

Salvation and Free Will

This article continues from [Article A-701, 'Why Only Our Omniscient God Has Free Will'](#).

Those who know me well will know that I do not care if critics shout their anger, or try to ridicule me, because of my stance. Such critics will enjoy arguing against this article, too, because I state very firmly that Man does not have free will (also see my other articles on this subject).

It is my personal assertion based, I believe, on biblical logic and fact (similar to Paul's view: 1Corinthians 7:12). Nowhere in scripture do we find reference to 'free will', whether in letter or concept. Therefore, the reader must weigh the thoughts for themselves, and decide which view carries more biblical weight. Arminians, of course, will just reject my view... but, I genuinely believe that scripture itself provides the same answer as I give.

As I indicated in A-701, the idea of 'free will' in Man is a philosophical one, and there are many hypotheses on whether or not we have this 'free will'. In the article I showed that the arguments depend on how we *define* 'free will'. This is still the case – yet I insist Man does NOT have free will. It is up to readers to either accept or reject my proposition. Note that I have particular interest in a supposed free will as it applies to the gift of salvation, because one is the antithesis of the other.

Many (usually Arminian) dismiss my argument, claiming that salvation is a two-way or two-part affair: God 'offers' salvation, and human beings must choose to accept. Some even say that human beings firstly seek after God and then make a rational choice to accept Christ. I do not see it this way, because God Himself says *He* chooses who will be saved, and that *no* unsaved man seeks after Him. Thus, salvation is never a two-part equation... it is ALL of God and none of Man. Salvation, then, is only one way: God gives salvation to whom He will, based on His own choice in eternity. No man seeks it, or can attract it to himself, or accept or reject it.

In this article I will not be looking at this plain biblical fact, because it *is* plainly shown in biblical text. Rather, I will look at the fact – also plain – that man does not have free will. Only God has free will and, as I have said before, He restricts what He does and says according to His own will and holiness. Unlike humankind, only the Lord knows all possibilities and outcomes, and only His choices are perfect.

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Written by K B Napier

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It never bothers me to travel a road others disagree with. This is because I read scripture as it is written, without denominational or private prejudice. In this particular instance, I conclude that Man has no free will and never has ([see O-404](#)).

I repeat that while Adam had choices far beyond our own, even he did not have free will, but had a will rooted in God's will, only doing His bidding. When he made a drastic wrong choice (to listen to Eve), it did not just mean his own demise over time, but the demise of all people ever born. This was because he did not have free will, but only a partial will based on not having knowledge of all possibilities and all outcomes (especially the death and damnation of all his descendants, as well as himself). He walked with God in the Garden – if he had known the consequences (outcome) of listening to Eve, he would not have made that choice. Hence – he had no free will, only a partial will.

Can We Align with God?

It has been suggested that the assertion – that we must align our own will with that of God – is very wrong, because we are not God. Indeed, in one of my articles I maintain that Man is nowhere near being like God, if not the opposite. My reason for such alignment is simple: we were made in God's image, and those of us who are saved by the Lord are expected to not just follow Christ, but to reject our sinfulness and live holy lives.

This means making sound choices, not human ones, with wills led by the Holy Spirit, resulting in holy lives. This is what God expects, but unless He gives us that ability, we cannot do it. Therefore, our will and choices are guided by His will and choices. This is the nature of our 'new man' as opposed to the 'old man'. The unsaved sinner, however, has no such possibility; his is a forlorn and forgone pathway to hell. Only the saved are given the opportunity to be like Christ, and to regain, at least in a small way, the intimate relationship Adam once had with God, including the ability to make (limited) choices.

The choices we should make as saved people must thus be aligned to God's will, and must mimic Him, just as we must mimic the Lord Jesus Christ. This does not make us God, nor does it mean we claim to be God, only that we humbly follow Christ and do our best to align our will to God's will. Our will must always reflect or mirror the will of God, and this is 'designed' by the Lord to be so.

I am very aware that many theologians, pastors, etc., would disagree with me, but I also know that many WILL agree. That is why it is up to the reader to come to his or her own conclusions.

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However, do not do so by having an Arminian heart on the matter! Arminianism is heretical. Get that out of your head and you will think more clearly. (It is something I try to guard against in myself).

