

Genesis, Part 4 Free Will

Both Satan and mankind were created as free moral agents and given the ability to make decisions for themselves. Both chose to sin, and God was fully aware they would do so in eternity past long before they made that choice. To understand that process, we will be taking a brief side-trip into the subject of free will. But first, we need to define and develop a few terms and concepts.

What God Knows.

1 Sam 2:3 ...for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

Job 37:16 Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?

“Perfect” is *tamiym* and means without blemish, complete, full, perfect. This is God's omniscience, and it lacks nothing by way of perception! His omniscience comprehends all things – things past, things present, things future, and includes the possible as well as the actual. It includes what did happen, what will happen, and all the possible alternatives to that all the way into eternity.

God's omniscience knows all: your innermost secrets, your past, your future, as well as what might have been if you would have made choices other than those you did make. This English word is derived from two Latin words: *omnis* meaning “all,” and *sciens* which means “knowing” – “all-knowing.”

God's knowledge is not related to or limited by time. Our knowledge is based on time and we are limited by time, but God's knowledge is superimposed over time. To God, the things of the past are as real as those present, and things future are as real as those past. God sees all His program of events in their unified whole. Omniscience brings everything – past, present, and future before the mind of God with equal reality and clarity.

God's foreknowledge is part of His omniscience. Divine knowledge is simultaneous as opposed to a succession. For God, the knowledge of one thing is not before another. One act of knowledge does not beget another. For man, one thing is before another, one year before another, one act of knowledge before another, one generation of man before another, one is the cause and the other is the effect. In man's mind, there is such a succession, and God knows there will be a succession, but there is no such order in God's knowledge. He knows all these successions by one glance, without any succession of knowledge in Himself. God knew all simultaneously in eternity past. Furthermore, He always knew it. Omniscience is not the ability to acquire knowledge but the actual possession of knowledge.

Part of God's omniscience is His foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is restricted to the actual and excludes the merely possible. *Proginosko* means to know something beforehand. *Pro* is before, in front of, or prior, and *gonosko* means to know. Foreknowledge is far more than just the knowledge of future events - or *preknowledge* of future events. Foreknowledge is that which God Himself proposes to bring to pass. As such, foreknowledge is related to foreordination in that it is part of the divine decree of God.

Remember the word for perfect knowledge, *tamiym*, without blemish, complete, full, perfect. By definition then, God's foreknowledge is far more than just the knowledge of your existence and what you will do with your life. It implies an intimate knowledge of you and your every thought and action. God foreknows the actions of all moral agents. He knows what decisions you will make and what actions will result from those decisions. This does not preclude the free will of man. This divine foreknowledge in and of itself implies no element of necessity or determination, though it does imply certainty. Foreknowledge does not mean that something has to happen, only that it is absolutely certain that it will happen. It is what God proposes to happen, and with that comes an extreme degree of certainty.

Does man (or Satan) have the freedom to act other than as God foreknew he will act? They are indeed capable of electing a different course of that

which was foreknown, but will not do so. If they did, what they did would be that which was foreknown. Divine foreknowledge does not coerce. It merely knows what the choice and action will be. This does not imply that God is acting on pre-known decisions. God does not merely look into the future to see what you will do and decree it to happen as foreseen. That is a violation of the sovereignty of God. God in His sovereignty will decide what will happen as part of His plan, but *He does it without violating your free will*. Yes, even though what decision you make was a sovereign decision of God in eternity past, your free will is still fully functioning. Yet God determines the course of your life – actually decrees it to happen exactly as He foreknew it. Confused????

Middle Knowledge

God's knowledge of you is so intimate and so detailed that He can predict with absolute certainty what your actions will be when faced with any circumstance that might be placed in your path. We call this “Middle Knowledge” – the knowledge of the counterfactuals, what could be or what is merely possible. This is more than just a simple and shallow understanding of what your decisions will be. This is a deep and intimate understanding of your soul and how you react to everything. With His intimate understanding of human nature, God can engineer or manage infinitely complex human circumstances and events to drive individual free-will decisions for Him to arrive at His intended objective exactly as He had purposed.

With this Middle Knowledge, God can decree precisely what will come to pass. The *divine decree* takes what is foreknown as certain and makes it certain. This is important: What God foreknows is absolutely certain to happen, not because He foreknows it, but because he decreed it. God's foreknowledge is simply God's knowledge of His own eternal purpose. It is what God purposes to do. And it is based on His sovereign decisions according to His plan and His intimate understanding of human nature and infinite ability to control events – God's omnipotence.

Summary

- God's omniscience is the knowledge of all things – things past, things present, things future, and includes the possible as well as the actual.

