

## Why Only Our Omniscient God Has Free Will

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 04 August 2016 10:59

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This article has been written following a query by a reader, who asked if it is necessary for omniscience to be a prerequisite for free will. This is a good question, because I say that no man on earth (except for Christ) has ever had free will. I have also said that much depends on how we define our terms. How I defined free will is found in O-401, 'The Free Will Fallacy'.

Some refuse my definition because they only want me to confirm their own ability to choose salvation. Others, because I have not given sufficient argument. Yet others, because they hate God and His word (and how they hate the idea of being given a free gift that is external to their own will and choices!). So, I provide more details below to show why I say only God has free will and Man does not.

Try a Google search on 'free will' and you will likely be given a very simple statement – that free will refers to *“the power of acting without the restraint of necessity or fate, the ability to act at one’s own discretion”*. In other words, it is defined as doing whatever we like, even though this merely proves we have no idea what we are doing much of the time.

Another definition is *“free and independent choice”* independent of physical or divine forces. (dictionary.com and more or less the same as is found in the Oxford Dictionary). This contradicts scripture.

Then we have: *“Free will is the ability to choose between different possible courses of action. It is closely linked to the concepts of responsibility, praise, guilt, sin, and other judgments which apply only to actions that are freely chosen. It is also connected with the concepts of advice, persuasion, deliberation, and prohibition. Traditionally, only actions that are freely willed are seen as deserving credit or blame. There are numerous different concerns about threats to the possibility of free will, varying by how exactly it is conceived, which is a matter of some debate.”* (Wikipedia). The same source gives a long list of descriptions of various definitions of free will. note – the arguments are many!

For charismatics and other Arminianists it all comes down to whether or not human beings can choose to be saved. When it comes to omniscience, we are told: *“Omniscience is the capacity to know everything that there is to know (included in which are all future events), and is a property often attributed to a creator deity.”* (See Wikipedia). This is close to my own view, because, to me, it is obvious. But, to others, of

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course, it is far from obvious. To my mind, human beings must raise the quality of their definitions, so they are closer to what God can do (though we will never get close enough). This is why I tend to up the grade when I refer to human ideas of 'free will'.

Yet, the entry continues: *"Some authors have claimed that free will cannot coexist with omniscience. One argument asserts that an omniscient creator not only implies destiny but a form of high level predeterminism such as hard theological determinism or predestination - that they have independently fixed all events and outcomes in the universe in advance. In such a case, even if an individual could have influence over their lower level physical system, their choices in regard to this cannot be their own, as is the case with libertarian free will."*

This is roughly a view I came to years ago, and also read in a few philosophical treatises. It is no longer a common view, but it is closer, to my mind, than many others. It displays God more than most other definitions. We are in an age when libertarianism ranks above biblical concepts and logic, so Christians must remember this when taking the side of such libertarianism, Arminianism, etc. Because watering-down what 'free will' is, is tantamount to denying God is omniscient (see above).

### Foreknowledge is not Predestination

It is interesting that the form of belief in free will amongst Arminianists etc., is referred to as *"weak theological determinism"*

. That is it

*"is based on the concept of divine foreknowledge - "because God's omniscience is perfect, what God knows about the future will inevitably happen, which means, consequently, that the future is already fixed."*

(Wentzel Van Huyssteen (2003).

*"theological determinism"*

. Encyclopedia of Science and Religion 1. Macmillan Reference. p. 217. ISBN 978-0-02-865705-9).

This argument goes: because God is omniscient, He knows in advance who will seek Him, so He 'chooses' such seekers because of this. Those who believe this double-talk do not usually accept the idea of predestination, though it is clearly taught in scripture. Nor do they understand that God Himself tells us no unsaved man will *ever* seek Him! Thus, it is *impossible* for him to 'choose' Christ.

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The opposite of this is called “strong theological determinism” (though I am not a fan of these philosophical definitions), which states that it is *“based on the concept of a creator deity dictating all events in history: ‘everything that happens has been predestined to happen by an omniscient, omnipotent divinity’.*” (A. Pabl  
lannone (2001). "determinism". Dictionary of World Philosophy. Taylor & Francis. p. 194. ISBN 978-0-415-17995-9).

