

Free Will, Destiny and Their Predecessors ©

Ted Wise

Like many Christians, I found my understanding of the principle of freewill to be on a collision course out on the highways and along the hedges where the master,s slaves are ordered to "compel them to come, that my house may be filled." (Luke 14:23). Moreover, in the Old Testament, God sticks His Law in the ribs of His people and commands them to obey or die. I began to ponder whether it was really correct to call the results of this encounter a "free will" choice? How can it be? If I stepped out of my house and a thief put a gun in my face and said, your money or your life, and I gave him my money, upon reporting the incident, I would wonder about the sanity of a policeman if he told me that I had parted with my goods of my own free will. Undeniably Jesus called me with a gentleness no mere robber possesses. Indeed, Christ's call became even more undeniable when He warned me of my forthcoming doom. If I didn't give Him my life, I would soon pass away in a predestined accelerated sort of continuation of the second law of thermal dynamics, picturesquely described as a lake of fire or everlasting hell. This is not what I usually imagine when I think of free will.

While mulling over this issue, I have wondered if any of us would be aware that we possessed even a vestigial capacity to choose if we were unaware that alternatives existed. For instance, if you were to hold out both of your hands before me and asked me to pick right or left, I can easily demonstrate a semblance of what appears to be free will. But if you don't offer me your hands, how will I show you my free will? This is not a Zen puzzle about the sound of falling trees in uninhabited forests. Free will is somewhat comparable to procreation. I have the capacity to father a child but not without a mate. In the same way, I have the latent ability to choose freely but not without something to actually choose. Unless a detour crosses my path, my free will remains merely an unfulfilled potential.

Adam and Eve had free will. The very existence of Eden's tree with the infamous "forbidden fruit " provided them with an alternative to obedience and thus free will, "The Lord God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.," (Gen 2:16-17). Later they were kicked out of Eden and as a result of their exile mankind has only the slightest shadow of that former freedom. According to the New Testament, through one man, Adam, death entered the world and in the long run, made what humanity calls its "free will" rather pointless. The Scriptures describes our righteousness, those things done without our complete dependence upon Christ, as filthy rags that will leave behind only the smoke of the eternal burning up of both the doer and his misdeeds. If mortal man does not have a choice about death, then his will is more libertine than truly unfettered. Unless an option to death exists, can we boast that our wills are really free?

I don,t mean that humankind lacks the power to choose. When Jesus came into the world, so did meaningful opportunities that we could freely choose. His presence in history has given back to fallen man an alternative to death free for the choosing. The theological issue that needs probing by Bible students is not the actual existence of free will but to what degree the Holy Spirit influences our choices while we are in a fallen state.

We know God seeks to externally influence us by means of His Word of salvation through Christ, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God". We know faith is a gift and that one can pray that most desperate of prayers, I believe Lord, help my unbelief. We know God holds out before us the opportunity to participate in the only work that will pass through the infernal end of all things. As He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." (Rev 21:5).

Is it predetermined for some to perish? Absolutely! The devil, the anti-christ, his prophet and Judas Iscariot "and not one of them perished but the son of perdition,..." (John 17:12). That leaves a lot of undecided folks out there. It seems hypocritical if our questions concerning free will only move us to debate. No matter what one,s conclusion are, if the possible existence of hell bothers you, then your heart should be aroused to do more than quarrel over words. After all, we posses the only option to the predestined end, "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Rev 21:8). We carry the message that offers the human race the only choice that matters: what will happen to them after they die and face the Lord God Almighty? In other words, the Lord has entrusted Christians with the "free will" of the lost. We can pray that the Lord will use us, through the preaching of the Gospel, to reduce the number of those that perish. We can pray that by His free will He will make the number small.

Predestination is more easily understood if you look at it like water running down hill. It is predestined to do so in accordance with the preordained order of the universe. We habitually think that there is only one possible outcome to a choice. God intervenes in the inevitable. Salvation is God's intervention into my destiny. I was born predestined to die. God came into my life and gave it a new ending and a lot of new possibilities.

Loosen up! Rejoice! "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; Neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear." (Isa 59:1)

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