

WHAT ABOUT FREE WILL?

Charles Faupel



There has been a longstanding debate among theologians and philosophers regarding whether or not human beings make decisions and choose to engage in behaviors freely, or whether they are constrained by forces and circumstances beyond their control. This is the essence of the debate over “free will.”

Theologians on both sides of this debate find it central to their understanding of God and His relationship to His creation. The debate is especially intense with regard to the question of where we will spend eternity—in heaven or hell? In Christian religious circles, this debate is generally framed as the debate between Arminianism and Calvinism.

Without going into too much boring detail, Calvinism, based on the teachings of French theologian John Calvin in the early 16th century, maintains (in its purest form) that we as human beings have no choice regarding our salvation or spiritual destiny. Some have been predestined to salvation and eternal life with God, while others—apparently the vast majority—have been predestined to an eternal

life in hell's torment. There is nothing they can do about that. Calvin's doctrines have been conveniently summed up in the acronym TULIP:

T – Total depravity of human nature

U – Unconditional Election—because man is dead in sin he is incapable of choosing God; only God can choose him for salvation

L – Limited Atonement—Jesus died only for the elect, those whom He has chosen for salvation

I – Irresistible Grace—those whom God has elected are drawn to him by an irresistible pulling within. They cannot help but respond positively to this pull

P – Perseverance of the Saints—those whom God has elected are saved by God's sovereign action; therefore their salvation is secure and there is nothing that they can do to lose their salvation.

Not surprisingly, many people have a hard time with this doctrine, some even considering it blasphemy. An early opponent of Calvin's teachings was a Dutch Reformed theologian by the name of Jacobus Arminius, writing a century later. Arminius and those who followed his general teachings (including John Wesley) rejected the idea that God had pre-elected some to salvation and others to damnation. Those adhering to this school of thought also rejected the idea of irresistible grace, contending that it is indeed possible to resist God's tugs and resist His salvation. Salvation was dependent on the choice of the individual to choose God or to reject God. These two schools of thought—Calvinism and Arminianism—comprise the theological context for most of the debate surrounding free will in the Christian church today.

Shifting the Premise for the Debate

I begin this discussion by asserting that both Calvin and Arminius make their claims based on an entirely false premise. Both men (and their followers) presume that only a portion of the human race will ultimately be saved, while the rest of humanity will not, and will spend eternity in hell. It is simply a matter of whether one's entrance into heaven is a matter of one's own choice of salvation

or whether God had somehow preselected some to heaven and the remainder to hell. I respond to both Calvin and Arminius, and all of those preachers and expositors who subscribe to their teachings, by declaring that the basis for your debate, and for all of the competing denominations that have been formed based on this debate, are entirely specious! The truth of God's Word as found in scripture is that ALL MEN will ultimately be reconciled to Christ. In Romans 5:18 we read, *"Therefore as by the offence of one [judgment came] upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [the free gift came] upon all men unto justification of life."* And in 1 Corinthians 15:22 we read, *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."* And then again in Philippians 2:9-11, *"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth; And [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Literally dozens of verses loudly proclaim the total reconciliation of the world to God through Christ, a position incidentally, which the overwhelming majority of early church leaders took until the third or fourth century AD. For an excellent discussion of this glorious truth, I would recommend to the Reader the series authored by J. Preston Eby entitled [*The Savior of the World*](#).

If God's Word is true, there is absolutely no debating whether man's salvation is dependent upon whether or not he has been predestined to heaven or hell, or whether it depends upon his freely choosing to believe in God through Christ. If all will be saved, as the scriptures that I have quoted above—among many others—declare, it then becomes clear that all men are saved by the Providential working of God, and not through any "free will" decisions that they make. To fully appreciate this bold declaration, it is helpful to examine more closely what is generally meant by "free will."

