

ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him the plan for the fullness of the times

**TO HEAD UP THE ALL THINGS IN THE CHRIST,
the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him...**

(Ephesians 1:8b-10)

By – Stuart H. Pouliot

Article #56

Man's [Free] Will vs. God's Will

June 2013

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. All of this in spite of the fact (yes, a fact) that ***there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God*** (Romans 3:10-11). These facts pretty well sum up the plight of all mankind, which leads to the purpose of this article and that is to prove that man's free will is really not the main issue; God's will is.

So, let us begin with the will.

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.

There is no challenge to 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, is this concept relevant when it comes to individual salvation or, for that matter, "doing something for God," as if it all depends on *free will*? So that you know where this discussion is going, the answer is no.

It is proposed that the term *free will* is a deceptive term that should not be included in the doctrine of salvation or even working out God's plan for the ages. 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, it is proposed that 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 as *free will*.

Some, actually many, believe that free will is a biblical concept, but where in scripture do we find the term applied to anything of God. Under Moses there was a free-will offering, but this was a voluntary offering in contrast to a mandatory one required under the Law.

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 most might agree that it is not, then it would be incorrect, for the exercise of one's will often has a cost attached to it. 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 CV). 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.

There are two possible views or explanations of *free will*. It is proposed that only one view can rightly be labeled free. However, in actuality, there is no such thing as *free will*. This is explained 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 and do come into play in the exercise of one's will. Man acts based on his 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 man alone makes the final decision as to what action or inaction he 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* – the will exercised apart from external influence.

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.

It is commonly taught that man is a **free-will moral agent**. As the thinking goes, God did not create man to be a robot. Obviously, He didn't create robots, for man was created in the image of God. Isn't it rather strange that Jesus, the Son of God and Creator of all things, only did His Father's will; He came not to do His will but the Father's will? Did this make Him a robot while He walked on this earth about 2,000 years ago? If His life on earth was a life of a robot for God then sign me up!

You see, Christians have come up with all sorts of terms and so-called explanations (doctrines?) they call truth, and yet, these things defy logic, especially the logic of the very word of God (i.e., scripture) that they seem to worship from the pulpit.

The question is this: Did God create man to be an independent god unto himself? Many, if not most, mainline 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 or a free-will moral agent. If you hold this view, then your 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.

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

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).

At any rate, 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**.

As a side note, the word *absolute* is 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!*

Think about it; only God is truly absolute in all things. He alone has free will, for there is no one beyond Him. As far as we know, there is no source of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding beyond God. Given this, His will is truly absolute.

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) mean that they (I) came to a conclusion on the matter without reference to anything else?

The spirit of humanism, which is **the spirit of the world** that Paul and John warned against (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 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).

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 higher than himself. Only a god is truly absolute in all things and has free will as defined earlier.

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 deny it.

The problem is that the material-energy worldview and its offspring, humanism, are so pervasive today that it has infiltrated into much Christian thinking and teaching, if not in whole, at least in the majority. 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. It is as if logic is checked at the door and not to be applied.

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.

In summary, it appears that *humanistic free will*, or, perhaps, simply *humanistic 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*** (writer's term). The adjective ***affected*** is used because it means **"influenced, acted upon."** However, it is proposed 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*. Once external influences come to bear on the will, the exercise of the will is no longer entirely free, for now restrictions 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 *devil* 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, Adam actually had little to no 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 this or doubt it, then you are challenged to read Ephesians 5:22-33 in light of Genesis 2-3 and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth.

Back to the question: 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 Adam stood in the garden, he weighed the options as presented by God and the crooked old serpent and decided to eat the forbidden fruit. His 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. We cannot drive a car legally unless we are of age and have a driver's license. We cannot own a car and drive it legally unless we have insurance, pay taxes, and have it inspected once a year. We might choose not to do any of these things, but then we would be a lawbreaker and eventually our actions would lead to trouble. Thus, as a citizen of the US, we do not have freedom of the will to do anything we 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.

Now, when it comes to the things of God, especially of salvation and His ultimate purpose achieved through His foreordained plan, man's will is not the deciding factor or even the major factor, contrary to what many Christians are taught from the pulpits and intake as spiritual junk food. Consider two sets of verses.