- God's foreknowledge is that part of God's omniscience that deals exclusively with the actual and excludes the merely possible. It is a more limited aspect of His omniscience.
- As a part of His omniscience, God's foreknowledge includes a deep and intimate understanding of how His creation will behave under any given set of circumstances. God's foreknowledge is therefore more than just a superficial foreknowing of future human activity.
- God's foreknowledge is viewed as absolutely certain. And this certainty is a result of human free will making decisions based on circumstances controlled by God that resulted from His intimate understanding of man.
- Man, as a free agent, is free to choose other than what is foreknown, but such a choice would become that which is foreknown by God.
- God's foreknowledge does not make anything certain. It views only that which is certain.
- God makes what is foreknown certain by divine decree.
- Since foreknowledge is what God proposes to bring to pass, it is part of the divine decree. The whole order of events from the smallest detail to the greatest operates under the determining decree of God.
- Foreordination takes what is foreknown and determined and makes it certain. Foreordination then is part of the divine decree. It is related to the saved, the unsaved, and also "all things" (Rom 8:28). Foreordination includes all that will happen concerning a person's life whether he is a believer or an unbeliever. It takes God's foreknowledge and decrees it to happen as foreknown.
- Predestination is that part of foreordination that is related only to the believer and his salvation, sanctification, and ultimate glorification. Nowhere in Scripture is it ever suggested that the unbeliever is predestined to his lost state. It is said all are lost, but some are predestined to election. Predestination means to "mark off" and as such is related conceptually to sanctification, which means to set aside as God's own.

Two Views

We need to consider two theological views that are at the extreme ends of the spectrum:

1. The Armenian view is that God predestinates only what He foreknows.

2. The Extreme Calvinist view contends that God foreknows only because He has first predestinated it.

Attempts to reconcile the order of these two great divine operatives are doomed to failure because they are not independent but interdependent actions of God's will. God can neither predestinate what He does not foreknow nor can He foreknow what He has not predestinated.

Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

This passage clearly states that certain persons are called according to God's purpose and are objects of God's foreknowledge and predestination. It goes on to declare that those thus designated *will* reach the destiny divinely purposed. And God is causing everything to “work together” to that end.

God has a purpose, and he has sovereignly chosen some for that purpose. By implication, others were not so chosen. Those He chose He foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. And those thus chosen will ultimately reach God's divinely decreed destiny. To that end, the chosen ones can safely assume that whatever happens in their lives is part of God's divine plan and serves His divine purpose. Nothing is outside His control, not even those who reject Him. Everything serves His divine purpose and is part of His plan to bring the believer to perfection.

How one can be sovereignly chosen by God and yet at the same time the decision to accept Christ is a free-will decision? Good question. Much of this material comes from a book by Norman Geisler, a Christian apologist. The book is called “Chosen But Free - A Balanced View of Divine Election” and does an excellent job with this subject.

There are three viewpoints we will consider as we continue this fascinating and challenging subject. The first is what we will call “Extreme Calvinism,” sometimes called “Hyper Calvinism”. It is interesting to note that John Calvin was not an extreme Calvinist, which is someone who contends that nothing can be foreknown as certain unless God first makes it certain by predestination.

The second view is that of the Armenians. Armenianism is the theology of the followers of Jacobus (James) Arminius (1560-1609) a Dutch reform theologian. The Armenian view is that God predestinates only what He foreknows. They contend that foreknowledge concerning the elect is based on an understanding by God in eternity past of what man will choose to do in the future. Some Armenians are John Wesley, Charles Wesley, John William Fletcher, and Richard Watson, the Methodists, Pentecostals, Holiness Movement, and the Charismatic Movement.

The third view is what Geisler calls “Moderate Calvinism,” or what we have come to call “Middle Knowledge Calvinism”. It is the view held by such theologians as Louis S. Chafer, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, and other key dispensationalists. Moderate Calvinism strikes a position that is in between Extreme Calvinism and Armenianism. This should not be construed as “fence-sitting,” because Moderate Calvinism is different enough from the two extremes to have its own clear and identifiable theology. We are going to come back and look at the three in more detail, but first, we need to establish some basic Scriptural truths.

Who is in charge?

- God is in charge and is said to be the first cause of all things
- God came before all things
- God created all things
- God upholds all things
- God is above all things
- God knows all things
- God can do all things
- God accomplishes all things
- God rules over all things
- God is in control of all things
- GOD IS IN CHARGE!

