

MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD
or
What About Free Will, Part 2: Why No Free Will?

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*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him;
male and female created he them (Genesis 1:27)*

Some time back I (Chuck) addressed the issue of free will, making the case as well as I could that human beings do not possess a free will. What, then, do we do with the verse above from the opening chapter of Genesis which states that we were created in the image of God? If God has a free will (which He does), and we were created in His image, does it not follow that we, His creation, possess a free will as well? This question takes us to the last section of that earlier article that we referred to just above. We would suggest that you read that article, entitled [“What About Free Will?”](#) if you have not done so already, giving particular attention to the last section. In that section entitled “The Paradox of Freedom and Our Will,” it was pointed out that true freedom can be discovered as we surrender our will (limited as it is) to the truly free and creative will of God. We explore that truth more fully in the paragraphs that follow.

How is it, then, that Adam and Eve were made in God's image (Genesis 1:27)? We would suggest that this refers to the breathing of His Spirit into man. It is in the sharing of His Spirit that we are able to commune with Him. This is so, even in our fallen state, though that communion is not the perfect communion that He has ultimately in store for us. Being made in His image does *not* mean that God has ceded the accomplishment of His purposes to the freedom of our carnal will to accept or reject Him and *His will*. Choices we do make, of course. The making of these choices is certainly a *representation*, an imperfect image, of God's perfect free will. But let us be clear here: God and God alone has perfect and absolute free will. Our will, and our ability to choose is but a *representation* of God's free will.

We might illustrate the distinction between God's absolute free will and our ability to make choices (that feel like they are being made out of a free will) with what is currently taking place with AI technology. News media outlets are touting this new technology as having its own will, making its own choices that are smarter and more clever than human beings are capable of. It is said, for example, that these computers are capable of beating the very best of chess players at their own game. At the end of the day, however, these supercomputers (by whatever name they are called) can only make decisions on the basis of that which has been programmed into them. While the decisions they make, in turn, generate an even greater database of information, it all began with the information that human agents programmed into them. From this vast database of information, the computers, through the various algorithms, "make decisions" that do indeed astound the brightest scientists and scholars. These computers do not, however, have absolute freedom of choice. They are limited by the constraints of whatever information was originally keyed into their database. In a sense, they are made in the image of man, but they are *not* man.

While this analogy certainly has limitations, it is instructive. God is the only being that has an infinite "database" from which to make decisions. He is, therefore, the only being that possesses an absolute free will. The choices that we make are all predicated on the limited information and circumstances that God has chosen to "program" into us. We are, in this way, *made in the image of God*, insofar as

our ability to make choices and exercise our will is concerned. We are a *representation* of God's perfect and absolute freedom of will, but only a representation; just as AI technology and the choices it makes are a representation of human ingenuity.¹

Why No Free Will?

We would begin by looking at where the illusion of free will originated. The illusion goes back to the garden of Eden and the opportunity that was given Adam and Eve to “choose,” in agreement with their Creator, the “tree of Life” from which their spiritual life and union with God was meant to be nourished and sustained; or, alternatively, having the “choice” or temptation to eat from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Clearly God gave them a choice. Contemporary Christianity teaches that Adam and Eve made this choice *freely*—exercising their free will against the will of God that they would not eat of that tree. Having made this fatal blunder, the Lord God kicked them out of the Garden and reduced them to a life of pain and toiling by the sweat of their brow. God's perfect creation, and the perfect union with God that Adam and Eve knew was now severed because of this bad choice that they made. God would now have to go back to the drawing boards and come up with an alternative plan to save mankind from the morass of sin that was created by the choice of Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That alternative plan, of course, was the sending of His Son to die a criminal's death to atone for the sin that was brought into the world by the choice of Adam and Eve to disobey God and thereby disrupt the perfect world that He had created.