(12) 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, (13) 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)

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)

Meditate on the significance of these words that are summed up with two words: ***But God!***

No Such Thing

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

Wouldn't a rational logical thinking person conclude that there is no such thing as our will being exercised free and clear of any and all external input or restriction? We should hope so. It matters not if we are a humanist or a *free-willer*. 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 will*, as defined, 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 to exercise their will, and as convinced as they might be of their freedom, ultimately God will prevail upon their will to their good and to His glory.

Consider what Paul had to say about God's influence.

(18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (19) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. (20) For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without

excuse. (21) For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (22) Professing to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:18-23 NASB)

On the other hand, as much as others 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, perhaps it is time to throw out the term *free will*. If we need to attach an adjective to the word *will*, then it should be the word *affected*. **We have *affected will*, not *free will*.**

Rational Choice Theory

Even the humanists who try to ignore the influence of God on their lives know that man's will is on the order of *affected will*. This is clearly seen in a concept (theory?) developed by the Rand Corporation, a California-based think tank, called the *Rational Choice Theory*. According to this theory, people must perform a cost-benefit analysis when making a choice. Essentially, we are told that we must balance the cost of our actions against the benefit of those actions in order to achieve a result that maximizes our personal advantage. Under this theory, the end justifies the means. Further, if one wants to succeed, moral consciousness must be left out of the equation. The result of the *Rational Choice Theory* is self-centered, self-indulged, self-serving individuals who seek for only what is best for them. When a country is pushed in this direction, it creates a culture of selfishness. Obviously, there is evilness behind such a theory, and, in large measure, this theory has been played out (implemented) in the American modern-day culture by a people who in all likelihood could be labeled *humanists*. However, the point is that even humanists recognize the nature of affected will. Unfortunately, they have found a way to manipulate the affected will of the masses in order to achieve a result that is rather evil.

This may seem like a bit of a diversion; but, is it a diversion if it speaks of the spirit of the world that has overtaken our culture in this day?

Well, let us return to the heart of the matter.

Danger of Free Will

When it comes to salvation, there is a real danger to the whole concept of *free will* because 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 an exception must be made when it comes to *free-will* Baptists. Besides, generally speaking, it is so commonly known that Baptists believe in *free will* that this is not divulging some big secret or trying to malign our fellow brethren. Perhaps, some reading this might be helped.

A Baptist pastor who preached *free will* and a literal, *fiery hell* one day announced to his congregation that one of their 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. By the expression on his face, it was obvious that this bothered the pastor, and it seemed that he had no answer as 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. 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.

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!**"?

Add to this the fear of going to hell to be tortured forever and ever if you do not accept Christ, and you have a mighty powerful force tugging on you to walk the aisle that can also produce 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 his experience. After all, the man was at the center of "making a decision for Christ," and he 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.

Could it be that *humanism* is at the center of *free-will* Baptist preaching "to get people saved"? Perhaps, some might 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 devil). 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 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 will* is an erroneous teaching that is part of the **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 CV)? *Humanistic [free] will* is much like the modern-day view of *hell* that comes straight out of paganism.

Whose Will Saves?

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?

In other words, 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? If many (by some counts, 50 billion since Adam) never exercised their so-called *free will* to believe or were incapable of exercising 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? It is a sad commentary on our day that many would answer "yes" to this question.

(3) For this is right and acceptable before God our Saviour, (4) who doth will all men to be saved, and to come to the full knowledge of the truth; (5) for one is God, one also is mediator of God and of men, the man Christ Jesus, (6) who did give himself a ransom for all—the testimony in its own times.... (1 Timothy 2:3-6 YLT)

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 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?

Again, some will say that God does not want robots, so He will not interfere under any condition with our will in the matter of salvation. Yet, 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, again, 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 CV)

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 who is a great 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. Paul did not apprehend Christ on that dusty road; rather, he was out to destroy Christ. 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.

(12) I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, (13) 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; (14) 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. Even worse, Paul never knew that it was a stumbling block until the Lord Jesus met him and blinded him on that dusty road.

But what overcame Paul's ignorance and unbelief? Was it Paul's will that all of a sudden decided 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 which are found 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, 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? Definitely 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.

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

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. Take note that this apprehension was set in the womb. We will come back to this thought.

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!

(8) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; (9) 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? Of course, we do; at least, we think we do. 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 and becomes a work. No man is saved by works!

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 to even lead 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? After all, according to Paul, none seek for God. If none seek for God, which includes you and me and Adam's entire race, then how does anyone turn to Christ? 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 many go off the rail 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.