The same reader who prompted this article suggested a good analogy found in football. Whilst a footballer is regulated by the rules of football, when it comes to taking a goal-kick, he has to determine himself how to kick the ball to best advantage, though what he does is bound by the rules. This is similar to my own thought – that whilst God determines all of history, as humans we are able to make choices (many being poor or bad) as to how we act within His divine plan. What I do NOT agree to, is that our choices are wrought of ‘free will’. (There are variations on the above two schemes, but I do not wish to argue between different human philosophies in this paper).

Interestingly, Thomas Hobbes said that a person only acts by his free will when it is the desire of that person to do the act, when he may also do something else. As I have explained, scripture itself tells us that an unsaved man is NOT free to make such a choice, because he must obey his ‘father the devil’. His choices, as unsaved, are ALWAYS ALL sinful, and determined by Satan, even when the person chooses out of malice, sin, wrong information, human good, etc.

This makes a statement by David Hume quite close to reality of scripture: *“this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to everyone who is not a prisoner and in chains.”* (Hume, D. (1740). A Treatise of Human Nature SECTION VIII.: "Of liberty and necessity" (1967 edition). Oxford University Press, Oxford. ISBN 0-87220-230-5). Unsaved men ARE in chains – to the devil.

### Unsaved Men are Incapable of Choosing Freely

Very clearly, scripture tells us that ALL who are under Satan (unsaved) are in chains to him! Therefore, the “hypothetical liberty” (of free will) does not exist. Voltaire gives a similar conclusion in his Dictionnaire Philosophique: *“Liberty then is only and can be only the power to do what one will.”* Again, as unsaved, a man cannot do whatever he wills, unless he wills to do what his ‘father’ the devil wants him to do. His only choices are sinful, and so not really choices from freedom at all, even if his mind and heart concur with Satan’s wishes.

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Spinoza has another view – that free will is a self-delusion and does not exist: *"Experience teaches us no less clearly than reason, that men believe themselves free, simply because they are conscious of their actions, and unconscious of the causes whereby those actions are determined."* (B de Spinoza, Ethics). In my ministry I come across this 'belief' many times, a belief found only in the communicant's mind.

*"David Hume discussed the possibility that the entire debate about free will is nothing more than a merely "verbal" issue. He suggested that it might be accounted for by "a false sensation or seeming experience" (a velleity), which is associated with many of our actions when we perform them. On reflection, we realize that they were necessary and determined all along."* (Hume, D. (1765). *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. Second edition. 1993. ISBN 0-87220-230-5).

Arthur Schopenhauer said: *"Everyone believes himself, a priori, perfectly free—even in his individual actions, and thinks that at every moment he can commence another manner of life. ... But a posteriori, through experience, he finds to his astonishment that he is not free, but subjected to necessity, that in spite of all his resolutions and reflections he does not change his conduct, and that from the beginning of his life to the end of it, he must carry out the very character which he himself condemns."* (Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The Wisdom of Life*, p 147). Thus, all who THINK they have free will are actually doing what their characters and inner-life demands... they are not 'free' at all, because their characters are products of, and producers of, sin.

### **Aquinas' View is deficient**

I wrote a book on Thomas Aquinas' version of salvation, etc., and though his mind was brilliant, he was wrong about it; but his argument was very subtle. However, his view on free will is quite good: he argued that we are governed by intellect, will, and passions (whereas God is not). (Stump, Eleonore (2003). "Intellect and will". *Aquinas, Arguments of the philosophers series*. Routledge (Psychology Press). pp. 278 ff. ISBN 0415029600). He argued that there are five stages to our making choices: (i) intellectual consideration of whether an objective is desirable, (ii) intellectual consideration of means of attaining the objective, (iii) will arrives at an intent to pursue the objective, (iv) will and intellect jointly decide upon choice of means (v) will elects execution. (Timothy O'Connor (Oct 29, 2010). Edward N. Zalta, ed. "Free Will". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition). The Metaphysics Research Lab Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University).