The Argument for Free Will

Philosophers and theologians who claim that human beings have a free will generally argue that this is part of our created nature and therefore no constraints should be placed upon the free expression of that will, except for the

protection of the individual or those around him or her. The Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes perhaps stated this position most concisely when he said, "*Your liberty to swing your fist ends just where my nose begins.*" The belief in the sanctity of free will was central to Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire and René Descartes who said, "*the will is by its nature so free that it can never be constrained.*" This thinking was so pervasive in eighteenth-century Europe that it would lead to the French Revolution of 1789, which was a revolution of the business class (bourgeoisie) to overthrow that repressive rule of the nobility at that time. The bourgeoisie wanted total freedom to pursue their economic interests unfettered by the constraints imposed by the ruling elites. Indeed, this same philosophy was a driving engine behind the American Revolution, whose gallant men were seeking freedom from the repressive rule of King George and the repressive taxes that the crown was imposing on the colonies. Behind both of these revolutions, which certainly changed the course of western history, was the belief in the sanctity of human free will. Western society today has become heir to this understanding of the inviolability of free will. Little wonder, then, that so many people become disturbed by any suggestion that our destiny has been predetermined by God and not the consequence of exercise of our free will.

The *philosophical* basis for the doctrine of free will is the idea that human beings are *free moral agents*. According to free will advocates, it is because we are free moral agents that each individual bears moral responsibility for their decisions and the actions that they take. Our entire legal system, as well as other institutions in our society, are based upon this premise. An individual makes the decision to enter a liquor store and hold the cashier at gunpoint for the money that is in the till. That individual is caught by the police, charges brought against him, and he is brought to trial. If the evidence establishes beyond a reasonable doubt that he did indeed commit this act with the intention to rob the liquor store, he is then punished accordingly. He is presumed to have freely made the decision to engage in this crime, therefore is morally responsible, and hence must be punished. If, however, he were forced at gunpoint by another person to enter the liquor store, the law recognizes that he did not act freely of his will, and he

will (or should under the law) be found “not guilty.” The verdict of his guilt is dependent upon the notion of free will. Without this critical element, according to the philosophy of our legal system, he cannot be held morally accountable for his actions.

There are, of course any number of scriptures, particularly in the Old Testament, which would at least seem to support this notion. The books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy are replete with references to the idea of exacting retribution in appropriate measures—“an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Such admonitions certainly indicate moral responsibility on the part of the offender, and moral responsibility, for most people, presumes that the person acting in the first place did so freely and without constraint. The New Testament is not without its verses that might seem to support the concept of free will. In the parable of the rich young ruler, for example, Jesus tells the young man to go out and sell all that he has and give it to the poor if he is to have *aionion* life. The young man went away sorrowful because he was very rich. The implication for most who would read this passage is that the rich young ruler was faced with a decision of inheriting *aionion* life or keeping his riches for himself. He, of his own free will (according to free will advocates), made the decision to keep his goodies.

Clearly, the rich young ruler did make a choice. I will come back to this parable later. Those in the Old Testament for whom retribution was given also made a choice to engage in the original offense resulting in the retribution. And the Bible teaches clearly, I believe, that we are morally responsible for the decisions that we make and the actions that we take. This still begs the question, “Do human beings truly have a ‘free will?’” I would assert that we do not, in any absolute philosophical sense, possess or operate out of a free will. In taking this position, I do not dispute the notion that each individual is morally responsible for their actions, nor that they should suffer or benefit from the consequences of those actions. We do indeed make choices among options that are presented to us. The process of making these choices involves an internal decision-making process in which we, on some basis, opt for one choice over another. I strongly maintain, however, that these choices are not made by free moral agents exercising a free

will in the sense stated, or at least implied, by those insisting that human beings possess a free will.

I am suggesting, in other words, that free will is not a prerequisite to moral responsibility. I contend, for example, that we engage in any number of behaviors—not out of an inviolate free will, but as a response to the conditioning that we have had through past experiences, or indeed in response to any number of pressures that may be brought to bear on our making that decision. As such we were not totally free to make that decision. But we did make it, and we are responsible for it, despite the fact that there were all manner of constraints and pressures that led us to that decision. Indeed, we do not allow people to use the excuse of a bad upbringing, or drugs, or any other influence as a reason not to hold them responsible for the action. They are still responsible, despite the fact that the choicer they made was not on the basis of a truly free will.

Why I Reject the Idea of Free Will

I reject the idea that humans possess free will for a number of reasons. This idea simply does not hold up under the scrutiny of natural reasoning, nor from the general witness of scripture. Moreover, if we are truly honest, our own individual spiritual experience contradicts the claims made by advocates of the doctrine of free will. I will address our personal experience later.