There is something that does not quite add up in this explanation, however. If God is omniscient (which He is), He knew full well that Eve and then Adam would partake of the forbidden fruit! We might say that Eve was “irresistibly drawn” to partake of that fruit (Genesis 3:4-6). If God knew that Adam and Eve would

¹ We want to make clear here that we are not suggesting that human beings are merely God's “robots.” Being made in God's image entails so much more than our ability to make choices based on the circumstances and knowledge that God has brought our way. There is a moral and relational quality to being human that goes to the heart of being made in the image of God. These are qualities that AI computers may imitate but can never truly experience.

partake of the forbidden fruit, He was certainly behind the very setup with the serpent that would draw her to eat of it. God knew when He planted the tree that the first couple would inevitably eat of it. The choice was not totally “free;” nevertheless, God required them to make that choice. It was precisely in this choice to disobey God that the illusion of free will was first born. They were now “as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). They believed the deception that they were now as gods, including, we are suggesting, the belief that they had a free will. It certainly *looked* like they were making this decision out of their own free will! Note that this happened after the original man and woman experienced the perfect communion with God, naked and unashamed. It was not until they knew this union, when their will was in such total subjection to the will of God and they knew only His will, that they were faced with the temptation to have their eyes opened and become “like gods” who knew good and evil. Ironically, while they believed that eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil would make them free, they surrendered that very freedom by abandoning their unity with their creator.

As was suggested in the article, “What About Free Will?,” we are only truly free as our human will is submitted to the absolute Lordship of Christ. This is, of course, a paradox. To the natural mind, submitting our will to another—even to Christ—is bondage to that person. Indeed, Paul would seem to suggest as much when he said that he was a *bondservant* of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10). The spiritual mind understands, however that because we were created to be one with Him, the surrender of our will to His represents the true freedom that we have in that unity. Our first ancestors were created in perfect union with Christ, and did, therefore, experience this perfect freedom. In this way, they were perfectly made in the image of God! Their will was in perfect submission to God because they knew nothing else. It was not until they were confronted with the option—set up by God Himself—to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and therefore be as gods unto themselves, that they were even aware of the possibility of abandoning that perfect union. They inevitably made the choice to abandon their perfect union for something that the serpent made them believe was even better.

Understanding that *their union with God* was the basis for their freedom as beings made in the image of God (as opposed to their having a free will as the indicator of being made in God's image), let us look once again at the characterization of free will as so readily adopted by the church system today. Most church-going Christians today believe that being created in the image of God means that we have an absolute free will, even to thwart the very purpose of God, which is ultimately to reconcile the world unto Himself. They will say things like, *"Because God created us with a free will, He will not violate that principle and He always gives us the choice of accepting His gift of salvation or not."* Another rationale that we have often heard, *"The Holy Spirit is a gentleman. He will not force anyone to come to Him against their will."* What these statements do not account for is that sovereign God changes our will! So, while it *feels* like we possess a free will in the making of decisions, it is God affecting our very will. Having established this premise in the aforementioned article, that there is no fair biblical argument one can make for such a "Descartian" (*absolute*) free will, and assuming the reader may at least be able to entertain this truth with an open mind and with a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, we would like to take this a step further and explore the basis for why God would create such a unique spiritual terrain to travel (no "free" human will) for us who are created in His image. If it is true that God is indeed sovereign over His creation in the most absolute sense, and that He indeed does know the beginning from the end in each life--and this would include our ordained purpose and the works He has set out for us to accomplish--what then might be the reason that God would limit our will? We suggest that *not* having a free will is a necessary passageway for humanity that would lead to the life of a perfect unity with him and our full maturation as sons of God.

The Fall Makes Way for Our Ultimate Life and Freedom

We have suggested that our ultimate freedom and life can be experienced only as we submit our carnal wills to His will. This involves a death to our will, a death to self. A fundamental principle in God's economy is that life comes from death (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 4:11-12; 1 John 3:14). We can only know life and experience life fully if we have first experienced death. This principle can be

found at work in practically all areas of life. We fully appreciate acceptance when we have been rejected. If we have never been rejected by anyone who mattered to us, we have a tendency to take acceptance for granted. Similarly, we know and recognize righteousness in contrast to evil. It is also true that we can appreciate light only when we have experienced darkness (whether this be in the natural realm or in the spiritual realm). The beauty and power of light is understood in contrast to darkness. Conversely, the void of darkness is only fully experienced by those who have lived in the light.