What is the Definition?

I find it odd that one of the more recent books on predestination says that to “ignore human free will would be inexcusable” (Robert A Peterson, ‘Election and Free Will’, P&R Publ. 2007, p125). I strongly suspect his definition of ‘free will’ is not my own. For myself, I am content to say that man has ‘freedom of will’ (that is, he can use his will even though he has very limited knowledge), but not ‘free will’ (limitless knowledge). Also, that such ‘freedom of will’ is darkened by sin and poor choices. It is always possible that Peterson has the same definition as myself, but it is not stated as such; I found his statements too vague to argue for or against.

I agree with his statement, though, that *“It takes looking at something, or someone, from multiple perspectives to gain a full appreciation”*. This is generally true (except when scripture defines something clearly) and this is why, concerning human will, I have written several perspectives, hoping that they will all meet in the middle with a better definition. Though I give several, each arises from scripture, not from my own mind. This is important when considering arguments such as this.

So, I have given my definition, and am working the article in this light. In my brief article, A-701, I looked at free will as a part of what scripture tells us: about before the Fall, at the Fall, after the Fall, in unsaved people, at salvation, after salvation, and in Heaven. Peterson agrees with such an approach (p126), but do we concur as to meaning?

‘Human beings as created had ‘true freedom’ and ‘freedom of choice’ (sub-heading, p126).’ But, when you look closely at this statement, it is far from clear, for ‘as created’, ‘true freedom’ and ‘freedom of choice’ need detailed definitions. Peterson says that we must separate ‘true freedom’ and ‘freedom of choice’, because Adam and Eve’s freedom was not the same as freedom of choice. Peterson defines ‘freedom of choice’ as the ability to do as we wish. Yet, Adam never had that choice, unless he wished to die! Adam could choose freely between God-given boundaries, but was warned not to have a free will response (which would lead to his death).

God fixed Adam’s precise boundaries to his choices. Beyond the boundary, Adam would sin and lose His holy sinless state. Thus, though he sinned, such sin was the result of a bad choice

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made by ignoring God's command. That Adam did not foresee the outcome proves that his choice was not free at all. He could have chosen so many things to do, but he failed in the one command that would keep him alive! This is neither rational nor free!

Peterson also says that men are created free to *"to make choices based on (our) inclinations"*. No, we were created free to follow the Lord precisely, and not to base our choices on our own inclinations (unless our inclinations are godly). Adam and Eve received specific commands to do what they did, but this did not include choosing to ignore the highest command given to them. Today, to make decisions based on our inclinations is usually the sign of sin, unless we incline towards God and His will. Yes, we are free to love God, but this is also a freedom to choose self-preservation! We do not want to anger God nor do we want Him to judge us as guilty sinners. So, we love Him truly and live according to HIS will.

Peterson's argument unravels when he says that we are free to have a relationship with God, *"t he ability to know, love, serve, and enjoy him, and with other human beings"* (p126, 7). Is he talking about Christians only, or everyone? If everyone, then he is wrong, because until a person is born again he will not seek God and has no love for Him.

Adam Had Limited Will

God gave Adam limited will; if Adam had free will (re my definition) then it would make him God. But, because he did NOT have free will, he made a dramatic and clueless error, bringing punishment upon the whole human race as well as upon himself.

As much as it is interesting to discuss free will, my main thrust is that Man cannot and does not choose God or salvation, because he is incapable of doing so. Salvation is a free gift. No man chooses to receive, or even to accept, it. Rather, once saved, he gratefully receives it (confused by many to be 'accepting salvation' as an act of human response). This appears to be backed by the Calvinistic* statement that *"omniscience and free will are incompatible"* (*but not confined to Calvinism alone).

Thoughts Through the Ages

It is also claimed that because God knows every choice we have ever made, or will ever make, we do not have freedom to choose (Alston, William P. 1985. 'Divine Foreknowledge and Alternative Conceptions of Human Freedom.' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18:1, 19–32). But, foreknowledge is a false objection. It only says that God is all-knowing and

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says nothing about choosing men on the basis that they firstly chose Him.