The Test of Natural Reasoning

Advocates of free will essentially liken the exercise of our decision making to ordering from a fast-food menu (or a gourmet restaurant menu for that matter). One examines the choices on the menu, and decides on a Big Mac combo meal. He or she has freely chosen the Big Mac from all the choices on the menu. This individual has, in his or her mind, exercised free will. But did they really? If they truly had the freedom to order whatever they wanted, why didn't they order lamb chops? Or gumbo? Or better still, a four-course dinner? The reason, of course, is that these options were not on the menu!

So it is with every choice that we make. Our choices are limited to a comparatively narrow slice of the spectrum of theoretically possible choices. If I

truly had absolute freedom of choice, for example, and I decided that I wanted to travel to Europe, I might decide to simply flap my arms and fly to Europe, thereby avoiding all the hassle of going through security at airports. Ah, but you argue, it is simply not possible to fly by flapping your arms. That is precisely my point. We do not, therefore, have absolute freedom of choice as Descartes and his free-will followers suggest that we do. Other examples abound, however, which do not require breaking the laws of physics. To return to the example of food and dining, suppose that I am starving and begin to consider all of my options for a satisfying meal. After spending some time, I might consider having perch, or shrimp, perhaps a T-bone steak, all of this, of course, with all the fixins' with the appropriate wine to accompany such a fine meal. Might I now argue that I am exercising my free will, not constrained by the meager menu on a fast-food menu? I might find myself confronted with a broader array of choices than at a fast food restaurant, but if I truly had the freedom to choose whatever I wanted, might I not order chocolate covered ants or grasshoppers for dessert? But that could have never entered your mind, you say! Yes, and my point once again has been made. The very choices that we have available are limited, when compared to all of the theoretically possible choices that there might be for eating or any other behavior. The culture that we live in imposes limits on our very awareness of the options available to us, whether we are talking about the food we eat or any other behavior.

The limitations on our freedom to choose goes beyond these broad cultural constraints imposed upon us. The experiences that we have, due to no choice of our own, will predispose us toward certain actions or inactions. Keeping with the analogy of food, I was raised in a mid-western farm family that raised beef and dairy cattle. We had for meals a regular fare of beef, sometimes chicken, and the garden vegetables that my mother grew in her garden. I was not exposed to many of the delicacies that most children are exposed to, and was never encouraged to experiment with food beyond the standard fare. The result of this is that I developed a profound distaste for any and all seafood, and most spices beyond salt and pepper. When I say "distaste," I mean much more than that my face would pucker. I would literally have to rush to the bathroom and vomit if I

were to have accidentally eaten one of the “prohibited” foods. One might argue, of course, that I could deliberately force myself to eat these foods and that is true. However, my freedom to consume these delicacies remains severely limited because they are not even on the radar screen as I consider what it is that I am going to have for dinner.

The limitation of our choices goes far beyond what it is that we will eat or drink. Because of traumatic experiences that they have had as children or even adults, there are those individuals who have phobias regarding flying, or being in a crowd, or just about anything imaginable. These individuals do not truly have freedom to choose, not in any total or absolute sense.

The fact is that all of us have had experiences that shape the decisions that we make. Most of the time, we don’t even give thought to alternative courses of actions, or if we do, we may consider two or three alternatives among the countless theoretical possibilities that may exist. Other options do not even enter our mind. Our freedom to choose, therefore, in any practical sense, is limited to those two or three options. And so, while we can TALK ABOUT free will in some vague, abstract theoretical sense, the fact is that this freedom does not really exist in the practical experience of any of us.

The Test of Scripture

Proponents of free will, wanting to make the case that our salvation is dependent upon making a free choice to “accept Jesus into your heart,” or some other decisive action that we take in response to God, do indeed point to scriptures that would support their belief. They point out that Eve, being tempted by the serpent, chose to eat of the forbidden fruit, and then Adam also later chose to partake of it with Eve. The presumption is that this choice was made of their own free will. Free will proponents also cite Joshua 24:15, where this leader of the Israelites who had just led his people into the Promised Land said unto them, *“choose you **this day** whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”* This was, indeed, a challenge to the people of Israel, one that would

require a choice on their part. But are we to assume from this that their choice was entrusted by God to their independent free will?