I (Chuck) have a colleague who was blind from birth. He learned to function in a sighted world, even to the point of riding a bicycle. Once, when on a professional trip to New York City, it was my job to warn him when impending obstacles might be coming up, including approaching a curb when crossing the street. Totally forgetting my assigned duties, we were crossing a Manhattan street when he suddenly stopped and said, *"I think we should be approaching the curb about now."* I looked down, and there was the curb! He had learned through the years that most streets are domed to drain off water. So, he counted the steps going uphill until he reached the middle, and counted the same number of steps going down on the other side. In this way, he knew when it was time to step up to the curb. I discovered that he really had no need of me! He declared to me one day that he had no desire to get his sight. Blindness was normal for him and he could not imagine what it would be like to be walking in light.

The same principle operates in our spiritual life. Those who never know light have no desire to leave their place of darkness. It is only as we are exposed to the light of God's overwhelming love for us that we can even desire to know and walk in that light. This is why Jesus said, *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him"* (John 6:44). More importantly for purposes of this article, it is also true that we cannot fully experience the life and freedom of perfect union with Christ unless we have first known death and bondage. The fall of Adam and Eve set the stage for the working out of God's master plan by putting into motion this divine principle that life comes from death. The incredible truth that we must get our minds around, is that ***as we submit to the death of our own self-life we will know life and freedom in an even more***

powerful way than did Adam and Eve because we have first experienced death and bondage! Life and freedom in our union with Christ could never be fully realized as God intended from the beginning if we had not first been born into death as a result of the Great Fall. What a thought!

The Fall Makes Way for Our Sonship

We must understand that Adam and Eve had to disobey God in order for God to accomplish His ultimate purpose. While they made this choice under the illusion of a free will, God Himself had orchestrated the serpent's temptation of Eve. In order to fully appreciate this, we must understand that God's ultimate purpose is to "*reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross*" (Colossians 1:20). ***All things on earth or things in heaven*** refers to the entire cosmos—and we would go so far as to proclaim that this includes Satan himself!

We would then ask the question, "If the world was already in perfect communion (conciliation) with God, why would a *re*-conciliation be necessary?" Stated differently, "Why would the fall of Adam and Eve be necessary to *re*-accomplish what God had already accomplished in the paradise of Eden? We have already suggested that such a *re*-conciliation was necessary so that we are able to fully experience the power of His life in contrast to the death and separation that we have known apart from him. Beyond this, however, we must understand that God further purposed that He would have a company of sons that would co-reign with Him, and be partners with Him as He restores all of creation to Himself. God's reign is one of love and service, even to the point of humiliation. This was demonstrated at Calvary. If He is to have a company of sons that would partner with Him in this way, they too must enter into this kind of love through humility. The only way that we can know the kind of humility that prepares us for this sort of servant-priesthood and servant-kingship is by being brought to the depths of our own depravity. We must know sin, just as Jesus knew sin by being lowered into the realm of deprived humanity and thereby taking on the sins of the world. As we are then brought through the *gehenna* fires we are confronted by our desperate condition as it is even then being purged from us by that purifying fire.

