

Take-Home for Session 7: He Left Us in the Hand of Our Own Counsel

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- The oldest excuse (because of the Lord I left the right way) is forbidden: God hates sin, causes no one's sin, and commanded no one to be ungodly (15:11-13, 20).
- The centerpiece: God created man and left him in the hand of his own counsel; fire and water, life and death are set before us, and whichever we choose will be given (15:14-17); Moses' Deuteronomy 30 summons restated, and the verse the Catechism itself quotes to ground human freedom (CCC 1730).
- We held Scripture's full witness together and found the Catholic both-and: grace absolutely precedes and enables (Orange, 529; CCC 2001-2002), and grace heals freedom rather than replacing it: work out your salvation, FOR God is at work in you (Philippians 2:12-13). The knock is his; grace awakens and strengthens our hand; the response is truly ours: and his voice gives even the dead the power to come forth.
- God's all-seeing knowledge and our real freedom stand side by side without embarrassment (15:18-20; CCC 600): hold both, stand down neither, worship where they meet.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Justin Martyr

Writing to the Roman emperor around AD 155, Justin insisted that unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions. He saw free will as the necessary ground of all praise, blame, and judgment, and taught that God, foreknowing all, coerces no one.

First Apology, chs. 43-44 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Irenaeus taught that God made man free from the beginning, possessing his own power to obey God willingly and not by compulsion, because God is persuasion, not coercion, and there is no virtue in an obedience that could not have been withheld. Love, to be love, must be free.

Against Heresies, Book IV, ch. 37 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo

The Doctor of Grace, who fought Pelagius fiercely, nonetheless wrote an entire treatise on grace and free will against those who so defend grace as to deny freedom. His mature formula holds both: he who created you without you will not justify you without you (Sermon 169). Grace begins, accompanies, and completes every good work, and the will grace heals truly wills: our consent is grace's gift and genuinely our own act.

On Grace and Free Will; Sermon 169 (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Memorize the memory verse and pray it each morning as a declaration over the day's choices: If you will, you can keep the commandments.
- Identify your one recurring fire, the choice you keep stretching toward, and put one concrete obstacle between your hand and it this week (an app deleted, a route changed, an accountability text).
- Read CCC 1730-1742 (ten minutes) and mark the sentence that most surprises you; bring it next week.

Scripture Memory Verse

"If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice." (**Sirach 15:15**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 24 twice, and bring your sealed My Guess sheet from Session 1.

Catechism References

CCC 1730 and 1705; CCC 1734-1737; CCC 2001-2002