

## Mankind's Sovereign Will

Perhaps God's most profound gift to mankind is the God-like quality of sovereign free will. What does that mean? It means that we have absolute sovereignty over our will, our ability to choose our thoughts and our actions, sovereignty that God cannot, because He will not, compromise. Does God intervene in our lives? Yes, and so does the devil, his cohorts and a goodly portion of the rest of mankind in one way or another. Then how can one possibly believe that we have sovereignty of will, of choice, when this intervention is so evident?

All intervention is through persuasion. Neither God nor man can take away what God has unconditionally given us, our right to choose our own beliefs, thoughts and actions. Persuasions, which may influence our choices, take on many forms, from loving guidance to prolonged sadistic torture and death. History is full of evidence regarding those who chose to believe in Jesus and were tortured without mercy as a means of persuading them to choose otherwise, but who nevertheless chose to die for their faith. Those less firm in their chosen belief were persuaded to make another choice. Parents choose to raise their children to live under a particular system of values and beliefs. They apply these through persuasion, example, instruction, indoctrination, reward and punishment. The child, however, chooses, as he or she will, to accept or reject these values and beliefs. They usually will also revise these as they enter the world and are further influenced by their peers and by many confusing and contradicting forces, which they encounter over the course of their lives. However, they never lose their capacity to choose, and always do so as a result of some composite of all of the persuasive forces by which they choose to be influenced.

Although God does influence our lives, so does the devil. God certainly intervenes in our lives and in the fate of nations, as evidenced especially throughout the Old Testament. God intervenes through both punishment and rewards, but never as a direct assault on our free will. Revelation. 3:20 tells us that He may knock on the door of our soul, but He will not enter unless we choose to let Him in. Ephesians 2:8, 9 tells us "For by grace are you

saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.” God gives (offers) us the grace of salvation, however, we must choose to accept it before it can actually be received and become the means through which we are born again. As born again Christians, we seek and obtain a unique affiliation with the Lord. Our faith, which is a choice, requires that we seek and live His way. In that capacity we ask Him to guide our choices and to intervene in our lives through our prayers. We ask Him to make choices for us and to take over our wills as well as our lives. This He will do at and only at our specific request, because He will not override our sovereign right to choose our own direction. Again, when God intervenes by punishing or rewarding, and thus in effect altering events related to individuals, groups or even nations, it does not mean that He is thus usurping anyone’s free will. Individual choice is still absolute in that one may choose to view these events as natural or manmade, coincidences, or God inspired, and to respond to them as one chooses. The whole purpose of man’s physical life is to grow to believe, love, and obey the Lord, have faith in Him and to thus become prepared to share the wonders and delights of eternal companionship with Him. There are a few things that God cannot do. Among them is that He cannot make us love Him. This is the key to the whole issue. Love, true unconditional love, is not an emotion, but a choice commitment. How sincere or worthy could that love be if it was derived in any manner other than from a sovereign ability to make that choice? Would God find any value in a love or faith that resulted from a stacked deck, that is from a source less than totally free to make that choice? An absolute free will is the only source from which such a commitment could originate.

The premise of man’s free will is also challenged when the idea of predestination is considered in this context. It would seem that the awesome accuracy of biblical prophecy would suggest that God directs everything and therefore even our individual thoughts and actions have already been choreographed well in advance of our commencing them. How else could He know what will happen centuries before it happens unless He has already planned and orchestrated it? The answer is quite clear. He knows what will happen before it happens because He is outside of time and in multiple higher dimensions that are beyond our powers of comprehension. From there He sees the future as easily as

the past and present. For Him it's not necessary to cause something to happen in order to know that it will happen, because past and present and future have no significance from outside of time, which in fact we now know to be a physical dimension which did not always exist, but was instead part of creation. A weak and limited analogy that may provide some insight into this phenomenon is the passing parade. A spectator standing at the curb will remember portions of the parade which have already passed, and is seeing that which is in front of him at the present. However, he has no way to know what is coming but which is not yet in view. He will not know that until it reaches his position, his present time. However, to a reporter in a helicopter overhead, viewing a parade from this higher dimension, if you will, sees the entire parade from beginning to end, and can therefore report to the spectator exactly what he can expect to see later, all the way to the end, if he has a radio and is tuned in to the right station. God is our reporter and the Scriptures are our radio. If we are tuned into the right wavelength, through which to hear the Word that is if we have the Holy Spirit, we also can know the nature of the whole parade. Therefore, what may seem to be preordained and thus already decided for us, leaving no room for choice through this sovereignty of will, is nothing more than evidence of the power of the Lord to see into the future and to thereby know in advance what choices we will make when that future becomes our present.

Nothing that the Lord does interferes with our free will. He may have influence over events along the way and thus limit our available range or type of choices, but not the freedom to truly make our own choices. This sovereign power of mankind and the choices resulting there from are in many ways the major sources of both the agony and the ecstasy of our mortal lives as well as the determining factors as to where our souls will spend eternity.

As a postscript, I believe that much of the Old Testament narrative depicting the Israelites ups and downs through the ages, their devotion and their transgressions, and God's response to them, can easily be viewed as a saga of man's sovereignty of choice and God's restraint from violating that sovereignty. To those who haven't studied carefully the entire message, and especially to non-believers, the stories might seem very strange in

the context of an omnipotent God. Without the concept that God irrevocably ordained this sovereignty of free will and, therefore, that He has allowed man to proceed through the ages disobeying, ignoring, perverting and modifying His stated ordinances, and even denying that He exists, one could easily conclude that God is neither all powerful nor all knowing. Certainly, however, He has adequately demonstrated His omnipotent capabilities, by His creation as well as in performing miracles, showing His wrath, rewarding and punishing individuals as well as whole nations, while He has also proven Himself to be a God of infinite love through Jesus Christ. Yet man seems always to have been able to go on his independent way, free to choose as he will, with seeming impunity here on earth. As a result, pain, suffering, poverty, starvation disease, torture, murders and all forms of evil proliferate. I believe that all of this is caused by fallen man's free will expressed against his own kind. It is the compound aggregate result of all pride, envy, deceit, lust, covertness, anger, lies, ignorance, and lack of love for God and his fellow man. We, of course, know that our God is omnipotent and could stop this or anything else if He so chose. Then why doesn't He?

I believe He will, and quiet soon. In His book where He has written all of the history, there is a part where He tells us about future history. He told us of, and described the many events, which would precede the end of His patience. Many of these events have happened while others are at this moment taking shape with astounding accuracy. If you are concerned with what is really happening, and going to happen in the world, turn off CNN and curl up in your best chair and read the Scripture. CNN only has a curbside, curb level view of the passing parade. The Scriptures will, if you enlist the interpretive power of the Holy Spirit, show you the whole parade, all the way to where the fat lady sings.