New Testament passages are also presented to substantiate this position. I have heard more than one sermon warning of the dire consequences of making the wrong choice, based upon Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler who went away sorrowful because he refused to sell all that he had and give it to the poor. The point that Jesus was making here, of course, is that our "riches" (all of the various distractions and worldly loyalties including, but not limited to, financial riches) make it difficult, yea impossible for many, to make the choice to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Such a sorrowful response on the part of the rich young ruler was hardly made out of a truly free choice! His heart was bonded to his riches, and he was therefore not able to freely make a choice to sell them, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Jesus.

I contend that scripture makes a far stronger case *against* the notion of mankind possessing a free will. I will begin by quoting the very words of Jesus: *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day* (John 6:44). Jesus had been speaking to the people who were asking Him how they might know that He was who He said He was. He responded by saying (among other things) that He was the bread of life, and that all who would come to Him, He would in no wise cast out. He followed that statement up with the statement quoted above, that ***no one can even come to Him***, except the Father draw him. Moreover, the Greek word for "draw" in the verse above is "*helkō*," which, literally translated, means to drag or impel. So Jesus is pretty clear that our very coming to Christ is NOT a matter of our freely choosing Him! He has chosen us, and only by His Spirit drawing (dragging, impelling) us are we able to make the choice to come to Him. That is hardly a matter of exercising our free will!

Paul also makes this point very emphatically when he says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*" (Ephesians 2:8; ESV). The witness of scripture is very clear that our very salvation is accomplished through the initiative of God Himself, and not on our freely

choosing Him. Scripture is clear, that from the very beginning, God chose us—not the other way around. Again, as the apostle Paul says.

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will...Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; [even] in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Ephesians 1:4-5, 9-11).

The witness of scripture points convincingly to God’s initiative in the lives of all men and women: in their creation, their redemption, their processing, and ultimately their glorification. Our destiny in Him is not left to the whims of our fickle minds making some sort of decision regarding our salvation or any other aspect of our walk with Him. Does this mean that we are robots, as some might accuse, who have no ability to make choices? Absolutely not! I shall address this question in more detail momentarily. First, however, I offer one last reason for the case against free will.

The Idolatry of the Idea of Free Will

My most strenuous objection to the concept of free will, at least as it is applied to our spiritual walk, is that it elevates human beings and their decision-making capacity to a place even more powerful than God Himself. Consider for a moment Peter’s bold statement, *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). This verse immediately follows the verse in which Peter declares that a day is as a thousand years with the Lord, and a thousand years as a day. Peter is encouraging the believers of his day to persevere through much persecution. As he is exhorting

his readers to hold steadfast, he makes this bold statement—that God is longsuffering, and is not willing that **any** should perish. Paul also proclaims:

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth; (Phillipians 2:9-10).

What the church has done with this verse, and many more like it which proclaim that God will reconcile the world unto Himself, is to subtly insert the humanistic “doctrine” of free will, to then interpret these passages to say that, “Yes, God does will for everyone to come to repentance, but he cannot override man’s free will. I find it impossible to get my mind around what a weakling this makes of God. This makes our so-called free will more powerful than God’s will! What an absurdity. I have also had it explained to me that when Paul states that every knee should bow at the name of Jesus, this means that yes, they *should* bow, but they are free to not bow the knee. Our will apparently supersedes God’s purpose that every knee should bend in submission to that exalted name of Jesus. Similarly, free will advocates claim that what Paul really means when he says that *“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive”* (2 Corinthians 15:22) is that *all who believe* will be made alive. In other words, it is not dependent upon the completed work of Christ on the cross that now brings life to all creation, but rather on our (free will) decision to believe on him. With this deceptive trickery of reading into scripture what is not there, those who would insist that our salvation (or any other work of the Spirit in us) is dependent upon some action that we freely choose to engage in, have rendered God comparatively impotent, and have completely diminished the work of the cross to something that is still dependent on our decision and works.

Friends, this is nothing short of that which the serpent told Eve on that fateful day in the garden, when she told him that she was not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for if she did, she would surely die. *“You will not surely die,”* replied the serpent. *“For God knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil”* (Genesis 3:4-5).

Eve was seduced by the thought that she could become as God, discerning good and evil. We do nothing less when we proclaim that we have the ability to be able to freely choose God or reject Him. That which God has foreordained from before the foundations of the world (our very election) is now at the mercy of our puny little wills as we decide whether we want to surrender to Almighty God. No, my friend, God's will to reconcile all mankind unto himself will not be thwarted (Colossians 1:19-20)!