Sorry 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.

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

In the Womb

As quoted already, Paul testified that he was first set apart in his mother's womb and, then later, was called through His grace. King David had a similar testimony: **Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother's womb** (Psalm 22:10 NASB).

A strong case could and should be made that the moment of salvation occurred for all us prior to our coming forth from the womb. In fact, it appears that it occurred before the very foundation of the world. Salvation is simply coming into a knowledge of what He has already done, is doing, and will continue to do in our lives and for all mankind until He is truly **All in All**. **God wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth** (1 Timothy 2:4).

In other words, salvation is not a moment in time that we mark on our calendar. Could we not say that the moment of salvation is really the moment we come into the knowledge of what God has already done. Our eyes are opened to see God's plan and purpose that was set into motion at the inception of creation itself and that includes us. Salvation starts with God who foreordained it for all mankind before He even set forth creation itself. **BUT GOD!**

Consider what Peter declared at Pentecost.

(22) "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—(23) this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (24) "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. (Acts 2:22-24 NASB)

Jesus was delivered over to the cross by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. If the death and resurrection of the Son of God, the Creator of all things, was a planned event in the history of mankind, does it not follow that our very salvation was predetermined or planned at the same time that God laid out His ultimate purpose of all and His plan to achieve His purpose? It's a package deal!

By the way, the cross ended the Old Covenant that was based on man trying to be obedient, that is, trying to conform to the will of God. We know how that ended; a total failure, at least on man's side, but not on God's side, for it achieved His objective of proving that works cannot save man and that the Law convicts man of sin and never delivers him out of it. The resurrection of Christ ushered in the New Covenant based on the will of God and His ability to work in us, a work that man is incapable of doing on his own. In other words, the New Covenant proclaims that God is doing what man is not able to do, that is, to save himself from sin and death.

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

As You Will

When people are first saved, they are often told by some pastors 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 sounds. After all, even Jesus was in distress as He prayed to His Father, contemplating the sin that He was to bear (not commit) 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.

(24) "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; (25) 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; (26) 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, (27) 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; (28) for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' (29) 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. (30) Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, (31) 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 mankind. Why? So that men would seek God! In other words, God arranges things so that mankind will seek after Him. God is the one who pursues mankind. What proof has God provided mankind? 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 mankind 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 Wills

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.

(10) And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; (11) 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, (12) it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." (13) 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 plan 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).

Some make the argument that God knew Esau's heart and foreknew what he would do. This argument could be made for every single person of Adam's race. Of course, God knows the end from the beginning. However, this begs the question of why didn't God, who knew (knows) what (is) was coming, both individually and nationally, act to turn things around or change the course of events. Most seem to bring the answer right back to the whole matter of free will;

God doesn't want robots. Hopefully, after reading this far, the reader understands the counter argument to free will.

Frankly, free will is the Christian's way of denying God His rightful Sovereignty over His creation and of protecting Him, as if this were possible on man's end, from the charge of injustice. But, consider Paul's answer to the charge of injustice.

(14) What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! (15) 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. How could He choose one brother over the other while in the womb and then hate the one He did not choose? Paul is emphatic; there is no injustice in God. God will have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy. Notice that Paul, nor anyone else in scripture, made the specious case for free will.

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.

(17) 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." (18) 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 God 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 lays the point. 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 mankind, as well as all creation?

(20) 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? (21) 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)

(3) Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. (4) 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. (5) Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, (6) "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 He has 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.**

No doubt, some of what Paul taught and supported through the words of the prophets might bother some people, especially those who hold to the doctrines of *free will* and *hell*. After all, it seems to go against man's freedom to choose to go to heaven or to 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 on this matter is a failure to recognize that God wills (intends) to save everyone born of Adam's race, without exception. 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. But all must come through His Son! Paul clearly lays this truth out in Romans 5, especially where he proclaims: **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). According to Paul's gospel, if all men are condemned, then all men must be justified. ALL!

Some believers will come into it at the end of our present age through the **first resurrection** (Revelation 20:5b). Other believers will come into it at the end of the **Kingdom Age** through the **second resurrection** (Revelation 20:5a; 11-15); **saved, yet so as through fire** (1 Corinthians 3:15), that is, the fiery law of God.

