

# THE FREE WILL OF MANKIND

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## I. INTRODUCTION.

### A. Why Do We Do What We Do?

1. “Determinism” – all that we do is determined by God alone before we do it (Calvinism).
2. “Indeterminism” – all that we do happens by chance or fate (Paganism).
3. “Self-determinism” – all that we do, we alone choose to do (Humanism).
4. Bible truth – all that we do is governed by God’s will and man’s will.

### B. What Is God’s Will?

1. Decreed will (Rev. 4:11) – mankind has no choice.
2. Revealed will (Mt. 7:21) – mankind has a choice.
3. Permitted will (1 Cor. 16:7; Jas. 4:15) – mankind has a choice.

## II. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FREE WILL ISSUE.

### A. Augustine and Pelagius.

1. Augustine, a bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa (A.D. 354-430), influenced by Gnosticism, believed that mankind after the Fall (Gen. 3) was totally depraved and could not exercise his free will. He also believed that Adam’s descendants are all born with a sinful, depraved nature (“original sin” or “total depravity”). Man cannot use his free will and choose to be saved. Only God’s elect can be saved and by God’s grace alone.
2. Pelagius, a British monk (c. A.D. 400), came to Rome to meet Augustine and debate this issue. Pelagius believed that man’s sins were not inherited from Adam and that each man could exercise his free will to choose right and wrong.
3. Augustine opposed Pelagius and the views of Pelagius were condemned as heresy by the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431). Augustine’s belief in total depravity and the bondage of the will prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church from that time to the present (as witnessed in the practice of sprinkling babies for inherited sin).
4. The modern denominational concept of predestination (God choosing each person to be saved or lost without free will) was developed first by Augustine and then revived and made popular by John Calvin.

B. John Calvin and James Arminius.

1. John Calvin (1509-1564), a French reformer, wrote *The Institutes of Christian Religion* in Geneva, Switzerland, in A.D. 1536. In this work, he set forth his beliefs which later became known as the Five Points of Calvinism: T-U-L-I-P. Calvin followed the teaching of Augustine, that man is totally incapable of doing any good and is not able to receive the gospel without a direct and divine intervention. (Martin Luther [1483-1546], the German reformer, was another major figure at this time that also believed mankind has no free will. He wrote, "The Bondage of Will").
2. Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch reformer, opposed Calvin in 1603 in Holland. Arminius died in 1610, but his followers continued to oppose Calvinism. Calvin and Arminius debated the issue of the predestination of God and the free will of man. Calvin taught that the choice of man to be saved or lost was determined by God's sovereign will alone, by God's free grace and greatness; not conditioned on man's free will. Calvin's understanding of God's sovereignty and greatness led him to believe that God's sovereignty (might, power, control) completely eliminated man's free will to choose. Therefore, salvation and damnation are unconditional.
3. At the Synod of Dort in Holland (1618-1619), Calvinism was exonerated and Arminianism was opposed. "TULIP" was formally taught from this time forward.
4. The five points of Calvinism are T-U-L-I-P: T (total depravity), U (unconditional election and reprobation), L (limited atonement), I (irresistible grace), and P (perseverance of the saints).

C. Calvinism Today.

1. The major denominations that came out of the Protestant Reformation followed Calvinism (Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, etc.). Today, many of the mainline denominations are Calvinistic in their theology. Most commentaries are written by denominationalists who are influenced by Calvinism. The John MacArthur Study Bible is heavily Calvinistic.
2. Some members of churches of Christ have accepted portions of Calvinism.
3. Calvinism and free will.
  - a) Some Calvinists have denied that there is such a thing as "free will." Others believe that man has a free will, but man does not have the power of "contrary choice;" that is, the ability to do something or not to it; or, the ability to act contrary to what God has decreed for them to do.
  - b) Most Calvinists believe that free will is compatible with determinism. They believe free will is "the ability to act voluntarily." In other words, it matters not that God has predetermined all of man's thoughts and

actions, as long as man voluntarily thinks and acts by himself. To Calvinists, choosing what God has already decreed for man is still a choice.