What About Individual Choice and Decision Making?

To deny that human beings operate from a free will certainly seems to fly in the face of our own personal experiences. We all confront situations in which we are required to make choices. Do we buy beef or chicken this week at the grocery store? Which route do we want to take to get to our destination? Do I want to go out with my friends and have a drink, or would I rather stay at home and curl up with a good book? According to researchers at Cornell University, we are confronted with more than 226 decisions each day regarding food alone; and they estimate that the average adult makes over 35,000 decisions each day (Graff, 2021)! I would venture to say that, at least in the society and community in which I reside, I do not feel forced or constrained in any way to decide one way or another as I am making these choices. As far as I am concerned, as I experience it, I am making these decisions on the basis of my own free will.

This is a great paradox, another of the riddles that our Lord has bestowed upon His created universe. While my freedom is not absolute—for example, I am not free to go down to the grocery store and purchase a pound of lion for my meat diet for the week (at least not in my town); nevertheless, I do *experience* the freedom to choose—will it be beef or chicken; or possibly pork or fish? Insofar as most of our decisions are concerned, it doesn't really matter if we have free will in any absolute sense. We experience a freedom to choose, and that is all that matters. How wonderful this experience of freedom in our choices is, indeed a gift from God that is supported and encouraged in some societies more than others.

The question of whether or not we have an absolute freedom of will is of far greater significance, however, when we are speaking of our spiritual life in Christ. The reason that it is such a significant question is that the answer to this question defines practically every facet of our spiritual life, and indeed, it defines how it is that we approach our eternal destiny. If we are the ultimate determiner of our future by the choices that we make, God then becomes but a judge who will find us either worthy or unworthy, at some future day of reckoning according to the theology of many Christians. Adherence to a belief in free will, as most Christians understand free will, effectively leaves one with a Deistic understanding of God. According to this view, God created the universe, including you and me, and created certain laws and principles by which the universe functions. One of these principles is the free will of mankind to choose its own destiny. God then sits back and watches, and eventually judges the choices that we make. While most Christians would certainly not call themselves Deists, they function this way on a day to day basis because of this understanding. It then becomes incumbent upon the individual to make the correct choices if they are to eventually find their home in heaven. I have met more Christians who live their lives in fear and condemnation because they are not certain that their “hearts are right with God” (which means to them that they fear that they have either committed some sin, or failed to be obedient to God in some way). They fear that their failure will result in everlasting torment should they die before they “repent” (again, meaning that they choose some action that would make right the wrong that they had committed). Oh what bondage the church system has put mankind into by this grotesque concept of eternal damnation perpetrated since about the third or fourth century AD, and magnified by the idolatrous place to which we have promoted this idea of free will.

God is *not* a Deistic God, simply sitting on the sidelines watching His creation make choices, crossing His fingers and hoping against hope that they make the right choices. His love for His creation is unbounded, and He is continually hounding us, seducing us, boxing us in with circumstances, and moving us within our very spirits to woo us in the direction that He would have for us to go. But here is the beauty and the genius of God. In all of this seducing and boxing us in,

He still leaves us with the opportunity of making a choice. Indeed, He *demand*s a choice! Let us not, however, assume by this that our choice is truly free on our part. God's very action in our lives predisposes us toward one choice over another. Our carnal nature also predisposes us in a particular direction—one contrary to that which the Spirit of God is wooing us. The choice that we make will be in the direction of whichever of these "forces" within us is dominant at that time. The choice is not, therefore, truly free. Praise be to God, the wooing love of God eventually conquers our carnal reasonings and impulses, making the choice to submit to His Lordship irresistible.

God has determined our ultimate destiny through the sending of His Son Jesus. His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection dealt the death blow to the ultimate power of sin in our lives, and has secured for us the victory over all sin and death. Through this sacrificial act, He has secured the reconciliation of *all mankind* unto Himself! Someone will surely say, "But I can remember the exact day that I made a decision to accept Christ into my life." Another wiseacre will probably say, "Yeah, I had the opportunity to go down to the altar and give my life to Christ. But I decided not to. I can make it on my own." I certainly agree that *both of you* made a decision—in opposite directions. My word to the wiseacre as well as to the one who made the profession of faith is that *both of you* have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and will one day—in this age or in ages yet to come—bow the knee to Christ and confess Him with your mouth. And it will be by your choice!