The idea that men have free will really comes down to the philosophy of Philo of Alexandria, who said that free will is a feature of man's soul. (Philo tried to fuse Jewish and Christian philosophy; his life spanned both pre- and post- Christ). For example, he said :

"But the soul of man, being the only one which has received from God the power of voluntary motion, and which in this respect has been made to resemble God, and being as far as possible emancipated from the authority of that grievous and severe mistress, necessity, may rightly be visited with reproach if she does not pay due honour to the being who has emancipated her. And therefore, in such a case, she will most deservedly suffer the implacable punishment denounced against slavish and ungrateful minds."

And

"God "considered" and though within himself, not now for the first time, but long ago, and with great steadiness and resolution, "that he had made man;" that is to say, he considered within himself what kind of being he had made him. For he had made him free from all bondage or restraint, able to exert his energies in accordance with his own will and deliberate purpose, on this account: that so knowing what things were good and what, on the contrary, were evil, and having arrived at a proper comprehension of what is honourable and what is disgraceful, and apprehending what things are just and what unjust, and, in short, what things flow from virtue and what from wickedness, he might exercise a choice of the better objects and an avoidance of their opposites; (50) and this is the meaning of the oracle recorded in Deuteronomy, "Behold, I have put before thy face life and death; good and evil. Do thou choose life."¹² Therefore he teaches us by this sentence both that men have a knowledge of good and of the contrary, evil, and that it is their duty to choose the better in preference to the worse, preserving reason within themselves as an incorruptible judge, to be guided by the arguments which sound sense suggests, and to reject those which are brought forward by the contrary power." (Extract from Philo, 'On the Unchangableness of God', Alexandrian text).

There are so many errors in this! Philo equates 'intellect' with 'free will' though there is no apparent reason to say so. The mind is certainly of a "higher rank", but "mind" has yet to be defined even today. Over the millennia no-one has adequately described what it is.

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He said *“it has received a purer and more excellent essence of which the divine natures were formed; on which account the intellect naturally appears to be the only thing in us which is imperishable.”* The intellect is ‘imperishable’ but only to a limited extent, for it can be ruined by many variables. Also, only the intellect of Adam and Eve were created pure and “more excellent”. Sin threw intellect into the mud of trodden earth, never again to regain its former glory. Intellect (and therefore human will) WILL perish when we die, for we will enter Heaven with a new mind, fully attuned to God.

Philo believed that God made Man so that his intellect (here equated with ‘will’) was “deserving of freedom” that was “unrestrained” to be “spontaneous will”. The only acceptable part of this assessment is the phrase that follows “as far as he was able to receive it”; man does not ‘deserve’ anything at all. Automatically, this tells us that the will was not, after all, fully free, but existed under the imposition of restraint, so contradicting Philo’s earlier statement. Adam’s will was not “unrestrained” – did not the Lord tell him he could eat of everything BUT a certain tree?

Philo appears not to distinguish Adam and ‘Man’ in general, for he says that ‘man’ has been given a “voluntary and self-impelling intellect”. This only applied to Adam, for, after the Fall, man’s intellect suffered along with all creation, and was destined to malfunction. Really, then, Philo’s idea is romanticised poetry rather than actuality. Man’s will is no longer ‘voluntary’, but exercised by sin. In the unsaved man this is total; in the saved man it is constantly influenced by the ‘old man’.

Philo continues:

“(God) had made him free from all bondage or restraint, able to exert his energies in accordance with his own will and deliberate purpose, on this account: that so knowing what things were good and what, on the contrary, were evil, and having arrived at a proper comprehension of what is honourable and what is disgraceful, and apprehending what things are just and what unjust, and, in short, what things flow from virtue and what from wickedness, he might exercise a choice of the better objects and an avoidance of their opposites.”

We can easily trace the Arminian heresy in these words. If we limit what he says to Adam, then the phrase “free from all bondage or restraint” is false. The restraint concerning the forbidden tree is not just peripheral – it is vital to Adam’s very life. Before the Fall, Adam did not have the ability to tell good from evil, because it was not until he committed the sin that he knew what evil was; evil was outside his vast knowledge. Thus, he did not “exercise a choice of the better

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objects and an avoidance of their opposites". Rather, he veered towards what was wrong and bad, because his 'choice' opposed the command of God. As I have said elsewhere, this is not rational and certainly not a sign that Adam's will was totally 'free'.

