heart that one believes.” Saving faith therefore is present in all the faculties of “the heart” – the reason/intellect, desires and volition. Why do some see the gospel as “the power of God for salvation,” while others see only “foolishness”? (1 Corinthians 1:18-21). Because *only* those to whom God gives new understanding and desire perceive its worth (Acts 16:14; 2 Cor. 4:4-6 etc.)

Conclusion

We who teach sovereign grace do not deny human choice. We affirm that people genuinely choose to believe or reject the gospel, as well as choose myriads of other things. But we deny that anyone comes to faith by the power of their own will alone. When we see the gospel as the power of God and not as folly, we do so because He has granted us sight and persuasion (Matt. 16:17; Jn 6:44, 65; 1 Tim. 1:14-15). Hence we boast not in ourselves for our “choice to believe”, but in God, who both began the work and will perfect it (Phil. 1:6). “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.” — 2 Thessalonians 1:3

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