

THE SECRET OF HIS PURPOSE .... THE PLAN FOR THE FULLNESS OF THE TIMES  
**TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN THE KING,**  
EVERYTHING IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH,  
**IN JESUS....**

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#33

***Whose Will Saves—God's or Man's?***

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Some, not all, of what follows has been presented in several other writings, reedited, and updated into this article. As Paul would say: *To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you* (Philippians 3:1 NASB).

This article attempts to address the issue of whose will saves—God's or man's? To answer this, we need to take a close look at what many Christians call *free will*? What is it? And, is it necessary to exercise *free will* to be saved? Are there other types of wills? Is there a more correct and biblical way to explain how our will and God's will enter into individual salvation?

As Christians, many of us have been taught that man has *free will* and that man makes a choice to believe in Jesus or not. As the teaching goes, many will exercise their *free will* by rejecting God's Son, which will lead to an eternity of torture in a fiery oven called *hell* because God's love and justice demand it. Others will exercise their *free will* by believing in Jesus and accepting God's free gift of grace, which will lead to an eternity in heaven, not on earth.

I call this the heaven—hell gospel, which is not really good news at all. Just to be clear, I unequivocally reject such a teaching; it is false and unbiblical. I have made my point on this matter numerous times in other writings, so I will not dwell upon it here. However, merely stating that I reject such teaching does not make it correct. And, I should add, I know it causes a rise for those who vehemently oppose such thinking.

So, let us consider a few points, starting with the concept of *free will* and what it means in light of salvation. Perhaps—for some who have had doubts about what they have been taught that seems contrary to God is love—I will help shed some light on the matter.

**Man's Will**

At the outset, it needs to be stressed that man does have a will that leads to making everyday choices in life, whether they are big or small choices, good or evil choices. I want to be abundantly clear on this. One of the definitions of the word *will* is "the power of conscious and deliberate action or choice: as, freedom of the will." This definition does not offer any indication of how freedom of the will works; it simply implies that man has a freedom to make his own choices, that is, to act or choose based on his own will or conscious reasoning. I have no problem with this definition, even the concept of freedom of the will. Let's face it; we make choices all day long, whether about food we eat, clothes we wear, activities we pursue, places we visit, and the list goes on indefinitely.

It is hardly necessary to make the point that in open and free societies, people generally have the freedom to make their own deliberate choices or take action in their daily lives. However, should this concept be carried over to individual salvation, as if it depends on *free will*?

So that you know where I am going with this discussion, the answer to the above question is no. I believe the term *free will* is a deceptive term that should not be included in the doctrine of salvation. It is much like the word *hell*. The concepts of *free will* and *hell* that are held by many in our day misrepresent God's plan to bring about His ultimate purpose of the ages. But, even more importantly, I believe the whole concept of *free will* is invalid, even when it comes to the exercise of man's will. Simply, there is no such thing.

### **Free Will**

The term *free will* is rather strange, for it could imply that the will comes without cost. If this were how it were viewed, which I do not believe it is, then it would be incorrect, for the exercise of one's will often has a cost attached to it. Actions have consequences! For example: "*For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it*" (Matthew 16:25). Or, going back to the beginning, when Adam and Eve exercised their will and partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, death passed through into all mankind (Romans 5:12 CLV). Hardly anything free about the curse of death! Obviously, this cannot be the intended meaning of *free will*.

Referring back to the definition of *will*, we could conclude that *free will* is a simplified way of stating *freedom of the will*; that is, man has the freedom to choose or not to choose any course of action in his life, including whether he wants to be saved or not to be saved, or to believe or not to believe, or to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or not to partake. However, as we will see, there is more to *free will* than this.

As I see it, there are two possible views or explanations of *free will*. I believe only one view can rightly be labeled free. However, in actuality, there is no such thing as *free will*. I will explain as we go along.

One view says that *free will* means one exercises his will apart from any and all external influence; that is, the will is exercised without any external input. The answer is within man and nowhere else. This view is clearly seen in the dictionary definition of *free will*, which is "able to choose for itself; not restricted by anything except its own limitation or nature." In other words, the entire process of exercising the will begins and ends in man alone.

The other view takes the opposite position by acknowledging that external influences can come into play in the exercise of one's will. People act based on their analysis or reasoning of external inputs. But then, could this truly be called *free will* in light of the above dictionary definition? No!

However, the common element in these two views is that one alone makes the final decision as to what action or inaction they will take. The difference between the two is based on the question of whether one allows or does not allow for input from other sources before a course of action is taken.

Let us look at both options and their outcomes, starting with *free will* apart from external influence.

### **Free Will without External Influence**

If *free will* requires that it be exercised apart from any external influence, then it makes man a free agent that is capable of making god-like decisions. Simply, he is free to make any decision he wants, independent of any external reference point. Carried to the fullest extent, of necessity, man would have to be free from any influence from his creator as well.

Over the years, I have heard it taught that man is a free-will agent. After all, God did not create man to be a robot. Obviously, He didn't create robots, for man was created in the image of God. But, did He create man to be an independent god unto himself? Most, if not all, Christians would probably recoil at such a thought; nevertheless, it is the only rightful outcome of exercising one's will without external influence. Under this type of *free will*, man must be his own free-agent god. This view is based in *humanism*, which has its roots in a material-energy worldview, not a biblical worldview.