Finally, the unbelievers raised up in the second resurrection will come into it through the judgment of God's righteous fiery law, the **lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death**, a death of their unrighteous works or deeds (Revelation 20:12; 21:8) that will lead to their full restoration by the **consummation of the ages**.

Salvation vs. Election

The problem, and it is a problem, with so many Christians is that they cannot see beyond initial salvation or justification by faith, as if everything or every matter relating to man and God is based on man somehow applying his free will to get himself saved. The result is that, when many come to the account of Jacob and Esau, they see Jacob as saved and Esau as lost in the usual evangelical way. But the selection of one over the other has nothing to do with their ultimate salvation. Both Jacob and Esau are included in the justification of life to all men. The difference is that Jacob was chosen or, if you will, elected for a special purpose of God and Esau was not. In the end, God will be just with Esau just as He will be with Jacob, as well as with every single person born of the human race, none excluded.

This very problem is seen in the great theological argument between Arminius and Calvin. They argued over justification by faith and the source of this faith. Was faith purely a gift from God or was it purely from man's free will? So, their argument was over initial salvation and not so much on saved verses elected. Actually, election was seen as synonymous with salvation.

Arminius believed that man made his own choice regarding salvation; that is, he argued in favor of free will. According to this school of thought, the sovereignty of God may be acknowledged but with limitations, as if God's sovereignty is potential but not necessarily absolute. In other words, God will exercise His sovereignty (or, His will) in limited ways, leaving most things to man's free will. Another way of stating this is that He will break into history when He sees fit to do so, but He doesn't shape or form history.

Calvin believed that in His total sovereignty, God chose some for salvation and relegated the rest (a vast multitude) to be tortured forever and ever and ever in what most call *hell*, where they are toasted in fire and eaten by worms as their flesh seems to regenerate itself without end. By the way, did you know that there was an ancient pagan myth that presented this very scenario? Some mythical figure was tortured by a bird that would come and eat his liver every day and leave. While the bird was gone, the mythical figure's liver would grow back so that the bird would be able to torture him the next day. Sound familiar?

Again, both men argued over salvation and faith, and neither held the truth that Paul presents in his epistles that God intends (not wishes or hopes) to save all men. However, there is an outcome to this argument that weighs upon the matter of God's justice.

If we take Calvin's view, then God is portrayed as an unjust God. After all, how could He choose some and cast the rest into a torture chamber? This seems so cruel and unjust. How does one justify God's action according to this school of thought? Perhaps, one doesn't justify His actions. He is totally sovereign in what He does; if this is what He has chosen to do, then so be it; who can argue with Him. However, the outcome is an angry God as evidenced by such horrid

preaching as *a sinner in the hands of an angry God* by Jonathan Edwards. Did you know that some people committed suicide after listening to him preach? Why? They were given no hope. The casualty of such preaching is the truth of the love of God. *God is love* trumps everything.

The counter to (or, outcome of) Calvin's theology is free will. For many, it is unimaginable that God would choose some for eternal life and most for an eternal fiery hell. As the thinking goes, we cannot hold God responsible for hell, so it must be man's free will that puts him there, not God's will. Most Christians probably would acknowledge that God is the Sovereign of His creation, but they cannot fathom the thought of Him being responsible for hell, so man is the one who creates his own hell all in accord with his free will. In other words, most acknowledge God's responsibility for His creation but only up to a point. Only in this way is God's justice upheld. After all, if some responsibility is placed on man, then God is off the hook, so to speak.

But, then enters the question of what about the savage on an island who has never heard the gospel and never been afforded the opportunity to exercise his free will? Where is the justice in this if he ends up in an eternal torture chamber? Of course, this leads to all sorts of unbiblical excuses (answers) as well as the so-called biblical answer of Romans 1:18-21. However, being given an inner witness that they ignored or rejected does not mean (or, say) God does not save them in the end; this is simply assumed in order to hold together a false theology. As a reminder, Paul built the case for the salvation of all and brought it to a head in Romans 5.

The issue of the justice of God is resolved, at least to a major degree, if free will and the modern-day version of an eternal hell are discarded to the winds of tradition and the salvation of all is embraced as the truth of God. God is the Absolute Sovereign of His creation, and He has set into motion a plan that will save all mankind in the end; no one will be lost by the consummation of the ages, and no one will be tortured in a literal eternal fire; judged by His fiery law, yes; tortured by fire and worms, no!