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What we see here is the simple fact that 'free will' is not the ethereal thing Arminianists think it is! In my work I have come across these steps to making a choice and can often delineate each phase. Even so, the idea expressed by Aquinas is deficient, because we cannot arrive at salvation by our own means or using the steps he refers to. This is simply because salvation is a gift, not a conclusion reached after intellectual or emotional pursuit. (Note how the Alpha Course attempts to 'save' people by this means).

Aquinas comes very close when he says: *"Free-will is the cause of its own movement, because by his free-will man moves himself to act. But it does not of necessity belong to liberty that what is free should be the first cause of itself, as neither for one thing to be cause of another need it be the first cause. God, therefore, is the first cause, Who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their acts being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary: but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them; for He operates in each thing according to its own nature."* (Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Q83 A1).

This is observable fact. The unsaved man thinks he is free to act, and makes choices to bring about his will, but what he thinks and does is determined by Satan, yet overall allowed or determined by God. So, even Satan is not free, nor does he have free will (as Job, etc., proves). As Aquinas rightly said, man will operate according to his nature, and that nature in the unsaved man is corrupt. Therefore, all he can do is follow his corruption which automatically denies him the opportunity to will what is good. Thus, his choices are limited by his very nature and by his 'father the devil', whose own state is allowed or determined by God! Also, the devil will not allow an unsaved man to 'choose' what is detrimental to his satanic person.

Amusingly, the term 'free will' was given to us by Christian philosophy in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, which stated that 'free will' means "the will does not have to be such as it is". That is correct – but the ONLY way the will can be changed is by salvation altering our being. Otherwise, the will cannot change and we will be as we are (re Aquinas and our 'nature').

The scientific view, after Darwin, worked with blindfolds, because it will not acknowledge God or that He fixes what happens. This has damaged the minds of many Christians, who then insist on 'free will' even though most are ignorant of the wide variations of definitions and the impossibility of having it.

### Non-Determined Will a Recent Phenomenon

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Only in recent years have Christians started to believe in a non-determined will (following the Romanistic Arminian model), even though it is evident that their belief is inconsistent (e.g. Pronin, Emily; Matthew B. Kugler (2010-12-28). *"People believe they have more free will than others"*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 107 (52): 22469–22474. doi:10.1073/pnas.1012046108). Psychology researchers found that the free will beliefs in most, are 'naïve' (Baumeister, R.; Crescioni, A. W.; Alquist, J. (2009). *"Free will as advanced action control for human social life and culture"*. Neuroethics 4: 1–11).

### Non-Free Will is not Fatalism

Many who believe in free will in themselves, often view the opposite view (no free will) as fatalism, which is an oversimplification. Fatalism is the 'robot' idea, whereas in God's system saved men are free to choose between good and evil, there being no fatalism. It is not fatalism to accept that God determines the lives of mankind, any more than it is fatalism to accept the rules of football, when a footballer, acting within the rules, decides what moves to make as and when needed.

*"Lay people should not confuse fatalism with determinism, and yet even professional philosophers occasionally confuse the two."* (Wikipedia). But, this is exactly the error they fall into – I come across it time and again, when men, even Christians, deliberately avoid logical steps rather than accept a biblical fact they dislike.

Note what Paul said:

*"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."* (Romans 8:29-30)

Note the order of events. Paul does NOT say God chose people because they were known to choose Him. No, he simply says that God knew in advance who would be saved. And those were chosen by God in eternity; He called them (by name) AFTER He predestinated them. (If we were to press the point, we could say, accurately, that all the 'steps' were committed at once in God's mind, there being no actual 'steps', except in the minds of men, so they could think in logical terms).

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Thus far, I think you can see that 'free will' is a matter of one's predisposition, there being no final stance. But, if we follow biblical logic we must say that unsaved men are not free agents, and they do not have free will. Then, go to science, and scientists question whether free will exists at all.

### Is Science Right?

*"Free will may be an illusion created by our brains"* (research based on the work by Dan Wegner, Thalia Wheatley: Adam Bear & Paul Bloom, Yale University: Psychological Science): *"Humans are convinced that they make conscious choices as they live their lives. But instead it may be that the brain just convinces itself that it made a free choice from the available options after the decision is made"*.