### **Material-Energy Worldview**

Francis A. Schaeffer (1912-1984) was one of the most profound intellectual Christian thinkers of the last century. In his book *A Christian Manifesto*, he wrote that at the core of all beliefs there are two *worldviews*, and all aspects of one's life will be based on which view one holds.

[*A Christian Manifesto*, Crossway Books, 1981. The following quotes were taken from pages 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25.]

I have no understanding of how Schaeffer viewed *free will*, and this article is not a review of his teaching. However, he offers some valuable insight on two worldviews and humanism that, in turn, shed some light on *free will*.

It is not uncommon to hear people refer to one's worldview. A *worldview* is the overall way people think and view the world and life as a whole. It is their reality. According to Schaeffer, one's worldview is based on one's view of reality or total reality.

The Christian worldview starts with the living God, the creator of all things. We could call this the creationist worldview. The total reality of Christianity begins with "the central reality, the objective existence of the personal-infinite God." All things that are in existence came forth from a personal God who is the creator of all things. Nothing that came into existence came into being apart from Him. Consequently, total reality is based on a living God, and this reality is to engulf all aspects of one's life. Schaeffer saw true spirituality as engulfing all aspects of life: "True spirituality covers all of reality."

On the totally opposite end of the spectrum is the worldview that has overtaken much thinking in our day that he called "the material-energy, chance concept of reality." This worldview is "based upon the idea that the final reality is impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present

form by impersonal chance." We could call this the *evolutionist* or *pure-chance worldview*. In other words, what we see with our human eyes, including our own physical bodies, came about by pure chance and evolved from chaos to order. Material and energy that make up the universe came together or took shape into some form purely by chance. Thus, we have the theory of evolution and mankind evolving from some primordial ooze. There is no personal God who loves and creates or even saves out of His love.

Consequently, reality is seen from two opposing views, one which begins with the living, personal-infinite God and the other which begins with impersonal-finite material and energy. One view has grace; the other view has no grace. One view has order emanating from God; the other view has chaos evolving into order.

### **Humanistic Free Will**

One of the consequences of the material-energy worldview is *humanism*, which is defined as "the placing of man at the center of all things and making him the measure of all things." According to Schaeffer, "the term *humanism* ... means man beginning from himself, with no knowledge except what he himself can discover and no standards outside himself. In this view, man is the measure of all things...." Accordingly, man is the last word on whether God exists or not, and if man believes God does exist, then he also has the last word on what God is like and how one can or must approach Him. This is humanism.

Paul best sums up the scriptural worldview that is diametrically opposite to the humanistic worldview: *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things* (Romans 11:36).

Up to this point, it should be obvious that the concept of *free will*, based on not being governed by any external influence, is embodied within the definition of humanism.

We could carry this one step further. If man's will is truly free, that is, free from any and all external influence, then man's will must be absolute, which again is what *humanism* demands because man has the first and the last say on any matter. We could call this *humanistic free will*.

I find the word *absolute* to be one of the most misused words in the American vocabulary today. It is commonly used as an acknowledgment of general agreement over the matter at hand, where the use of a simple *yes* or, perhaps, the word *definitely* would be more appropriate. The word *absolute* means "perfect, pure, not limited, not conditional, unrestricted, not dependent on anything, considered without reference to anything else." The last part of the definition seems to capture the heart of the concept of *humanistic free will*. It is a will not dependent on anything and has no reference to anything else. This type of *free will* is the power of self-direction or self-control. It sees man as a free agent who lives in the realm of the absolute. *Humanism!*

The next time you hear some expert or news pundit use the word *absolute* or, perhaps, you or a friend use it, ask this question: Did they (I/we) mean that they (I/we) came to a conclusion on the matter without reference to anything else?

You see; I believe that the spirit of humanism, which is within the spirit of the world that Paul and John warned about (1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 2:15-17; 4:3), is so pervasive and, at times, so subtle in our world today that many, including Christians, easily get sucked into it, and their words and, in some cases, their doctrines are an indication of it. We need to be on guard!

Carried to its extreme, *humanistic free will* demands that whatever man chooses to do or not to do is the right and perfect choice for him. How could it be anything other than this, since there are no external reference points by which to judge his exercise of *free will*? The concept of good or evil does not enter into the picture, for what matters is what is right for man. In fact, good and evil are defined however man sees fit to define them, and when and how they are applied. It is calling evil good and good evil.

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20 NASB)

Have you noticed how much of this is going on in our day as men vie for power and control of the world? Humanism is at the heart of it. Consequently, there is nothing outside of man that makes a difference. What he sees and does is right in his own eyes. He is on the top of the mountain as the king of the mountain. Scripture warns about doing what is right in our own eyes.

Through Moses, the Lord warned the sons of Israel: "You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes (Deuteronomy 12:8 NASB).

But they did not heed this word. In the days of when there was no king in Israel, it is recorded that every man did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6 NASB).

Later, Solomon offered some wisdom on the same matter.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel; and Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts. (Proverbs 12:15; 21:2 NASB)

Interestingly, some time back, the following editorial comment appeared in a newspaper: "My wife and children are my world, and other family members are simply satellites around that world. If they refuse to recognize my world, then to me, they're just insignificant comets flying through my universe." This quote is a great illustration of humanism. This person's worldview is obviously centered on self, and I would imagine he believes in *free will* as well.

