

Good and Evil and the Paradox of Free Will VS Predestination

The Holy Spirit, among other things, is a love essence of God, and when called upon through our embracing Jesus as our Lord and Savior, He enters the heart, sensitizes the human spirit and stimulates a higher consciousness of Himself within us. Thus the human spirit becomes capable of establishing communication with God, and obtains an enhanced ability to understand God's purpose and will. Achieving this, the conscience can now more accurately interpret, articulate and communicate God's will through the soul to the mind and body. In this way, the physical being receives the necessary guidance, strength and resolve to conduct itself as God would have it be. If this were the only force, the entire earth could simply be an expanded Eden without pain or suffering or any of the physical, mental and spiritual difficulties that now plague the earth

Why isn't this the way things are? Surely it would seem that this is the way that God would want it to be. As the supreme and ultimate all encompassing power, He could have it any way that He would choose to have it. Why then is there evil along with all of the associated human tragedies that have always plagued mankind? I don't know, and I doubt that anyone really knows, because I don't believe that God has told anyone in a good, solid, fully understandable way. He has, however, included a few clues in the Scriptures. An explanation that satisfies me, at least for the moment, and based on what I have read, observed and reasoned, is as follows. Satan, the angel who would be God, was banished to earth from heaven. He became and is the manifestation of all evil, the antithesis of God, though in a comparatively puny way, because he is himself only a created being. It would seem that he is the epitome of a free will and an insatiable ego gone astray. Although banished from heaven, he retained all of his angelic powers, powers that from a human viewpoint are incredibly God-like obviously, but compared to Gods', are quite limited.

In the meantime, God made man in His own image. Think about that - in His own image. I don't believe that that means what I used to think that it meant, or what many people believe that it means. Look in a mirror and you will see your image. That image is a reflection, the playing of light and shadows; it has no substance; it is nothing. Modify the surface topography of the reflector, and the image becomes grotesque, distorted, or disappears. As that essentially nothingness image is to each of us as flesh and blood, so are we as compared to God.

Nevertheless, this "image" of God was created and endowed with many and complex characteristics including free will. Herein lay the ultimate paradox and a topic for debate that might well never be reconciled to any mutual satisfaction. Can there be free will if there is predestination? If God knows everything, and he does, then all of our actions and their results are known to Him before they happen, and were thus, it would seem, predetermined or known from the beginning of time. If it is already known by God exactly what we will do, our every act, and how everything will end, then free will would seem to be a farce and we, therefore, have no choices; they have already been made for us, and we are merely following a prepared script which we didn't write and which we can't change. I understand that St. Augustine wrestled with this problem for many years and finally satisfied himself that free will and predestination do co-exist. Although I have yet to read his work on this subject, I have found reason to believe this also. At the risk of being embarrassed in the future if I find his or another explanation to be superior, I, nevertheless, feel compelled to record my current views on this matter.

We do have control of our actions; we have free will. He gave this to us almost unconditionally to do with it as we see fit, to the very limits of human capability. It was given as an amoral quality, being neither good nor evil. Stockpiled also within our psyche after the fall, were the means, the potential, and the propensities for good and for evil. It would seem that perhaps these propensities are attached to the boundaries of the soul.

soul. That for good is at the spirit/soul boundary, and that for evil is at the soul/flesh boundary. In between, within the soul is the conscience, that internal judgement seat that must continually arbitrate between these two competing factions and render personal judgement on one's actions. Under unencumbered free will conditions, when our spiritual side scores a point or wins a round, we feel good and have a "clear conscience." When evil wins a round we feel a "troubled conscience." However, we do not live in a balanced, unencumbered, free will environment, as world conditions clearly illustrate. Because we live in the world of the flesh, that propensity for evil, which resides at the soul/flesh interface, is closer and more accessible to the external world than is the more internal force for good. Satan, the prince of this earthly, external world, the would-be god of all creation, the hater of God the creator, has as his mission the seduction and destruction of God's creation, man. To this end, he proceeds to insinuate himself into the flesh, stimulating these evil propensities such as pride, lust, avarice, hate, etc., and causing them to grow and engulf the soul, subdue the conscience, and subordinate, or eliminate the Holy Spirit-directed propensities for good.