As I have said, no human being can claim 'free will' because he can only choose from what is available to him at the time, which is quite sparse. The study suggests that people 'rewrite' the history of their choices, to make it seem they actually chose what they chose. Good point.

This is evident in so many who think they have a 'free will'! They want it to be so, thus they re-order events and what they do in their minds, so that they convince themselves they had a free choice. As the study says, *"The idea of free will may have arisen because it... (gives) people a feeling of control over their lives..."* This idea, in particular is VERY evident in Arminians, whose minds cannot tolerate being shut-out of salvation by a God Who chooses them without their 'consent'.

Such a belief in one's own freedom to choose might *"be pervasive and ubiquitous... governing all aspects of our behaviour, from our most minute to our most important decisions."*

(Also noted in 'Nature', 31

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August 2011). Those of us on the 'other side' of Arminian error have no doubt that the notion of freely choosing salvation and Christ is endemic amongst Arminianists and Arminian-style people.

The idea that we have no free will is even found in the later hypotheses by Darwin. His cousin, Sir Francis Galton, later said that our choices depend on our inherited genes, so our ability to choose our fate is not free, but depends on our biological inheritance. This led to a continuous publication of arguments on both sides and none, but scientists assumed that 'something' caused us to make choices. Which, in Christian terms, brings us back to God, and whether or not we are saved.

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In the 1980s American physiologist Benjamin Libet “*demonstrated*” that we have no free will. He showed that a woman had electrical impulse activity in her brain *before* she decided to move her hand. This, he said, was proof that her choice was not made freely, but was simply the result of her brain making the decision for her.

But, in terms of science, this cannot be taken at face value – Libet could not say 100% that his interpretation was as he described it. Rather than ‘prove’ there is no such thing as ‘free will’, the experiment only proved that there was electrical activity before the woman made a choice.

What of the entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, which said that “*Free Will*” is a *philosophical term of art for a particular sort of capacity of rational agents to choose a course of action from among various alternatives*’.

? The mere fact that we may choose a course of action between a variety of alternatives does not make the choice right, nor suitable, or that the alternatives were themselves suitable or sufficient, or freely arrived at. As the entry says

*“philosophers have debated this question for over two millennia, and just about every major philosopher has had something to say about it.”*

Further: “*Philosophers who distinguish freedom of action and freedom of will do so because our success in carrying out our ends depends in part on factors wholly beyond our control.*

*Furthermore, there are always external constraints on the range of options we can meaningfully try to undertake. As the presence or absence of these conditions and constraints are not (usually) our responsibility, it is plausible that the central loci of our responsibility are our choices, or “willings”.*”

Note – ‘factors wholly beyond our control’ (therefore, not free).

### So – Who has the Answer?

Me? You? I do not think so! What I offer is my logical deduction from Who God is and who we are, as documented in scripture. For me the claim that only God has free will and humans do not, is a matter of biblical logic based on scriptural assertions.

Significantly, in nearly all of scripture, it is God Who chooses, not man. Note the text of Deuteronomy 30:19, in which the matter of choosing is brought before those who already belong to God, and not to strangers or unbelievers.

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*"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:"*

The options given to the Hebrews were limited and defined by God, not by the Hebrews. They could choose to die ('perish', verse 18) or to live: death would bring cursing and life would bring blessing. If they wished to live they had no option but to accept God's decision ("therefore choose life") – not really a choice so much as a rational obedience to God's demand! Thus, they did not make their own 'free' choice from all available options.

Joshua repeated this command (Joshua 24:15) when he called upon the Hebrews to choose who they would serve. The 'choice' to serve false gods would lead to their destruction, so the people instantly declared they would follow *"the LORD our God"* (verses 16, 17). Joshua reminded them that they could NOT follow the Lord unless it was a true conclusion, otherwise they would be consumed (verse 20).

So, when Joshua told them they had made a 'choice', really, they had come to a rational conclusion within options given to them by God. This they freely did. But, it was NOT the same as a free will choice, because God did not give them that option... only irrational men would have chosen to disobey what was a command that included their death if they refused!

