

Free Will ---- Is it Humanity's Bane or Benefit
And what can we do about it!

In the beginning God had a desire for something He didn't have and couldn't create. So in His infinite wisdom and power, He set about creating the means by which He could obtain that which He couldn't create. First, He arranged for a brief alteration in His eternal timeless expanse wherein time and matter would come into existence. Then out of the matter He created life, including mankind, which He chose to make in His own image. In doing so, He endowed mankind with a few of His own attributes, the principal ones being the ability to reason, to comprehend and to make choices on his own, that is to have free will. Free will as defined by Augustine is "the ability to make voluntary decisions free from external constraint or coercion."

Prior to this, God had created angels. Even though they had the power of choice, they were not made in His image, nor did they possess the power or qualities to provide Him with that which He was seeking. As we know, and of course as He knew from before the beginning of time, there was one angel who would rebel, taking with him a third of all the other angels. Naturally, He also knew that this would happen in that it had always been part of His plan. But now, there are two wills in existence, God's and Satan's. The wills of the rebel angels were in unison with Satan's as were the wills of the others in unison with God's will.

With the advent of created man, the potential for a third will came into existence. At first, man's will also remained in unison with God's will. But God, in His divine wisdom and in accordance with His divine plan, gave man a list of do's, and also a single don't, thus giving him this simple, elementary, but very essential opportunity to use his free will, to either stay with the do's or to apply his free will and do the don't. Of course, we all know that through the influence of Satan, he did do the don't, and thus another will contrary to God's will came into being. However, the one don't, as soon as it was eaten by Adam, not only exploded into a myriad of other don'ts we call sins, but it also shook the very foundations of the entire universe, initiating entropy, decay, and death.

Here we should pause for a moment to examine a very important related precept. Today, if we really think about it, we must acknowledge that in our fallen human state, doing the don'ts, that is to engage in sin, is a very attractive, compelling alternative to not sinning, that is, to living God's way. The condition of the world reveals ample proof of that. The temptation to sin is obviously caused by this attractiveness and our desire to have or experience its perceived benefits. Man does not lust after ugliness but only after that which is attractive and pleasure producing. He steals because he recognizes the attractiveness of obtaining his wants in ways easier than working for them. He lies because at the moment of choice, the lie is more attractive than the truth, because it seems to achieve what truth cannot.

These and many more examples of that attractiveness of sin express how all of the world functions. But, we know Satan became the father of all lies and of all evil. We tend to think of Satan, if we think of him at all, as a significant adversary of God, a challenge to His omnipotence. We think correctly in terms of some kind of a real and evil spiritual force behind the scenes engaging in a power struggle between God and Satan. This is because we know from Daniel 10:13-20 and other Scriptural references, that there is a power struggle going on between principalities and powers, and that Satan does have behind the scene power over earthly governments and other organizations. However, we also know, or should know, that Satan can do nothing beyond that which God allows him to do. It is no more of a bona fide power struggle than it is the wrestling match on the living room floor between a father and his 4-year old son. Satan in all his evilness and power is allowed to exist because God has chosen it to be so as part of His divine plan. Satan exists in part to provide the yang to go with the ying, the darkness to go with the light, and the wrong to go with the right, all to provide the genuine choices that made free will legitimate and not a sham. Thus, we must realize that Satan is merely a tool, or unpleasant agent in the implementation of God's grand plan. It does not seem, however, that it is for us to know the whole of God's plan where Satan is concerned, but from what Scripture does reveal we can see that he is a real part of it, if nothing but a pawn.

Getting back to Adam, we see that he, of course, became the father of all the other free wills, which then proceeded to populate the earth, each a different will, but all contrary to the will of God. In his fallen state, hopelessly infected with this sin virus, it was impossible for man to have a will not contrary to God's will. With all of this having taken place, and in seeing the depravity that exists today through the only lenses available to natural man, one could conclude that God blew it. His plan somehow went out of control. But those who see through lenses provided by the Holy Spirit, know differently, because through their lenses, God's word, the Scriptures, reveals clearly to them the wondrous and perfect choreographing of God's plan as it has been taking place.

But now what did all of this do for God in terms of His desire to obtain that which He couldn't directly create, and just what was this illusive thing He wanted so much? From John 4:16, we know that God is love. But what good is love without a beloved? In fact, love cannot even manifest without a beloved. There must be a loved one to love. However, love can also be unrequited, that is it doesn't have to be returned by the beloved. Such a love, however, is a very lonely and extremely painful love. Love yearns to be returned by the one being loved. Surely God loved the angels and they loved Him. But they were not of His kind; they were not made in His own image, as was man. Perhaps this can in one way be likened to the love between a man and his pet, as compared with a genuine love between a man and his bride. I pray that the angels not be offended by this analogy. It is applied only to illustrate the differences of love between diverse and like kinds.