If man has *humanistic free will* as presented so far, then man must be his own god. Why? Because only a god can make a choice apart from any external influence! Only a god exercises his will according to what is right according to his own standard. Only a god can determine what is good or evil. Only a god has no one to answer to.

The fact of the matter is that mankind, in general, seems to act and think this way. But the bigger question pertains to Christians. How many have fallen into the trap of accepting and even, unknowingly, teaching *humanistic free will*? Of course, when confronted with this prospect, most would probably deny it.

The problem, as I see it, is that the material-energy worldview and its offspring, humanism, are so pervasive today that it has infiltrated into some Christian thinking and teaching. It is so diabolically deceptive that the same ones who vehemently hold to this concept of *free will* also vehemently argue against Darwinian evolution, even though both have their roots in the material-energy worldview and are manifested through humanism.

At the center of *humanistic free will* is man who is at the helm of his own *ultimate* destiny and who denies God *ultimate* sovereignty over and responsibility for His entire creation, without exception. The word *ultimate* is injected to emphasize that we are not dealing with man's aspirations or desires or plans; we are dealing with a much higher and greater issue that relates to God's purpose and plan that includes all of God's creation, but especially everyone born of Adam's race.

To conclude this section, it appears that *humanistic free will* is most closely aligned with and explained by the dictionary definition of *free will*, that is, "able to choose for itself; not restricted by anything except its own limitation or nature."

### **Affected [free] Will**

Now, let us put aside *humanistic free will* and turn to the second possible type of *free will*, namely, that which is exercised based on external influence. This could be called *affected [free] will* (my term). The adjective *affected* is used because it means "influenced, acted upon." However, I propose that once the word *affected* is attached to *free will*, the word *free* loses much of its meaning, if not validity, especially in light of the above definition of *free will*. It seems to me that once external influences come to bear on the will, the exercise of the will is no longer entirely free—restrictions then come to bear before action is taken or not taken. It is simply *affected will*.

The basic and essential question is this: Does anyone truly exercise their will apart from external influence or restrictions? Experience says, no!

Consider Adam and Eve; they did not exercise their will apart from external influence or restrictions. They had two forces working on their conscious that day in the garden. God had commanded them not to eat of the forbidden fruit, for they would die, and the crooked serpent called *the satan* tempted them to go ahead and eat it, for they would not die. They had a choice to make, but it was not without two external forces tugging on their conscious. Some would call this exercising *free will*, but it cannot be if we are to hold to the dictionary definition of *free will*.

Besides, I do not believe Adam actually had a choice in the matter, for he had to attempt to redeem Eve who was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. She was of his body, and love for his body demanded that he try to save his wife. Anything less than this would have led him to

break the highest and overruling law of God, the law of love. If you are unsure of what I am stating, then read Ephesians 5:22-33 in light of Genesis 2-3, asking the holy spirit to guide you.

Is there any area of our lives in which we exercise our will independent or absent of any external influence or restriction? Of course not! Everything we do or do not do is based on some influence in our lives, whether we directly know these influences or not. We could say that our whole life experience and the environs around us come to bear on our will. When we exercise our will, we are making choices based on all the external influences that might come to bear upon the matter at hand. It is like weighing all our options before we decide to act or not act.

Again, as they stood in the garden, Adam and Eve weighed the options as presented by God and the crooked old serpent and decided to eat the forbidden fruit. Their choice; our loss!

The fact of the matter is that nothing has changed since Adam and Eve. Our lives are directed every which way we turn. Not one of us makes decisions independent of some external influence. There is always something that comes to bear in the exercise of our will.

For example, governments of today expend a great deal of energy and money controlling the lives of its people. I cannot drive a car legally unless I am of age and have a driver's license. I cannot own a car and drive it legally unless I have insurance, pay taxes, and have it inspected once a year. I might choose not to do any of these things, but then I would be a lawbreaker and eventually my actions would lead to trouble. Thus, as a citizen of the US, I do not have the freedom of the will to do anything I want to do without consequence.

Further, to carry it to the sublime (at least it is sublime to me); I love ice cream, but the "food police" and doctors say it is not good for us; high fat, loads of sugar and cholesterol. By the way, it isn't ice cream if it isn't filled with these things. Don't even think about feeding me fat-free and sugar-free ice cream. So, when I go to the frig and pull out that carton of premium ice cream, the dire words from the food police and doctors (what do they know?) scream at me not to do it, or if I must do it then take only a small scoop. A small scoop; you have got to be kidding! That's like telling me to eat just one pistachio. Ok, so I compromise; instead of eating the whole pint of premium ice cream, I eat half of it. Happy?

Do you really think this is *free will*, according to the definition? Of course not! Is it *affected will*? Of course, yes! Actually, my personal example is far from free. If anything, it has every potential of producing a convicted conscious that says I am guilty of breaking some rule imposed upon me by some anti-ice cream fanatics.

### **Throw Out Free Will**

Based on all that has been presented so far, what are we to conclude?