In his text Philo refers to the parallel choice given to the emerging Hebrew nation by Joshua, a text often erroneously used as 'proof' that we have 'free will'. He asked if the Hebrews chose God, and therefore life. Philo has unfortunately confused himself. The question is not about choosing between personal salvation or eternal death, but about the national path to be taken to satisfy the Lord. They were ALREADY chosen as a nation by God; the question was about whether or not they chose to return to holiness. To choose NOT to follow would have been unwise and irrational, and this is why the people chose "life"... they knew what might happen if they chose the wrong path! Thus, like Adam, they were under restraint. To use the text as referring to 'free will' is not correct.

In some ways Philo was being reasonable, but in the matter of free will he was wrong. God Himself tells us that we do not, as unsaved men, have this free will. (Note; the phrase "voluntary and self-impelling intellect" may be a faulty translation from the Greek).

Philo, like so many thinkers of his day, relied on Stoic and Platonic thought. He was born before the era of Christ and died about 15-20 years after Christ's death, so such influence is feasible. As Arminians and charismatics base their ideals on this early 'Arminian' idea expressed by Philo, it is worth noting what was said.

Which Sort?

"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. Which sort is the free will sort is what all the fuss is about. (And what a fuss it has been: philosophers have debated this question for over two millennia, and just about every major philosopher has had something to say about it.) Most philosophers suppose that the concept of free will is very closely connected to the concept of moral responsibility." (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: 'Free Will', 2010)

As I have said, my article is but one view amongst many. Yet, Arminians presume they have the upper hand and reduce the matter to just one view – their own.

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“I have implied that free willings are but a subset of willings, at least as a conceptual matter. But not every philosopher accepts this. René Descartes, for example, identifies the faculty of will with freedom of choice, “the ability to do or not do something” (Meditation IV), and even goes so far as to declare that “the will is by its nature so free that it can never be constrained” (Passions of the Soul, I, art. 41). In taking this strong polar position on the nature of will, Descartes is reflecting a tradition running through certain late Scholastics (most prominently, Suarez) back to John Duns Scotus.” (Stanford)

Again, we come across the theme that the will is unrestrained, even though scripture says otherwise. There are no very obvious allusions to ‘free will’ in ancient Greek writing, though Plato (through Socrates) implies that our actions are determined by our beliefs, and our beliefs depend on our knowledge. This can easily be used in my own view (as a generalised idea).

Plato was ‘ditched’ by medieval thinkers in favour of Aristotle (as per Thomas Aquinas), who stated that the future is fixed by past truths and cannot be changed. Interestingly, this is close to the statement that because God chooses, His choices cannot be altered. However, His choices for mankind do not appear to be on the micro-level. Thus, man is able to choose throughout his life, but not in the matter of his own salvation.

William of Ockham (about 1280-1349), who opposed Aquinas, suggested that what ‘God’ maintains as necessary and fixed is seen differently by an individual, who sees the future event or state as merely ‘possible’. We can think whatever we like, but it is God Whose word counts, and is fixed. William was ‘destroyed’ by Rome for his opposition to Aquinas because, at that time, the ‘doctor’ was supreme.

According to Jewish philosophy, the ability to make a free choice is through *yechida* (the part of the soul that is united to God, Who alone is not affected by either cause or effect). This must be disputed, for no part of a man’s soul is united to God except by salvation; unsaved men have no connection whatever.

However (‘Free Will Problem in Judaism’, www.myjewishlearning.com), some Jews see free will as a problem:

“Our experiences indicate that we have free will. When we do a particular action, we have the

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sense that we have chosen that act from an array of alternatives. However, there are theological, philosophical, and scientific reasons to think that this sense of choice is illusory.”

I believe that many who believe in free will THINK they have free will because they THINK they have made a rational choice out of many alternatives. In this they miss the input of emotions, falsity of beliefs, falsity of variables, and not knowing all the variables (even if they are vital), which can all persuade a man to act wrongly and to be led to the ‘belief’ that what he has concluded is an act of ‘free will’.