- c) Calvinists say that every act of man has two causes: a primary cause which is God; a secondary cause which is man's own will. But the secondary cause can never act independent from the primary cause.
- d) Most Calvinists will give lip service to the idea of free will, but their free will is not the true free will we find in the Bible.

### **III. FREE WILL IS A PART OF OUR OWN CREATION.**

#### **A. Created in God's Image.**

- 1. We are created in God's "image" (Gen. 1:26-27). This includes free will; the power of choice (note "freely" in Gen. 2:16).
- 2. We differ from other created things in that we make conscious, free choices; we have moral freedom to choose right or wrong, to do good or evil.
- 3. Consider the first couple and family (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:6-8; 4:7).
- 4. Free will was not lost after Adam and Eve sinned as Calvinists teach.

#### **B. God's Revealed Will in the Bible Can Be Accepted or Rejected.**

- 1. God's will accepted (Psa. 119:30).
- 2. God's will rejected (Isa. 65:12; Mt. 23:37; Lk. 7:30; 13:34; Jn. 5:39-40; Acts. 13:46). Note the word "reject" is found many times in scripture (Lev. 26:15, 43-44; Mt. 21:42; 1 Pet. 2:4; etc.)

### **IV. FREE WILL CHOICES HAVE BEEN GIVEN BY GOD.**

#### **A. Free Will Is Offered.**

- 1. Offered by Moses (Deut. 11:26-28; 29:15-20; 30:15, 19).
- 2. Offered by Joshua (Josh. 24:15).
- 3. Offered by Elijah (1 K. 18:21).
- 4. Offered by Solomon (Prov. 1:29; 3:31).
- 5. Offered by Jeremiah (Jer. 21:8).
- 6. Offered by Jesus (Mt. 11:28-30; 23:37; Jn. 7:17; 8:31; Rev. 22:17).
- 7. Offered by Paul (Philemon 14).

#### **B. Salvation is Conditional for All.**

- 1. God's salvation is offered to all mankind.
  - a) God desires all mankind to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).
  - b) God's mercy and grace are extended to all mankind (Rom. 11:32; Tit. 2:11).

- c) God's Son, Jesus, died for all mankind (Lk. 2:10; Jn. 3:16-17; 12:32,33; Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:2).
  - d) God's gospel is for all mankind (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15).
2. God's conditions of salvation are for all mankind: "any one" or "all men" or "all the nations" hear (Mt. 13:19; Mk. 13:10; Lk. 24:47; Eph. 3:9; Jas. 1:23); "whosoever" believes (Jn. 3:15-16; 11:26; 12:46; Rom. 1:5; 16:26; 10:11, 13); "all men" repent (Acts 17:30); "whosoever" confess (Rom. 10:9-11; 1 Jn. 4:15); and, "all men" or "all nations" or "all creation" baptism (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15-16; Jn. 3:26). Why? Because God would have "all men" to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; see also 4:10; Tit. 2:11)!
  3. God gives all mankind the free will to accept or reject salvation.
    - a) Each person chooses whether or not he will meet God's conditions (Isa. 65:12; Mt. 23:37; Rev. 22:17).
    - b) Each person has a role in determining his own destiny (Acts 2:40; Phil. 2:12; 1 Tim. 4:16).
    - c) Each person is treated the same by God (Rom. 2:6-11; Acts 10:34-35).
  4. God can save people and then later allow them to be lost (Ezek. 18:21-28; Jn. 15:1-6; 1 Cor. 9:27; 10:12; Gal. 5:4; Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-29; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Jude 5; Rev. 2:4-5).
- C. God Wants Free Will Service, Not Forced Service (Psa. 32:9).

## **V. CONCLUSION.**

- A. Mankind Is Truly Free – Free to Act on His Own and Freely Accept or Reject the Revealed Will of God.
- B. Your Free Will Choices Are Important.
  1. The choice of belief (obedience) or unbelief (disobedience).
  2. The choice of heaven or hell.
- C. Recognize Your Choice: "What Must I Do to Be Saved?" (Acts 2:37; 16:30; 22:10).
- D. Choose Carefully! Your Choices Will Be Judged by God in the Last Day (Eccl. 12:14; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12-13).