

Understanding Freewill

There is no more significant question I receive, nor so common a statement I hear more frequently than, “What about free will?” This question is commonly brought up as it refers to the doctrine of election, salvation, and understanding sin. However, this question is also brought up in several other biblical and theological categories that cause confusion. I will attempt to address this issue simplistically, with as much brevity as possible. However, before we address this issue, I wish to ask you a question: where or when did you first assume that humans have a will, and when or how did you determine that it was free?

We must start asking this question and for you, the reader, to honestly consider. We know that humans have a will, but how do we know if that will is free? The will within the realm of philosophy is one or more parts of the mind that accompanies reason and understanding. Therefore, the will must be understood as something the mind comprehends or thinks about and then is put into action. Thus, the will then is secondary in the causal chain of events that takes place within one’s mind, leading to a decision. For example, what you know and how much you know about a subject dictates how your mind views the decision you may or may not make. If you possess knowledge that if you jump off a building, gravity necessitates that you will fall straight to the ground and not hover above until you look down (like the Wiley coyote from Looney Tunes), then you understand jumping off of a building will lead you to falling to the ground. The certainty of falling from stepping or jumping off a building is the reality of a truth. However, when you find yourself on top of a building, you can ignore the laws of physics; however, you will pay the consequence of that decision.

So, the knowledge one possesses dictates the decisions you make to preserve one's life or bodily harm. Your previous experience of touching a hot stove tells you that if you do not want to burn your finger, you know not to touch the hot stove. This is a universal truth that no one would contest; however, when we apply the same understanding in terms of decision-making in the spiritual, there is often a shift that takes place within our minds that leads us to make false presumptions concerning our will. When thinking about doing something that is right or wrong, many who do not understand the will assume that every individual possesses a will that is free; that is, they believe that the will of an individual is entirely neutral and not predisposed to good or bad, but is simply neutral. This faulty assumption can lead to a false understanding of how you were created. Indeed, we all know that we have a will, but we must now identify whether our will is neutral. Is it prone to choosing the right actions? Or is it prone to choosing wrong actions?

To understand the will, we must understand who we are as human creatures and how we were created. We know that we are made in the image of God, to be bearers of His image for the purpose of knowing and having a relationship with God (Gen. 1:26). When God created man, the creation account states that “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” Genesis 1:31. The word good in this verse translated means, useful, pleasing, or beautiful. The word good does not imply perfect. As the creation account continues in Genesis 3, we see an interaction between the serpent (Satan) and Eve, the woman. In Genesis 3:3, Eve gives us something that helps us understand how Adam and Eve processed information that influenced their decision-making. God gave them a command in Genesis 2:17 that they shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, in Genesis 3:3, when Eve responds to a

question Satan asked concerning the command, Eve varies the command of God by adding, “You shall not touch it.” God never told Adam and Eve they were not allowed to touch it, only that they were not to eat it; therefore, it stands to reason that something had already influenced Eve in her mind, which led her to add something additional to God’s commands, which in essence is sinning against God by adding something to His command. So, even at the outset of creation, mankind is prone to make decisions contrary to God's commands.

We know this event that took place in the garden is referred to as “the fall,” meaning that mankind fell away from a close, intimate relationship with God due to their decision to choose sin rather than obedience. Well, what influenced Eve’s mind to choose sin rather than obedience? It was her desire. Understanding the influence of one's desire is vital in understanding the will and answering the question, does mankind have free will? One of the greatest theologians America has ever produced is a man by the name of Jonathan Edwards; in his writing on, *The Freedom of the Will*, he says,

The will (without any metaphysical refining) is plainly, that by which the mind chooses anything,” he writes. “The faculty of the will is that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice.

What Edward is saying here is that there is a strong connection between desire and the will and that they are interconnected. An individual will never in any instance wills anything contrary to their desires, nor desire anything contrary to their will. Meaning, the decisions we make and the actions we take are always according to our strongest desire at that time. For example, how many of you have ever began a new diet? As you begin to restrict your calories and cut out foods that are contrary to your diet, you will inevitably come to a crossroads in which

you have a desire to eat something that is not according to the diet plan you made. You know have a choice, to eat the snack or to not? What dictates your decision in that moment is the strongest desire inside you influencing your choice.

Change the context from a diet, to sin, and the logic still applies and holds true. Apart from the saving grace of Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, what is mankind's natural disposition? Is it towards righteousness or towards sin? The Bible is explicitly clear on this issue. The Bible describes mankind, due to the fall and sin (Ps. 51:5) that is spread to all mankind, that mankind will always naturally choose sin (Rom.3:10-20; Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 2:1-16; Ps. 14:1-7). Therefore, mankind's will is not free, but is bound by sin, and will only result in mankind choosing sin rather than righteousness. Romans 6:6 describes mankind as "slaves to sin" meaning we are captured by, controlled by, and influenced by sinful desires, actions, lusts, and choices. Therefore, everyone born on this earth is born with a sinful nature. This nature controls us by dictating and influencing our desires to choose sin. This once external influence that began in the Garden of Eden through Satan has, and continues to influence each one of us apart from Christ. Our desires directly influence and dictate the decisions we make, when we make the decision because the choices we make is driven by our strongest, and in sin, only motive to choose sin. The choices we make or dictated and determined by what appears to us as the most good or pleasing to our minds, which in s

But God, being rich and steadfast in His mercy and grace provided a way out to free the will from the bondage of sin, so that we may no longer be slaves to sin, but we are made alive to Christ. Upon Christ regenerating us from death unto life, we are then made free (John 8:36). However, even though those in Christ are no longer slaves to sin, our will has been made free

from the bondage of sin, we still have the temptation, and potency to fall back into sin and are charged throughout the New Testament to live not for the lusts of men, but for the will of God (1 Pet. 4:2). Understanding that indicates that Christians still have the temptation and ability to sin, but the will is now free from the bondage and slavery of sin, and can now choose to follow and obey Christ.