I believe we must conclude that there is no such thing as our will being exercised free and clear of any and all external input or restriction. It matters not if we are a humanist or a *free-will* whatever (denominationalist). The fact of the matter is that the concept of freedom or, we could

say, absolute freedom, as it applies to exercising the will, did not exist with Adam and Eve, and it does not exist with us 6,000 years later.

Yes, we make choices for ourselves and others. We could even say that we often, but not always, have the freedom to make these choices; however, we can also be wooed, steered, nudged, coerced, restricted, and even forced or mandated into these choices or actions. Of course, we also have the choice to fight external influence or submit to it.

On the one hand, as much as the humanists might like to think they are their own gods—*humanistic free will*—as we have defined it, does not exist. Whether the humanists know it or not, they do not exercise their will apart from external influence. They are deceived to think so. Actually, what they are doing is trying to ignore the influence upon their lives of the creator and sovereign God. As hard as they might try, and as convinced as they might be of their freedom, ultimately God will prevail upon their will to their good and to His glory.

On the other hand, as much as evangelicals might like to think that man has a will that is free to accept or reject anything it wants, including God and His Son, in real life it just does not work this way; and as we will see, in relation to individual salvation, it is God's will and plan that matters, not man's.

So, I propose we throw out the term *free will*. If we need to attach an adjective to the word *will*, then I further propose it should be the word *affected*. We have *affected will*, not *free will*.

### **Danger of Free Will**

When it comes to salvation, I see a real danger to the whole concept of *free will*, because I believe those who use it do so in the absolute sense of "not restricted by anything except its own limitation or nature." They have unknowingly bought into the philosophy of humanism.

Normally, I avoid mentioning specific denominational groups, but I must make an exception when it comes to *free-will* Baptists. Besides, generally speaking, it is so commonly known that Baptists believe in *free will* that I am not divulging some big secret or even trying to malign my fellow brethren. Perhaps, some reading this might be helped. I once heard a Baptist pastor who preached *free will* and a literal *fiery hell*, announce to his congregation that one of their fellow members had died. With sort of a perplexed look on his face, the pastor went on to say that this same man had come to him some weeks before his death questioning whether he was saved or not. I could tell that this bothered the pastor, and it seemed that he had no answer to why this man, who had been in his congregation for so long, had these doubts. I felt for the pastor because he could not see that his very teaching had planted the seed of doubt in this man.

Think about it; if you are taught that you have the choice to walk the aisle or kneel at the altar or do whatever in order to accept Christ, does it not follow that if you make the decision on your own, you can also undo your decision? How often have you heard the plea: "Make a decision for Christ!"? Or, how often have you heard the newly saved say: "I made a decision for Christ!"? Both are unscriptural. As Jesus told His disciples: "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you*" (John 15:16). Who did the choosing? Jesus! He makes the decision to save you, not you.

Add to this the fear of going to hell to be tortured for ever and ever if you do not accept Christ, and you have a mighty powerful force tugging on you to walk the aisle that even produces a lingering sense of uncertainty or doubt. The person might be saved, but never has the full assurance, because the seed of self-direction has been planted in their experience. After all, the person was at the center of "making a decision for Christ" and was coerced into making this decision through pleading rhetoric and fear that he had to act or face a fiery torture chamber filled with worms and burning sulfur.

This particular pastor would cry out that if he could walk the aisle on his knees on broken glass to get just one person saved and keep that person out of hell, he would do so. I cannot state so emphatically, but it seems to me that humanism is at the center of *free-will* Baptist preaching "to get people saved." I am open to a rebuttal that they acknowledge that many external influences might come to bear in making a right choice (i.e., the holy spirit, or perhaps, fear) or a wrong choice (i.e., the flesh and/or the satan).

However, if this is so, then the word *free* should be dropped. At best they hold to *affected will*, but even this misses the mark when it comes to salvation. Mind you; I am trying to be generous, but I believe they actually and literally mean *free will*, as it has been defined, and unknowingly preach *humanistic free will*. Their emphasis is placed squarely on the individual and not on God who wills.

The sad part is that they do not realize what they are doing, and worse, they adamantly defend what they preach because they are "preaching the word" straight out of the King James Bible. But are they really preaching the word, or are they preaching a tradition of men taught in the seminaries that is unscriptural? I vote for the latter.

Can we not conclude that when it comes to salvation, *humanistic free will* is an erroneous teaching that is part of *every wind of doctrine that has been worked into the systematizing of the deception that has been introduced by the trickery of men* and that Paul warns us to be on guard against (Ephesians 4:14 CLV)? Again, *humanistic free will* is much like the modern-day view of *hell* that comes straight out of paganism.

### **Salvation—Man's Choice or God's Will?**

It all boils down to this one question: Is man saved by his own will, that is, by making a choice to believe God about His Son, or is he saved by God alone who overcomes man's will with His will so that man can and does believe God? Does God's will trump man's will at the moment of being saved by grace through faith? Or, worded in another way, is man's salvation based on man's will or on God's will? Whose will prevails?

I have read that some believe there will be upwards of no less than 50 billion people in hell. I don't know how anyone can make such a claim. Nevertheless, let's go with it for a moment. This means that 50 billion people will never exercise their so-called *free will* to believe. Do you honestly believe this many will choose death over life? What of those who were never given a chance to exercise their *free will* because they never heard the good news. Does this mean that

they are forever damned and condemned to eternal torment and torture in a literal hell-hole of fire, as many preachers would have us believe? Where is God's justice in that?