Only then can we begin to experience the humility that qualifies us as a first-fruits company to co-reign with Christ. As this is being accomplished in us, the rest of humanity is inevitably touched by the love of God. It is in this way that the reconciliation of all things will be accomplished through these adopted sons (*huiiothesia*, referring to the adoption of *mature* sons), whom He had predestinated for adoption from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5). Our Lord Jesus Christ was, of course, the first or pattern son whose obedience took Him to the cross (1 Peter 1:18-20). It was not God's intent, however, that Christ's death and resurrection was to be a one-time event, that simply by giving some sort of mental assent to its purpose,² would bring humanity to be reconciled to Himself. God purposed, rather, that there would be a *company of matured sons*, speaking and acting under the Lordship of their elder brother and pattern son, who would, through their humble obedience to the Holy Spirit, be partners with Christ in this glorious endeavor, taking their marching orders from their Head, Jesus Christ (Romans, Ch. 8). This maturity unto sonship that prepares God's elect for such a mission takes place through the taking up of our own crosses in the fallen world in which we find ourselves. As we said earlier, in God's economy, life comes from death. The fall of Adam and Eve is the very death that eventually gives rise to Life. Those of us who are called to sonship must individually experience this death as well if we are to come into His Life that will ultimately transform and reconcile the world to Himself. His elect are led through a series of experiences that will strip them of their own carnal will and the drive to satisfy the desires of their flesh. Through this process, we are confronted with our own fallen nature, as He applies the fire of His purification in our lives. None of this could take place had Adam and Eve refused to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They (and we) would have always known perfect communion with God, our wills being perfectly aligned with His. But we would not have experienced the suffering, the purging, the death to self—the preparation for our participating with Him in bringing about the restoration of all

² This mental assent takes various forms. Would-be believers are instructed to say the "sinners prayer," for example, where they acknowledge that they are a sinner and "ask Jesus to come into their heart." All of this is but mentally acknowledging that Jesus died on the cross to save them from their sins. Having done so constitutes (for them) salvation, and the dear soul is now on their way to heaven rather than the dreaded eternal flames of hell.

of His creation that He had ordained from the foundations of the world. Adam and Eve's choice was indeed a setup by God to accomplish His ultimate purpose.

Conclusion

Made in the image of God...what a privilege is ours! But just what does it mean to be made in the image of God? Most Christians that we speak with insist that it means that we have a free will, just as He has a free will. This is a belief largely promoted by the church systems today. However, this position both idolizes the human creature, while at the same time overlooks what we believe to be the most important aspect of what it means to be made in God's image.

It idolizes the creature because by insisting that human beings have a free will—extending even to thwarting God's will that *all* shall be made alive in Christ—it makes the human will more powerful than God's will. God is "*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9); however, most free-will advocates insist that all will *not* come to repentance, and will therefore burn in eternity in hell because they decided to give God the finger and refuse His gift of salvation. To state it differently, for those who insist upon absolute free human will, the cross is *not* sufficient unto salvation, but something in addition to the cross is required. That something is our "freely" choosing to accept Christ by whatever formula a given theological tradition deems necessary or appropriate. This added requirement renders the cross powerless and its efficacy is made subject to the whims of human will. *Anathema!*

Moreover, by insisting that being made in the image of God means having a free will, we miss what it truly means to be made in His image. We are made in His image by virtue of the fact that He has breathed his very Spirit—His very essence—into us! This has incredible implications. Because we are comprised of His spiritual DNA, we are one with Him. He is our very life. We are truly inheritors of His divinity.

The problem, of course, is that we fail to experience this unity and divinity in this earth realm in which we now function. This is because there was a great separation that took place when our spiritual ancestors partook of the fruit of the

tree of knowledge of good and evil. But this Fall was known and intended by God when He planted that tree in the garden. This is so because in God's economy, separation and death *must* occur before oneness and life can be experienced to the full. And He is first bringing His sons through the purging fires that constitute the very birth canal that births the resurrection life in us. This is an incredibly privileged position that we have, despite the fact that these purging fires are extremely painful things to endure. It is painful because our flesh is being burned up as the tares in our life are being separated from the wheat and then burned. Our wills are thereby being conformed to His will and as this takes place we experience fully our union with Christ in contrast to the separation that had been our life. Indeed, as this purging and being brought into conformation with His will takes place, we lose our sense of a sin consciousness that has so bound us in our separation from God. We also experience His divine life fully in contrast to the death that we had known in our separation from God. This is, moreover, a privileged position because as God accomplishes this work in us, we are being made into His priests and kings to partner with Christ in restoring the world to Himself. Hallelujah!

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