Now, here is the issue regarding salvation and election. All are destined to be saved but some are destined to be the elect in their generation. Election is more than initial salvation. It is the same as the difference between an overcomer and a non-overcomer; both are saved but one is chosen over the other. The method by which God will bring salvation to all is discovered in the election of some who are destined to bring the rest of humanity into salvation (not save them but lead them). God's chosen ones are to be a blessing to all the nations and families of the earth. Consider the covenant made with Abraham; God chose one man to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3). The blessings are for all, none excluded, but one man was chosen to bring those blessings to all. If we are called and chosen in our generation, it is because we are to be a blessing to all. In the next age, the called and chosen will be a great blessing to all the nations and families on earth as they manifest the glory of God until it fills the whole earth.

(8) And the Scripture, having foreseen that God would justify the nations by faith, previously announced glad tidings to Abraham, that "In thee shall All the nations be blessed." (9) Those of faith, therefore, are blessed with believing Abraham. (Galatians 3:8-9 WED)

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? The word *absolute* is used in its fullest sense. Probably, 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*.

It is 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 mankind.

A very well-known pastor in some circles of the ecclesia of God stated that God is the God of second chances. When I heard this, my ears perked up. Of course, he was referring to second chances for believers. But when I heard it, it was as if the Holy Spirit was speaking God's heart through him to God's people. I heard the word *ALL*. Perhaps, the Holy Spirit is laying the groundwork in this brother's heart to come into the light of the salvation of all. As he continued on, I heard nothing specific that indicated he had come to this revelation. Along the way, he did mention *hell* without any elaboration. However, later, he really got my attention when he stated that *all* men (mankind) are created in God's image and *all* are given gifts, and as such, *all* are to be honored. This is a most profound statement; one that we would expect out of someone who holds to the absolute success of the cross and the salvation of all; however, he never indicated that this is the extent of his beliefs.

Many will rightly declare that Adam's one sin brought all mankind 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, which, in the first place, was all in accord with the plan of God.

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 mankind. In other words, Adam's one transgression was an absolute success in bringing death and sin unto all mankind, and those born of Adam's race have no choice in the matter. All born of man 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*). In other words, 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? To repeat...

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 more clear 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.

(14) For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; (15) 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 mankind into death, then isn't He responsible for getting them 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 mankind. This is the glory of the cross of Christ and His blood that was 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. The phrase *they who live* refers to all mankind 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.

(19) For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, (20) 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 brings 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 CV)

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*. Again, we read...

(12) 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, (13) 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 he becomes 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 mankind through His Son. We need to be continually reminded that it is God's will that is being worked out in the ages, not man's will, and that God will accomplish all that He wills through 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 new. Further, we need to stop boasting in ourselves or encouraging others to boast in themselves when it comes to our so-called salvation. Perhaps, just perhaps, if we moved off of this ground, we would begin to praise God for His glorious plan to save all mankind, *eventually*. Just imagine the power of the gospel that would go forth based on the pure love of God and not on some fear of a fictitious pagan place called *hell*.

He who is boasting—in the Lord let him boast!

When my eyes were opened to this truth, I began to look at others, especially the lost, with a whole new set of eyes, for I began to see that God truly loves the world and intends to save all the world, none excluded. I began to share and manifest God's love to others without my heart secretly condemning them.

Paul sums up the whole matter and makes it clear that God will be all in all because He 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, for 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).

Conclusion

Today, without stating so directly, many actually believe that man's will is either stronger, better, or greater than God's will, or, perhaps, man's will is on an equal par with God's will. Either way, the whole concept of free will as taught in most Christian circles places the emphasis on man and his will and not on God and His will.

Isn't it time to abandon the traditions of men and seek for the very heart of **God is love**? Isn't it time to humble ourselves before Almighty God and repent over our arrogance and pride that says our will is able to save us? Isn't it time to stop condemning most of humanity in a pagan hell and see God's value in and love for every single human that has ever stood on this glorious earth?

I leave you with a quote from the *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament* by A.E. Knoch (Concordant Publishing Concern 1968).

"God's will for all mankind will not be fulfilled until the consummation. 1 Corinthians 15:24. Only those who believe receive eonian salvation now. Those who acknowledge that God is greater than man, and that His will is more powerful than man's will, believe and exalt in the final salvation of all mankind."

Let us exalt!

To Him be the glory forever. Amen.