It is a sad commentary on our day that many who call themselves evangelicals don't see a problem with their free will doctrine. As for me, God our Savior wills all men to be saved!

For this is right and acceptable before God our Saviour, who doth will all men to be saved, and to come to the full knowledge of the truth; for one is God, one also is mediator of God and of men, the man Christ Jesus, who did give himself a ransom for all—the testimony in its own times.... (1 Timothy 2:3-6 YLT)

### **Who Saves?**

I propose that the question is not whether we exercise our will in making choices every day, for we most certainly do make choices all day long, but again, it is whether God's will trumps our will when it comes to believing in His Son. Another way of asking the question is this: Does God's will come to bear on our will to save us, or is salvation totally up to our will?

Some will say that God does not want robots, so He will not interfere with our will in the matter of salvation. Yet, again, our wills are influenced all day long by our spouses, our children, our parents, society, and, most of all, by our government and its laws under which we live. Not one of us lives in some protected bubble free of external influence. We don't live in a vacuum!

So, why is it that so many believe that our very creator has no direct influence on us when it comes to salvation? Who saves us, God or ourselves? Why is it that so many seem to hold that God's love cannot and does not woo our hearts to His Son? Of course, love is another matter entirely; but isn't love a powerful influence?

For a moment, let us consider Jesus' will when He walked on this earth 2,000 years ago. In regard to the purpose of God, Jesus executed God's will perfectly, never executing His own will. While on earth, He was under the will of another source, the will of His Father in heaven. The Son of God did not come to this earth to exercise His will. He came to do the will of the Father. He had no intention of coming to do what He wanted to do.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 6:38 NASB; also, Matthew 26:39; John 8:28)

It was designated beforehand that the Son would come to this earth in the form of man, not to exercise His own will, but to do the will of His Father in going to the cross to die for all mankind. Even His second coming is in the will of His Father.

Now, concerning that day and hour no one is aware, neither the messengers of the heavens, nor the Son; except the Father only. (Matthew 24:36 CLV)

The Son cannot decide on His own that He is tired of waiting, so He is going to return to earth and seize His kingdom. The Father and the Son know the day and the hour, but the Son cannot change the appointed time fixed by His Father's authority (Acts 1:7).

### Grace Overwhelms

Consider Paul the apostle. I use him often as an example of one who was apprehended by Christ (Philippians 3:12). On the road to Damascus, Paul had no intention or desire to believe that Jesus is the Messiah-King. Paul did not apprehend Christ on that dusty road; rather, he was out to destroy Him. In fact, he considered those who did believe in Jesus, the Way, to be his enemies and the enemies of God that needed to be wiped out. Paul's testimony is mighty powerful proof that his will was so set against the Lord and His people that a power beyond him had to blast him out of his ignorance and unbelief.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 1:12-14 NASB)

By his own admission, Paul was in ignorance and unbelief. It was like a great mountain in his life that was immovable. Nothing could blast this huge stumbling block from his life. Judaism was an idol in the heart of Paul that blinded him from the truth. Even worse, Paul never knew that it was a stumbling block until the Lord Jesus met him and blinded him that day. But what overcame Paul's ignorance and unbelief? Did Paul's will all of a sudden decide to accept Christ apart from any external influence? Hardly! A blinding light out of heaven is a mighty powerful influence on one in unbelief. So, what changed Paul's mind in that split second when Jesus spoke out of heaven? Paul tells us what did it. *Yet the grace of our Lord overwhelms, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.*

It was the grace of our Lord that met him on that road and overwhelmed his ignorance and unbelief with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Don't miss the truth that Paul has left us. It was grace that overwhelmed him with faith and love. It was not Paul's grace; it was not Paul's faith; and it was not Paul's love. It was all from the Lord Jesus. When he wrote his epistle to the Galatians, Paul declared that it was not his faith; it was the faith of the Son of God.

I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 DNT)

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 KJV)

I can testify that it was neither my will nor my faith that led me to believe in Jesus. One day as I was in unbelief and ignorance, Jesus broke into my life, and by His grace He gave me His faith to

believe—I believed and He saved me. My boast is in Him alone, for I did nothing to save myself; I had no faith of my own to believe; and my will was overwhelmed with the grace of God so that I bowed the knee to Jesus. Was my will exercised when Jesus met me? It most certainly was. But did I make a choice independent of any external influence? Absolutely not! Then what happened to my will? God came in and trumped my will with faith and love and brought my will into conformance with His will.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! (Romans 11:33 NASB)

Does this make me or anyone else who believes in Jesus into a robot for God? Absolutely not! We continue to make choices all day long, but now we are free to make right choices for God and His kingdom under the influence and guidance of the spirit of God.

### **Where is Your Boast?**

Again, let us consider Paul's testimony.

But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles [ethnos; nations]. (Galatians 1:15-16 NASB [CLV])

Where is *free will* in his testimony? There is none. Paul was called through grace. He never boasted that he made a "decision for Christ." Christ apprehended him; a fact he later testified to the Philippians.