Now, therefore, He had created the potentiality, the being, through whom he could get what He sought, a being made in His own image, you might also say potentially of His own kind, whom He could love. However, that wasn't enough, because of this yearning to also be loved by those after His own image. But even God in His omnipotence could not make anyone love Him. This is because love is a commitment given freely by a being having both the capability and the absolute, sovereign, free, unencumbered choice to love or not to love. So here at last we come to the answer to the question, as to why mankind had to be given free will, an unfettered right to make choices. It was so that

man would be potentially qualified to provide to God that which He wanted but could not directly create. It was so that He could both love and be loved by beings of His own image or kind, so He could have an eternal loving family relationship in heaven. How wonderful it is, that that is His desire, and that we are thereby so blessed as to have the privilege of being part of His eternal family!!

But the fulfillment of this desire cost God far, far, far more than we can ever comprehend. Because once He allowed sin and Satan and all these other diverse wills to exist, and we see that He had to for the reason given above, we also see that a wholly new and different process had to be initiated to counter the problems and clean up the wreckage which this free will caused. Scripture calls it salvation, which leads to justification and then to sanctification. Because God could not take into heaven any sin, and since free will and temptation made certain that all would sin, this additional incredible process, which is the unqualified expression of God's perfect love was made necessary before God could actually acquire a mutually loving family and eventually bring it home to eternal bliss.

Now let's see what this all cost God. For starters, God has had to suffer the on-going painful indignity of seeing those created in His own image in constant rebellion against Him. Through their free wills, nearly all of humanity chose and choose even today, to chase after and worship false gods and many so sadly choose to deny that He even exists. Even after having chosen a particular man, Abraham, through whom he generated a whole race to which He many times personally revealed Himself, His love and His omnipotence, the choice to do evil remained in every one of them as it has in all other people. Even more painful to our God must be to see the long suffering of all humanity from the accumulative and compounding consequences of all of the individual choices throughout history, which were, and continue to be, made contrary to God's will. While it is sometimes tempting for the redeemed, and is universally popular for the natural man, to blame God for humanity's predicament, God never does, nor could He, initiate pain or evil. But as difficult as it is for the natural man to understand, God has to allow this to

happen in order to preserve the un-coerced freedom of choice regardless of the consequences. That is not to say that He doesn't intervene in many ways. Scripture is full of examples, but it is difficult to find evidence of His intervention in choices, however, it is most common to see evidences of His divine hand in many of the consequences. Also, He does put forth for our consideration many evidences of what He prefers us to choose, but He then leaves it to us to make the final choice.

However, in the redeemed, those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, those who have fulfilled His desire for a mutually loving family, He retains an on-going fellowship through which He does, in fact, strongly influence the heart to live by His will. This is because the former will of the redeemed has served its purpose and is no longer needed or wanted in His divine plan. His will remains sovereign. Now, in order to redeem man from sin, He, Jesus, the Son person of the triune Godhead, had to enter His own creation in order to save from sin that portion of His likeness which He chose to be His eternal family. Not only did He have to enter it, but He also had to suffer physically and spiritually and then die at the hands of those He had created in His image! This, of course, was followed by His resurrection. But His death was the only way He could cleanse the sins of the elect in order to make them eligible for heaven. Another price He paid for this act of love is that He now sits in heaven as both God and man, having visible proof of this incredible sacrifice as evidenced by His pierced hands, feet and side, for we know that when He returns these will still be there (Zachariah 12:10, 13:6, and Revelation 5:6). We also know that even the earth, and the stars and the whole universe groan from the pain of the original and subsequent sin (Romans 8:22).

So as we see the terrible consequences wrought to all creation by this quality called free will, we can also see the necessity of it as a means by which God has achieved His purpose. For we know that those who are of the spirit and possess that love, are the embodiments of that purpose. Because He foretold all that would happen, we also know that the times of universal suffering are nearing the end; from His word we know the signs of those times, and can now see that we are actually in the times of those signs.

Those who are His chosen, who see by the light of the Holy Spirit, see the folly and the burdens associated with ownership of free will, this independent personal will. Having completed its principal purpose at the moment, we become born again, that is to have become part of His eternal family, having made the love commitment, and having had our sins forgiven and forgotten, there is no longer any good purpose or need for a free will. It has, in fact, become the bane of our lives. It is poisonous to the soul. It is a point of entry for Satan and for all of our former thoughts, emotions, and desires, which are contrary to God's will. Therefore, it is to our great benefit to give back to God our free will, to beg Him to take it and to pray that He will. In doing so, we should pray that He live every moment through us so that it is now His will, and only His will which governs us. This is not easy to do, because our old selves are yet very strong and want mightily to retain their independence and self-determination as to what to choose, and the desire to sin yet remains strong in our loins. But as children of God, we no longer need, nor should we want, anything contrary to His will, so His will should always be our goal and our only choice. As the love for Him, which He so much wanted and for which He paid such a high price, grows in our hearts, His will in us must also grow evermore beautiful, joyous and easier to follow. At the same time, as He continues His blessed work in us, the old self should become ever more repugnant and easier to subordinate. So ask God to take back your free will, pray that He will do so, and then try to live every day, moment by moment, as if He has taken it!