Those who have studied the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard (as I did) will recognise him as an Existentialist. Unfortunately, he assumed that God gave human beings the ability to have true freedom over Himself! This led to the idea that Man could surpass God in will. This was his idea of ‘free will’, because only then could mankind be truly free (Kierkegaard, Søren. (1848) Journals and Papers, vol. III. Reprinted in Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1967–78). The list of philosophical explanations of ‘free will’ is long and varied!

The Christian Angle

Many critics think that belief in predestination means God chooses every single choice made by individuals. They then mix it with a very odd idea that this is because God has foreknowledge. Of course He does – but it does not mean He makes us choose according to His will. In this, saved people have a choice. God chooses who will be saved, and that they ARE saved, but after that human beings are allowed to choose, but not totally freely. Otherwise we would be acting out Kierkegaard’s assumption, which would make us greater than God! Even so, this is the basic position of Arminians, not true Christians.

Romans 3 – a Proof Text Against People Seeking God

“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (v10-12)

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“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:” (v23, 24)

So, no-one is righteous (right before God). None understands spiritual things, Nobody seeks after God, because they are all evil and have sinned. Yet, though we come short of the glory of God, we are justified freely by His grace, through the sacrifice of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. But, the question is this – can we choose to accept Christ and choose to be saved?

One assertion made by Arminians *et al*, is that men seek after God. Well, according to the text NO man seeks after God. Therefore, he cannot *find* God. And if he cannot find God he cannot accept any ‘offer’ of salvation (an ‘offer’ that is only found in Arminian delusion). Many texts in scripture speak of men seeking after God – but none of them applies to unsaved people. Only those who are called and saved will seek after Him, for any reason. As Psalm 119:155 clearly states:
“Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.”

Am I saying that unsaved men and women are ‘wicked’? Yes, I am, because God says they are. As John 8:44 bluntly says: *“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”*

Because they are of their father, the devil, they are wicked in God’s eyes, worthy only of death (which includes hell). It is the lot of everyone on earth, except they are saved. Verse 43 says that because the unbeliever is of the devil, he cannot understand what is being said, and so will not ‘hear’ the word of God. And even when they hear what is being said of God, they do not believe (verse 45). Tell me, then – WHO is able to seek after God, if this is their character and relationship to Satan? None.

Something or someone must break through this impenetrable barrier. The proof text for that is in Christ’s own words, when He spoke to Nicodemus, who went to see Him under cover of darkness:

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“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)

Jesus ignored the question Nicodemus asked, because something more important needed to be said – HOW one is saved. Before being born again, a man is incapable of seeking after God, for his father, the devil, will divert his attention from truth and stop him wanting salvation. (But, even if it were possible to ask about salvation, it would not be a genuine query, because his heart is ‘desperately wicked’).

When Nicodemus asked how it was possible to be ‘born again’, Jesus told him that only a man born naturally AND of the Holy Spirit, would be reborn (v5). Jesus then counselled that no man can know how to obtain this privilege from God; the Spirit comes to whomever He wishes, and not to those who call Him (which an unsaved man will not do anyway) (v8). From this point, Jesus told Nicodemus that God sent His Son to save those who believed (elect, also called here ‘the world’).

Jesus was asked *“Who then can be saved?”* (Matthew 19:25). Jesus replied *“With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.”*

(v26). Thus, when men claim to seek God, they do not, because it is ‘impossible’. And when they say they want salvation, they do not get it, except it is given BY God, beginning with election in eternity; they cannot attain to Heaven by their own efforts.

He who does not believe and be baptised (as a proof of salvation) is damned to hell (Mark 16:16). So, how can a man damned to hell possibly receive salvation by his own efforts? Many attempt to get through the narrow gate, but never find it, because they are “not able” (Luke 13:23,24). It is these Jesus will tell *“I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.”* (v27).

I have given just a few texts; there are many more that show God choosing who will be saved: they are those He elected in eternity. No-one else can be saved. It is a matter of obvious logic, that if God says He elects who will be saved, and this salvation took place in eternity, then no other man can be saved, whether by his own supposed seeking, or by any other way.

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So, unsaved men are wicked, they do whatever their father the devil tells them to do, and they are incapable of seeking after God, and so are not saved by their supposed response or request. They do not, then, have 'free will'. This is straightforward scriptural teaching. The texts put upon us by Arminians, that try to reject this view, are all misused and can be debunked.

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