Possibly one way to illustrate the point that I am making is with something that Yogi Berra is famously quoted as saying: "*When you come to a fork in the road, take it.*" What most people don't realize is that this quote came out of a conversation that Yogi was having with his fellow baseball player Joe Garagiola. Yogi was giving Joe directions to his home. Yogi lived on a circle drive, and approaching his house, the street forked so that one could get to his house by going *either* left or right at the fork in the road! It is probably true that the distance to Yogi's house would have been shorter or longer, depending on which direction one would choose to go. Either decision, however, would get Joe Garagiola there. So it is with us on our spiritual journey. God puts forks in our

journey, and we are confronted with a decision at each fork. Some decisions are better than others in terms of moving us more quickly or effectively forward on our spiritual journey. Each decision will inevitably lead to a further fork in the road. Ultimately, however, we will arrive at the glorious destiny that He has prepared for us. Indeed, we do make choices along the way. These choices are not “free” in any absolute sense, nor in the sense that most Christians understand them to be. We have been “set up” by the warring forces of the Spirit of God and the carnal mind to choose in a certain way. But choices we do make. The glorious truth that I am proclaiming, however, is that in the fullness of time, we will all ultimately choose Him. His will ultimately trumps all of the opposing forces of our flesh and carnality. And His will, that *all men* will be saved, will be realized! **HE** has established that destiny for us through His death and resurrection. What an awesome and glorious truth.

Understanding this wonderful truth makes all the difference in the world in our understanding and experience of God, and our relationship to Him. He is no longer the harsh taskmaster and rigid judge that so many of us have known Him as for so many years. Rather than living under the stress and bondage of having to please a demanding God, we can rest in the knowledge that, in His great love, God has determined that we will be reconciled to Him, and He is even now in the process of bring to completion that reconciliation.

The Paradox of Freedom and Our Will

I have strongly contended in this writing that the idea of human beings possessing a free will is not only erroneous thinking, but idolatrous as well. Such an idea promotes human beings—you and me—to a place more powerful than God. If, by our “free will” we can subvert the will of God that *all* should be reconciled to him, for example (1 Timothy 2:4), we are placing ourselves in a position more powerful than God Himself! There is, however, a glorious and wonderful paradox regarding this idea of freedom and our human will. The paradox is this: ***we experience true freedom by surrendering to God our (so-called) free will.*** To understand this paradox, we must humbly contemplate the following words of Jesus:

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it (Matthew 16:24-25).

Here, Jesus is speaking to His disciples after He had just rebuked Peter for challenging Him regarding going to the cross. Jesus was submitting to the will of the Father in going to the cross, and was challenging His disciples (and all of us) to take up our cross and follow Him. Importantly and ironically, it is in the taking up of our cross, of laying down our life, that we find life, and that we find TRUE freedom!

The laying down of our life is nothing less than the total submission of our will—puny and limited as it is—to His. It is a voluntary abandonment of *our* will—which, in our fleshly Adamic nature is bent on expressing itself in the pursuit of our own selfish interests—and a surrender of that will to His will. Jesus is calling us, in the words of Paul, to be a *bondservant* to Him. A bondservant, in Paul’s day, was one who voluntarily surrendered their freedom to another in loyalty to that person in exchange for the provision, support and protection of that master. The bondservant was one who surrendered his will to the will of his master. Jesus, in the verses quoted above, is proclaiming that as we voluntarily submit our will to Him, we find life. Indeed, it is here that we truly find freedom! Ironically, while this surrender is totally voluntary, we are totally incapable of making this surrender apart from the grace and the desire that God puts in our hearts to do so. This, then, is the wonderful paradox: *we experience true freedom as we relinquish (by His grace) our claim to our own self-determination (free will).*

If, as I have suggested earlier, our claim to self-determination—our belief in the free will of human kind—is but an illusion anyway, there is really nothing that we are giving up but an illusion. As long as we hold to this illusion, we will continually find ourselves laden with obligation and duty to make the “right” choice; and be left with a sense of guilt and shame when we “freely” make the wrong choices. The freedom that we are being offered by and in Christ is simply a matter of recognizing that our will, being controlled by the desires of the flesh, can be laid

down, submitted to His perfect will, and in so doing we find freedom (life).
Hallelujah!

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