We could find many texts in scripture referring to choices, but the only two tests that matter are those referring to (a) the 'cause' of salvation, and (b) the act of salvation.

### **The Cause of Salvation**

The 'cause' or source is very simply put – God. As Psalm 47:4 tells us, *"He shall choose our inheritance for us". "... and he shall choose thee"* (Isaiah 49:7). When Jesus returns, He will gather to Himself ONLY the elect (Matthew 24:31), who cannot be charged of anything by the unsaved (Romans 8:33). They cannot because it is God Who justifies.

We are elect *"according to the foreknowledge of God"* (1 Peter 1:2). What does this mean? Firstly, the elect are picked out by God; He chooses who will be saved. He chose us

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*“before the foundation of the world”*

. It is a matter of simple logic that if God chose us before He made the world, that is, in eternity, then such a choice is fixed and cannot be altered by negation, acceptance, or choice. This means that only a fixed number are saved throughout the world's history, and those who are chosen are already known to God. He chooses who He will by His own grace, which means no man can choose to be saved. (See Ephesians 1:4, 5; Romans 9:11 and 11:5).

We are saved by His grace and given salvation as a free gift, all of which were determined by God before any man was created. It is obvious that what God decides cannot be altered, not even by repentance (which would be false if the man is unsaved) or change of behaviour.

In 1 Peter we are told that we are elect according to the foreknowledge of God. This does NOT mean that His election only came about after He had foreknowledge! To suggest it is ridiculous, because in God there can be no past or future, for His decisions are all made at once. The preposition “according”, *kata*, can also be shown as ‘down from’ or ‘inasmuch’ or ‘forethought’ and ‘pre-arrangement’. Thus, to paraphrase, we are ‘elect by prior arrangement of God’. It is entirely of God, and nothing of us! It is this that Arminians hate, for they want a part in their own salvation.

We are predestinated *“according to the good pleasure of His will”* and our choice has nothing to do with it, for such a choice would be an act of works (Ephesians 1:5 and repeated in verse 11). To predestinate is to decide beforehand, in eternity, to foreordain. Because He is God He knew who would be saved, because it was He Who chose who would be saved, without their assistance, partnership, choice, or even their acceptance. As Strong correctly says, “This verb (proorizō) is to be distinguished from proginosko, ‘to foreknow’.”

I will emphasise the fact that when God chooses (anything at all) in eternity, it cannot ever be changed by what man does. Therefore, no man can choose salvation or even reject it. Such is impossible as biblical fact and logic demands.

With this in mind, man having or not having ‘free will’ is irrelevant.

### More Logic

My position is rooted only in scripture and not in the millennia of arguments put forward by

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philosophers and scientists. God is supreme; He is absolute; whatever He chooses is always His choice alone, unfettered by anything of Man. His choices are based on His free will, which is also absolute, for only He knows every possible factor and every possible outcome. Even though this is true, His decisions are not a matter of weighing up these variables: His choices are instant and always correct, so we can say that every possible factor and every possible outcome will always follow on from, and included in, His immediate choice.

Thus, when looking at the impossibility of man's choices borne of 'free will' (totally led by sin when unsaved, and hampered by the 'old man' when saved) we must compare to God's choices on a similar level. For this reason we can assert that no man has, or will ever have, knowledge of every possible factor and every possible outcome. Thus, any choices he makes will always have alternatives, and may often be wrong.

If we decide to use lesser definitions we are simply playing with lesser arguments! Comparisons must always be 'like with like', but men who think they can choose salvation are just being Arminianistic and humanistic, comparing the divine with creation, and trying to be equal to God. Thus, their decisions are based not on heavenly logic but on the lowest common denominator – their own sinful fallacies.

The will of man:

1.

Before salvation – no free will

2.

At salvation – human will has no part

3.

After salvation – ability to choose between good and evil, but no free will

4.

In Heaven – no free will, only perfect compliance, freely committed

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5.

Thus, though we can freely choose, we do not have free will

Also read part two of this article: [Man Does Not Have Free Will: \(Part 2 of A/701\).](#)

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