

Free Will

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The following was a reply by John to a reader's question. Shortly after this dialogue, John responded to a very mature saint's affirmation that, in respect to God's own free-will, He has bound Himself to His Word, so that He never exercises His will contrary to that Word. The two correspondences provide a continuity of thought that we hope will be helpful to all who are rethinking the proposition of human free will.

Hi Fred (not his real name),

Finally getting back to you on your questions regarding free will. There is so much confusion on the subject that one hardly knows where to begin to attempt to help another find his way out of the maze of presuppositions (that have no basis in biblical truth) and downright sloppy thinking. I remember, for instance, a sister in the Lord, who had suffered a great personal loss in her life, asking me the this puzzling question many years ago; "Brother John, do you think God allowed this to happen?"

I was dumbfounded by the utter foolishness of her query. I was careful, of course, not to respond in a way that would unnecessarily hurt her feelings, but I did say, "Dear one, how could anything happen without God's permission?"

Everything that occurs, occurs within the sovereign will of God. Nothing is accidental. All has been foreseen by Him because all things come to pass by His decision, so that everything has occurred by Him, either doing something to make it come to pass, or by deliberately refusing to act so as, by that absence of His action, to trigger certain consequential results.

There is a dimension of consequence that is brought about directly by the positive energizing of God by His Spirit. In that mode, He causes people to receive and participate in His nature, with all the good action that follows such participation. But there is, what we might call God's indirect causation whereby He, temporarily, withholds such

energizing, by withholding light from that person, insuring that the person will act a certain way without the energizing of the light and power of God.

Of course, we have the scripture that tells us that, "God will not withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly before Him" (Ps.

84:11). The key to this seeming inconsistency is that, in order to walk uprightly before Him, we must first suffer lack, which leads us to grace, which is the only way anyone can walk uprightly before God. Having suffered such lack (specifically being in want of the glory of God), one has been readied to appreciate and receive the grace of God which will directly cause him, yes I did say cause him, to walk uprightly before God and ultimately have no good thing withheld from him. God withholds some good things some time, so that He may not withhold any good thing ultimately.

The old testament prophets gave a preview of this principle, saying, to quote just one representatively, "I will put my Spirit within them and cause them to walk in my statutes" (Ezek. 36:27). And the new testament confirms this with such statements as, "Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

The idea that God has given men a will, that by some definition and in some sense, is to be understood as autonomous and independent of the will of God, is a philosophical notion that has no support in scripture.

There are many shades of this idea, but regardless of the various theological systems that hold versions of the idea of human "free will,"

you'll find one common thread. They all agree that there is a point at which God, having done all that He chooses to do to influence one to a right decision, He stops short of actually causing him to act as He desires.

This amounts to God leaving a dimension of sovereignty up to man; a place within man, where he, the man, having felt the influence of God and the influence of evil, in all practical terms, functionally makes the good or evil actually happen by his choice. Every version of that scenario agrees that man is the final decider as to whether he will do

or not do the will of God. It, in effect says, "God only has the ability to bring his will to pass in a life if that person allows Him to." Can you see how that really makes man the sovereign one, not God.

I heard some dear old country preacher explain this convoluted idea of eternal destiny, thinking that he had summed up wisely the whole issue with the following illustration.. It went: "Whether you go to heaven or hell depends on three votes. God's vote, the devil's vote and your own vote. God is voting for you, the devil is voting against you, and you have the final vote."

When I heard that, I nearly coughed up blood in frustration, especially imagining the smug look on the preacher's face after making such a statement, and knowing also, full well, how many in his radio audience would, dumber than fence posts, be nodding their approval of such down-home, home-spun "wisdom." Folks, there's only one "vote" that is finally determinative---God's, and you've got it.

The truth is that the only One in the universe who has true free will is God Himself. As is true of every good thing, free will is something found in God's very nature and we can only experience freedom of will by God causing us to participate in His freedom by causing us to become "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4); and that is His choice not ours.

That is, He causes us to participate in the divine ability to desire something, then foreordain it, predestine it, and make it come to pass.

That's freedom; to be without constraint, without hindrance, without anything that can, in any degree, stop or hinder one's desire. The scripture is quite clear that God will bring to pass His desire for all men and for the entire cosmos.

Now some, completely indoctrinated by the dumbed-down notion of free will, upon being confronted with what I've just shared, without any depth of thought at all, would accuse me of making man out to be a mere robot. But, I ask, if God has a free will, and brings man into participation with that will, how can freedom be defined as robotic? Freedom by definition, involves not being controlled by another.

The relationship of God's will to us, is not one of making us do something against our will, but by bringing our will into union with His. This is not coercion, this is causation, and it is causation by the force of love which ultimately worked by God leaving us to ourselves to do what we would do left to ourselves; which was to crucify His Son, and then to love such enemies back to Himself by the power of forgiving love to the praise of the glory of His grace.

I hope this is helpful, and please know that I would be happy to hear from you again if there is need for further clarification.

In His grace,
John

(Please continue on to the second correspondence below.)

Yes [indeed God has bound Himself by His Word and will never arbitrarily act contrary to it]. And since His Word is the full and perfect expression, not only of His will, but of His very Person, thus it is by acting in the integrity of who and what He is, that He chooses and acts freely. God's nature, purpose, will, decisions and accomplishments are one unbroken Reality.

There is no competing, false persona in God, HE DOES WHAT HE IS. His foreknowledge, foreordination, predestination, purpose, will and action are a perfect unfolding of His nature. God loves by nature, purpose, will and action. This is true freedom, the freedom to be what you really are, not the freedom to do what you THINK you want to do only to discover that what has been operating in you all the time was a foreign mind, desire and will, doing it's own thing.

That's bondage. Jesus could say that there was no place for that "devil" in Him.

It's clearly a misunderstanding of the whole concept of freedom to think that a person can freely exercise his will to sin. The will that operates in sinning is a will operating in and out from bondage. "I SIN BECAUSE I'M BOUND TO, NOT BECAUSE I'M FREE TO." To repeat and rephrase:

I'm not free to sin, I'm bound to sin.

Freedom to sin is an oxymoron. Luther and Spurgeon would have laughed at some of our concepts of human free will.

If we define Satan as "the lie," as the voice of who we are NOT, insisting that he (it) is our true persona, then, overcoming becomes a matter of conquering the lie by knowing by revelation and affirming out from that revelation, in word and truth, that Christ is my life.

I mentioned in one of my articles that Jesus, in a very covert way, defines the devil as the lie. He called the devil a liar and the father of lies. You have to be a lie to father lies, just as you have to be a Gavazzoni to father Gavazzonis.

This brings us to the question, who really is the "one" in bondage? It must be this lie, trying to displace the Truth.

That's got to be the ultimate futility or bondage of the will. Such a will cannot be carried to fruition; it is chained to its purpose of acting in hostility to the will of God, yet unavoidably serving God's will ultimately.

If we define "will" as power to bring desire and choice/decision to fruition, then we get to a deeper level of this dimension of the truth, and confess that, by that definition, and in that sense, there is only one will in the universe. Would we have to say then, that "my will," defined as that which has the capacity to frustrate the will of God, is really no-will?