If God is in control of everything, then why should we be blamed for anything? God's sovereignty does not eliminate your responsibility! Extreme Calvinism, however, says free choice is simply doing what we desire, but no one ever desires to do anything unless God gives them the desire to do it. If this were true, then God would be responsible for all human actions. If this were true, then the Bible would say that God gave Judas the desire to betray Christ, but it doesn't. It says "The devil had already prompted Judas...." (John 13:2)

Nor does it solve the problem to claim that God gives only good desires and not evil ones. Neither Lucifer nor Adam had a sin nature at first, yet they chose to sin. Well then, who made the devil do it? Who caused Lucifer to sin? If free choice is doing what one desires and all desires come from God, then God must have made Lucifer do it. But it is contradictory to say that God can ever be against Himself. Hebrews 6:18 says God cannot sin. Habakkuk says God cannot tolerate wrong. James says God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. Therefore the extreme Calvinist position must be rejected as contradictory.

Some less-than-extreme Calvinists say God does not give evil desires but only good ones. Then why would God give the desire to do good to some and not others? Nor does this explain where Lucifer got the desire to sin. If it did not come from God then it had to come from himself. In that case, the original evil act was self-caused (caused by himself), which is exactly the view of human free will that the extreme Calvinist rejects.

Who made the devil? (Watch for the play on words here.) The Bible affirms that God made only good creatures. Ecclesiastes 7:29 says God "made mankind upright". In 1 Timothy 4:4, we are explicitly told "Every creature of God is good". Only perfect creatures come from the hands of a perfect God. The Bible says God did not make Satan. Rather, God made a good angel called Lucifer, who became Satan by his own free will choice to sin.

God gave His good creatures a good power called "free will". God told Adam "You are free" in Gen. 2:16. Mankind intuitively recognizes freedom as good. In short, free choice is undeniably good.

With the power of moral free choice comes the ability to either choose the good God designed for us or reject it. The latter is called "evil". The origin of evil, therefore, is the misuse of free will. Free choice is the origin of evil. We have been granted a license to drive a car. Those who irresponsibly abuse that right and drive recklessly, killing and injuring others, are responsible for that, not the government that granted the license. The government gave us permission to drive and informed us how to drive safely through license tests, road signs, and stop lights. It is the driver who has the responsibility to drive safely.

And so it is with God and free will. God gave us freedom and guidance in how to use that freedom, and the responsibility to use that freedom properly is ours alone. Ecclesiastes 7:29 says "God made man upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes." The fact of freedom is good, but some acts of freedom are evil. God is the cause of the former; we are the cause of the latter.

Who made me do it? Contrary to what the extreme Calvinists say, God did not make you do it. The Biblical answer to who made me do it is "I did". The self is the cause of evil. Evil existed only as an abstract concept until God created free moral agents with the ability to bring evil into reality through the abuse of their free moral agency. Evil originates from the good power of free will that God gave me.

The extreme Calvinists have a problem with this. They say every event has a cause. This is true. Every event does have a cause, but not every cause has a cause. If every cause had a cause then God could not be the first uncaused cause that He is. Therefore, if the creature, using the good power of free choice, is the first cause of evil, then no cause of this evil should be sought other than the person who caused it.

The extreme Calvinist's objection wrongly assumes that either an evil act must be caused by some other person or thing, or else it is not caused at all. Every event is either caused or uncaused, there are no logical alternatives. Neither the extreme nor the moderate Calvinists, or even the Armenians, believe that evil actions have no cause. That would be libertarian freedom — spontaneous decisions outside of reason or logic. This would be a violation of the fundamental rule of reason: Every effect

has a cause. Furthermore, if evil actions have no cause, then no one can be held accountable, but the Bible clearly holds us accountable. Therefore, our actions are indeed caused.

The great “philosopher” Pogo (a comic strip character if you don’t remember him) once said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." The extreme Calvinist position that actions cannot be self-caused must be rejected. God did not cause Lucifer to sin. His sin of rebellion was self-caused, otherwise, how could God blame Lucifer for his actions?

The question is why do we make decisions? Are there outside influences that sway us? Doesn’t our background, training, and environment affect what we do? Yes, they do, but they do not force us to do it. They affect our actions, but they do not affect (cause) them.

You may have been born in a ghetto, but that fact does not force you to be a criminal. You may have been born into a home where you were abused, but that fact does not force you to be an abuser. There is a difference between inherited physical characteristics like brown eyes or blond hair, over which we have no control, and inherited spiritual tendencies, like lust or other trends of the sin nature, over which we ought to have control. We don't have a choice about eye color, but we do have a choice whether or not to follow spiritual impulses we may have inherited. Morally speaking, "irresistible urges" are simply urges that have not been resisted. People have died from lack of water, but no one has ever died from lack of sex, alcohol, or recreational drugs.