Try as he may, however, Satan can never pierce the veil that surrounds the God-given, noble qualities inherent in man. He may cause them to be totally subordinated, and may banish them from the consciousness, but he can never destroy them. Thanks to the teachings of Jesus, no matter how low one may have sunk, there is always hope for redemption and forgiveness as soon as we accept Him as our Savior. Unlike Satan, He will not impose himself but waits to be asked into our lives. Only then is it possible to break Satans grip. Satan's grip on our soul through our flesh can be, and often is, overpowering and seemingly impossible to overcome. The pleasures of the flesh are often irresistible and addictive as well as cunningly deceptive, because Satan knows our weaknesses better than we do. Once he has penetrated a soul and taken command, he builds within it a whole new set of values and a new "morality" fashioned after his likeness. The individual so afflicted is no longer able to exercise free will, even though for a while, he may think that he is "liberated". The great deceiver has instilled an illusion

illusion of freedom as he proceeds to enslave that soul in the morass of selfishness and evil, masquerading as enlightened modernity. The enslaved individual is not aware of his condition. Through Satan's deceptive powers the person may feel just and moral and a pillar of enlightenment. After a while, as it often happens, uncomfortable feelings, feelings of some kind of spiritual void or lack of satisfaction or fulfillment, may enter the soul. Perhaps this is that imprisoned higher self, kicking the walls of its confinement and begging to be released. Perhaps also, it is the Lord knocking at the soul with His offer of salvation. Those who respond through sincere prayer, regardless of their sinful status, will find God. At that moment, Satan will reluctantly pack up and leave. The prayer will unleash a powerful antibiotic, completely eliminating Satan's viral grip, and bring forth from captivity those nobler qualities so abhorrent to Satan.

Although the power of the Lord is infinitely greater than his, Satan will, nevertheless, lurk in the shadows waiting for another opportunity to reinfect the soul. As with so many diseases, the host remains susceptible and can easily have a relapse. Only through constant vigil, as provided by prayer and faith in Jesus, can the soul's immunity be maintained. Whenever Satan loses a soul, he is mightily enraged and leaves a permanent cloud of evil virus and temptations surrounding his former host. These are always ready and able to penetrate any void or exploit any weakness, which might regain for him, that soul.

The existence of Satan and his ability to subvert souls and enlist them in his army of evil and destruction is the cause of the pain and suffering and all of the wrongs in the world. A subverted soul lives for its own gratification and pleasures. These take many forms that inevitably inflict pain and suffering on others, the lust for and attainment of power being the most evident and destructive. Stalin, Mao and Hitler are but three of this century's most prominent of his legions of dedicated agents. These three alone are responsible for the tragic deaths of over one hundred million innocent souls along with the pain and suffering and illness of hundreds of millions more. These are the result of man's free will

man's free will and Satan's exploitation of his more base capabilities. If God is so good, how can He allow all of this suffering to continue? For those whose priorities are in the here and now, a satisfactory explanation may be impossible. However, those who have studied the Bible and believe in Jesus may find some value in the following.

The earth just might be a quality control and testing center for souls. Making a soul that has the qualities necessary for everlasting life in heaven is not a simple matter, even for God. Making the stars, the earth, and everything on the earth was easy for God, but making a good, reliable, everlasting soul is not that easy. Look at the angels. One would think that they would be perfection itself. Yet a third of them "went bad" and revolted. Instead of destroying them, He simply banished them to earth for a while before issuing a final sentence. During this while, as Satan, the ringleader of the pack of mutineers, schemes to get back to heaven and displace Him, God has found a use for them in this center for quality control we call earth.

In order to be sure, even for God, this test is necessary. How does He test these created souls for the necessary qualities? Simply put, He gives them free will and sends them out into the devil's world of temptations and observes their conduct. In order to pass the test, the soul doesn't have to be a bastion of strength and infallibility. He didn't make it that way. If He had, man's free will wouldn't be all that free. Man had to be vulnerable and capable of choosing freely between God and Satan. Through the clear, crisp, beautiful message of Jesus, we know that in order to pass the test, we need only to seek Him and put our unconditional faith and trust in Him. I say "only" not because it is easy, but because it is all that we need to do. It is not easy. It is extremely difficult. Satan, in his own mind isn't here as a quality control tester. He has a different agenda. He is here to build a mountain of captured souls so high that he can climb back to heaven over it. It is difficult for us because it is difficult not to live of the flesh and not to succumb to all of the temptations of the flesh, even without Satan's involvement. God, of course, knows this and He willingly forgives all sins, as long as we believe in His Son and, as a

consequence, sincerely, with all of our ability, work to avoid sin. In the final analysis, the only thing He wants is a total, unconditional faith in Him and, of course, all that that implies. Perhaps it is because of the partial mutiny of His first creation, that He has chosen this route as the means for obtaining for heaven, only those souls that can endure this test of temptations, pain and suffering and still stay loyal to His Word.