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12 KJV)

The Greek word for *apprehend* can have the meaning of "to seize." Paul was not simply spoken to; he was seized by Christ. Again, his will was overcome by the will of the Lord. Paul made no boast that he had anything to do with his salvation. It was all of grace, the free gift of God. His boast was in the grace of God. Period!

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB)

If we believe that we made a *free will* decision for Christ, do we not have a boast in ourselves? Yes, we might proclaim "Jesus saved me," but it is based on us figuring it all out on our own and making the decision according to our own will. Simply making the claim that "I made a decision for Christ" is a boast. Does not "our decision" become a work of "our" faith; something of which we can boast? In other words, we have a boast that by our *free will* we made a right choice for God. After all, we tragically and even arrogantly think we are not like the billions of others who, based on their *free will*, refuse to believe in Jesus.

We might have walked the aisle or knelt at the altar or heard a preacher or simply cried out to God when we were saved so that we knew it within our heart, but where do we think the grace through faith came from in the first place that led us to God and His Son? If we were in ignorance and in unbelief one moment and bowing the knee to Jesus in the next moment, then what precipitated this change in our life? What removed our blindness and opened our eyes? Do we honestly think that we did it? Can we take any credit for bowing the knee, as if it were our work? Where is our boast, if not in God alone?

Where I believe many go off the rail doctrinally is in their denial that God's will trumps man's will when it comes to salvation. Again, they have bought into the lie of humanism in which man gets the credit. Their boast becomes their decision for Christ.

Without a mighty external influence, none of us would ever be saved! It matters not if we have *humanistic free will* or *affected free will* and how we define these terms; the fact of the matter is that the will of God is supreme when it comes to His creation.

I apologize for the repetition, but we must see that the issue is not about our will, free or otherwise; it is about God who wills and whether His will can and does overcome man's will to save him. God does not wish it or merely desire it as if it might not happen; He not only wills it to happen but also makes it happen to His glory.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-4 DRB)

If you still have some doubts, then consider some other points.

### **As You Will**

When people are first saved, they are often told that they must obey the Lord; and this comes by reading His word, knowing His will for them, and obeying what He speaks to their hearts to do. They might even be told that in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus cried out to His Father, "*Yet not as I will, but as You will*" (Matthew 26:39), and that this is to be their prayer as well.

Those of us who have gone on with the Lord for a few years can testify that knowing and doing the will of God is not as easy as it seems. After all, even Jesus was in distress as He prayed to His Father, contemplating the sin that He was to bear and the cross that He faced. Doing the will of God is often taking up our cross (Matthew 16:24), and this is not an easy thing to do, for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38).

Now, this poses a question: If for believers, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, then how does an unbeliever, whose spirit is dead to God and whose flesh is in control, exert his or her will to believe in Jesus? Stated another way: If believers face challenges to do the will of God and they have an earnest of the spirit of God (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14), then how do unbelievers break through these same barriers on their own without the spirit of God? The answer is that unbelievers cannot break through, for they have no means within them to do so; their flesh is in control, and the flesh profits nothing (John 6:63).

Simply, doing the will of God that leads to salvation is impossible for an unbeliever. Sinners need the grace of God and the faith of Jesus (His faith) to break through the barrier of unbelief, and this requires the holy spirit to move upon their hearts of unbelief. We all start from this same point, whether we are 4 or 80 years old when Jesus breaks into our life.

As Christians, let us hold to the worldview of a personal God, the creator of all things, who is the supreme and sovereign over the affairs of His creation. God Himself is responsible for His creation, including mankind. Let us shun anything and everything that comes forth from the "material-energy, chance concept of reality," including anything that has its roots in *humanism*.

When we were ignorant and in unbelief, by His grace, God broke into our lives and saved us by giving us the faith of the Son of God!

Let us not be persuaded by a worldview that robs God of His glory. We do not live by pure chance, but by the loving care of a personal God, the creator of all things, who speaks to men and declares His way for mankind.

"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:24-31 NASB)

Notice that God alone arranges the appointed times and boundaries for His human race. Why? So that we would seek God! In other words, God arranges things so that we will seek after Him. God is the one who pursues mankind. What proof has God provided us? He raised Jesus, the Son of God, from the dead. The creator God is the God of the living, and by His grace, love, and faith manifested through His Son, He alone gives life. This gift is not dependent on man's will but on God who wills that all of us with two legs and two arms be saved. Give God all the glory, and let your boast be in the Lord.

Let us be encouraged that He overlooked the times of ignorance and has overlooked our ignorance and unbelief. Yet the grace of our Lord overwhelms!

### **God's Choice**

If God's will trumps man's will, then why doesn't He simply save everyone at the same time or at some specified age? Why is it that He wills not to save some during their journey in mortal

bodies? Doesn't this mean that they are lost forever if they die without believing? To answer these questions, we again need to turn to Paul, for he offers the clearest answer.

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." (Romans 9:10-13 NASB)

Two brothers came out of the same womb minutes apart, but according to God's will, one was chosen and the other was not. Notice that while still in the womb, having done no works, either good or bad, the Lord chose one brother over the other. It was God's choice according to His purpose. He even reversed the order of birth and gave the birthright of the firstborn son to the younger brother. He applied the law of the second by taking away the first in order to establish the second (Hebrews 10:9).

God loved Jacob but hated Esau. This might seem out of character for God who is love, until we realize that *hated* simply means that God loved Esau less or rather showered less blessing on him than his brother. It was His purpose to bestow on Jacob special favor because He chose him to be central in His plan. There was a blessing on Esau; it just wasn't the greater blessing that was part of God's plan for Israel. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come (Hebrews 11:20 NASB).

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." (Romans 9:14-15 NASB)

Paul brings the whole matter into sharp focus. He knew the charge against God that He is unfair and unjust. Paul is emphatic; there is no injustice in God. God will have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy.

So, then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. (Romans 9:16 NASB)

This one verse refutes every argument in favor of *free will*. Everything depends on the God who has mercy and not on man's will. It is hard to imagine how anyone who claims to know the word of God can preach that *free will* enters into salvation, based on this one verse.

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." So, then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. (Romans 9:17-18 NASB)

Here Paul injects the Exodus account of God hardening the heart of Pharaoh. It was God's purpose to harden his heart in order not only to demonstrate His power but to reveal His

purpose, namely, that His name might be proclaimed to all the nations of the whole earth. Thus, Pharaoh was caught up in God's plan, and it was necessary that He harden his heart.

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" (Romans 9:19 NASB)

Again, Paul knew the charge made against God who, at times, seems to place blame on people. But who resists the will of God? Herein lies the point of this article. God's will trumps man's will. When God moves upon a heart to move it a certain way, no one can resist His will. After all, He is the sovereign of His creation. Should He not be able to do as He plans to accomplish His purpose for His image bearers, as well as all of creation?

On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? (Romans 9:20-21 NASB)

Does the created answer back to its creator, accusing its creator of being unfair and unjust? Paul drew his analogy from Isaiah and Jeremiah the prophets.

You turn things around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, that what is made would say to its maker, "He did not make me"; or what is formed say to him who formed it, "He has no understanding"? (Isaiah 29:16 NASB)

Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so, he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 18:3-6 NASB)

Just as the Lord has the right to raise up and tear down nations, so does He have the right to choose one man for an honorable use and another for common use. Paul again draws upon this concept in his letter to Timothy.

Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. (2 Timothy 2:20 NASB)

Again, this all comes down to the fact that it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

I have no doubt that some of what Paul taught and supported through the words of the prophets might bother some people, especially those who hold to the flawed doctrines of *free will* and *hell*. After all, it seems to go against man's freedom to choose to go to heaven or go to hell. To others, it still might seem unfair, especially for those who see billions upon billions being cast alive into and remaining alive in a literal fire of hell for eternity.

The problem with so much teaching along this line is a failure to recognize that God wills (intends) to save everyone born of Adam's race. All are destined for immortality through the Son of God, but all are not destined for it at the same time or in the same age or even in the same way.

And for the critics—Is there judgment? Yes! Is faith required? Yes! Jesus's faith, who is the author and finisher (perfecter) of faith. Does one have to believe in God's Son, Jesus? Yes! The spirit of the Lord gives His faith for one to believe. How? But God, all through Christ!

### **Absolute Success of the Cross**

It all boils down to one question: Do you believe that the cross was/is an absolute success in saving all mankind? I use the word *absolute* in its fullest sense.

I imagine that most would answer, yes, but with the condition attached that it is so only for those who exercise their *free will* and believe. What they really are saying is that the cross *potentially* saved all mankind, but not *absolutely*. I find it fascinating how close some pastor-teachers come to the truth of the absolute success of the cross without arriving at its rightful conclusion in regards to the salvation of all. Many will rightly declare that Adam's one sin brought all into death and its companion sin, and that none of us has a choice in the matter; and yet, when it comes to the last Adam's one act of righteousness on the cross, very few will benefit from it because each individual has a choice in the matter and most will fail to make the right choice. Further, most, if not all, agree with Paul that love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8), and yet, they deny this truth by believing that the love of God will fail to reach the heart of everyone born of Adam's race.

How could Paul state that love never fails? He could because he knew that the love of God manifested through the cross was an absolute, 100% success in undoing what the first Adam brought upon his race.

Now, Adam successfully caused death and sin to enter into all mankind. *In Adam all die* (1 Corinthians 15:22). There is no exception for any born of Adam's race, which means all of us humans. In other words, Adam's one transgression was an absolute success in bringing death and sin unto all, and those born of Adam's race have no choice in the matter. All born on earth through a woman must die. Most every student of scripture would have to agree that this is true. In fact, even the unbeliever would have to agree that all die, for it is an indisputable fact that all die, and we have a countless number of graves in the earth to prove it.

However, when it comes to Christ's one act of righteousness, many believers hold an entirely different view. They see Christ's one act of righteousness *potentially* leading to life for all, but not all will attain to it, because it is *only possible if* one believes of his own volition (*free will*). Accordingly, mankind has a choice in the matter, and unfortunately, most will not make the choice while in mortal bodies, so they will die in their sin and remain lost, rotting in hell forever.

Is there something odd about this reasoning? Mankind has no choice in the matter of death and sin, but now must make a choice in the matter of life. Mankind had no *free will* in becoming a sinner and, ultimately, facing death, but now has a *free will* to determine his destiny in heaven or hell.

Does this make any sense to you? Isn't it rather strange that billions upon billions of people who had the spirit of life breathed into them made a *free-will* choice to die and rejected God's promise of life? Why is it that the majority (not the minority) of mankind has chosen, according to their own *free will*, not to go the way of life? Isn't it far more logical that if man's *free will* were operative in the matter of salvation, that most of mankind would choose immortality? After all, most of mankind seems to fear death. When we fear something, we generally desire to stay away from that thing. Think about it!

Consider this question: Why is Adam's one transgression more successful (in a bad sense) than Christ's one righteous act (in a good sense)? Has God ultimately failed? Is God not able to save all mankind? Did He make the ultimate sacrifice knowing that billions of His creatures, made to be perfected into His own image, are going to be cast into a fiery lake to be tortured forever and ever and ever?

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. (Romans 5:18 NASB)

Could Paul have made the universal salvation or restoration of all any clearer than this? All men! Life for all men!

For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ all will be made alive**. (1 Corinthians 15:22 NASB)

Do you see any exception in this? *All* is an inclusive word, meaning everyone, not some or most but all. All made alive in the Messiah!

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that **one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all**, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NASB)

Don't let what you have been taught about *free will* get in the way; throw out the concept and follow Paul's logic. Christ died, and when He died, He took the whole of the human race with Him into the grave; therefore, all died, no exceptions.

Now, if Christ took everyone into the grave, how will anyone get out of death? They are dead! How can they exercise *free will* to get out? If God is responsible for bringing all into death, then isn't He responsible for getting all out as well? There is only one way, and it is through the one who was raised from among the dead—on behalf of all the dead, that is, all humans. This is the glory of the cross of Christ and His blood shed for the sin of the world.

Some might read into the phrase "they who live" as referring only to believers, but the context does not support this conclusion. All died, not by their own choice or *free will* but by God's doing; therefore, it is up to God to get them out of death, not by man exercising his *free will*, but by God who wills. *They who live* refers to all of humanity that will eventually, but not all at the same time, live for Him who died and rose on the behalf of all.

Add to all of this Paul's word on reconciliation, and all remaining doubt must vanish.

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Colossians 1:19-20 NASB)

Notice how Paul carries reconciliation beyond man and earth to all things in heaven as well. The success of the blood of His cross is all-inclusive and universal. This answers the question of why God chooses some over others during the ages, and why He hardens hearts, and why He molds some as vessels of honor and others as vessels of dishonor or common use. It is because each has a part to play in His plan, and ultimately, when all is said and done, God will settle all accounts with each and every one in a fair and just way as He saves them all into immortality through His Son so that He may be all in all.

Paul makes it abundantly clear that all are actually on the same footing when it comes to salvation. There is none righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10), and all are locked up in stubbornness or disobedience.

For God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all. (Romans 11:32 CLV)

Paul places all of us, believer and unbeliever alike, on the same level playing field before God. God is going to shower His mercy on all because He has shut up or locked up all. Whom do you want to exclude from this all? Are we to conclude that it is His will that there are exceptions to His *all*? If it is true, then we must conclude that God will fail to achieve His purpose, and the cross was not able to undo all that Adam did. Without doubt, some will argue that it is man's failure, not God's. But this cannot be so, for if man fails to reach God's end, it is God who fails, not man. Man did not establish God's purpose; God did! Man was nowhere to be found before the ages of time when God set His purpose and plan according to the counsel of His will.

### **But of God**

We need to be abundantly clear that if God did not, does not, and will not exercise His will on behalf of man, then man will be forever locked in death and never find his way into immortality. Thank God; it is not left up to man's so-called *free will*.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13 NASB)

Some might read into this that one must first make a choice for Christ before they become a child of God, but this is not what John wrote. Do those who believe in His name become children born of God because they are born of a certain bloodline or ancestry? No! Do they become children of God because they exercise their will, as in the will of man or *free will*? No! Then how do they become children born of God? But of God! It comes from God Himself, not from the will of man,

free or affected. Simply, God acts in favor of man, even when he is dead in his transgressions (Romans 5:6-8; Ephesians 2:5).

Man is helpless in his sin, so why do we make man a hero in his own salvation, as if he can save himself by exercising his so-called *free will*? God the creator alone is responsible for His creation, and He has taken on the full responsibility to save all of His creation through His Son.

Before closing this out, I have a question for you. As I finish this article, I just heard a teaching on the gospel that went like this: Only the holy spirit saves, but man has to exercise free will (choice) to be saved. After reading what I have written, do you see something odd about this? If you do, then congratulations. However, in case you miss the point—this teaching wants to have it both ways—but, in the end, it keeps man at the center of his universe, not God.

We need to continually be reminded that it is God's will that is being worked out in the ages [eons], not man's will, and that God will accomplish all that He wills through and for His Son. In Christ all will be made alive! All things come forth through God.

There is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (1 Corinthians 8:6 NASB)

We need to stop holding to a small, impotent god created in our own image and embrace the God of *all* who will be *all* in all. Paul sums up the whole matter and makes it clear that God is all in all.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. (Romans 11:36 NASB)

Who or what is left out of this glorious truth? Nothing! God encompasses all things, and at the consummation of the eons, He will be all in all when He has completed making all things new (1 Corinthians 15:28; Revelation 21:5).

Then, a new journey begins for God's new creation!

To Him be the glory forever. Amen.