There is a difference between moral and non-moral choices. Our color preferences are non-moral and largely determined by genetics, but a choice to reject someone based on color is a moral issue. Those who say all actions have a reason, and that reason determines how we act, do not differentiate between purpose and cause. The cause is what produces that act. The purpose is why we act. Confused?

Example: You find a bag with \$250,000.00 in cash in it. What do you do? The cause is the bag of money. It is going to drive some action. The purpose is what happens, that is what you do with the bag of money. You

can take it and make your family rich, maybe go hide someplace like Costa Rica. Or you can turn it over to the authorities. Moral actions spring from our free choices.

The extreme Calvinist argument is that whatever is good by nature cannot will to do evil, and whatever is evil by nature cannot will to do good. We may be born with a propensity to sin but that does not make it a necessity to sin. We will inevitably sin, but it is not inevitable we must sin. Even though we are depraved by nature and bent toward sin, each sin is freely chosen. We must separate desire from the decision. Free men may desire to sin, but they need not decide to sin.

Paul says it well in Romans. 7:15. "I do not understand what I do, for what I want to do I do not do, and what I hate I do."

Personal experience reveals that we sometimes act contrary to our strongest desires. This Extreme Calvinistic view is a form of determinism – our moral actions are caused by another rather than self. If evil can't will for good and good cannot will for evil, then why do Christians still choose to sin even with their new nature? And obviously, the unsaved can and often do lead what society would consider highly moral lifestyles. That is because morality is a choice.

The difference between the saved and the unsaved is that believers have the power of the Holy Spirit to exercise that choice in a moral manner. The unsaved must rely on the carrot and stick system of God's divine institutions: free will, marriage, family, government, and whatever norms and standards they have in their conscience.

For heaven's sake, whose fault is it? The unpleasant truth is even though we have inherited sin natures; we have no one to blame but ourselves. We have met the enemy, and he is us.

Both Calvinists and Armenians agree that God holds us accountable for our actions. However, sound reason demands that there is no responsibility where there is no ability to respond. If we cannot respond with our free will, how can we be held accountable? Whatever evil we do, we could have

responded in another manner by not doing it. That is undeniable. That is a self-caused action. It is an action that one could have avoided.

Ought implies can.

If we, as free moral agents, ought to do or not do something, that implies we have the power to do what is expected. Good reason appears to insist that if God demands it then we can do it. Moral obligation implies moral freedom. The statement "ought implies can" does not mean we can under our own strength. This would be contrary to Scripture. "Without me you can do nothing" John 15:5. "We can do all things through Christ" Philip. 4:13. Hence "ought implies can" only in the sense that we can through the grace of God. But the unsaved are left to function under the divine institutions and the fear of retribution.

Other evidence that we have self-determination is that both Scripture and common moral wisdom inform us that praise and blame make no real sense unless those praised and blamed were free to do otherwise.

Both fatalists and determinists have attempted in vain to deny human freedom. But determinists believe that all non-determinists ought to change their minds and become determinists. The profound irony is this implies they have a choice and are free to change their mind. Determinism is therefore false because it is contrary to its own claim.

What do the Scriptures say? The Bible affirms that the human being has a free choice. The power of free choice is part of mankind being made in God's image. Adam and Eve were commanded to multiply and to refrain from eating from THAT tree. This implies they had a choice. "Ought implies can." The fact that they ought to obey these commandments implies they could obey them. Even after Adam fell and was a sinner by nature, he was not so depraved that he could not hear the voice of God nor make a free response. The LORD called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the Garden, and I was afraid because I was naked so I hid." God's image in Adam was marred but not destroyed. The "Image of God" which includes free will, is still in human beings after the fall.

The fallen descendants of Adam have free will. Depraved human beings have the power of free choice. The Bible says fallen man is ignorant,

depraved, and a slave to sin, but these conditions involve a free choice. Peter speaks of depraved ignorance as being ignorant "willingly" (2 Peter 3:5). Paul declares that the unsaved have "clearly seen" and "understood" the truth but they deliberately "suppress" it (Rom. 1:18-19). As a result, they are "without excuse". Even our enslavement to sin is a free choice.

Rom. 6:16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

God is sovereign and in complete control. Man is a free moral agent and can make choices contrary to God's pleasure. These two truths are in tension. Ephesians 2:2 says even those under the power of Satan are thereby a free act of disobedience. Verse after verse affirms that mankind is a free agent and has a choice in determining its course of action.

Eph. 2:8-9 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, that no one should boast.

The extreme Calvinist takes the position that faith is a gift that is offered to only some. They believe that faith is a special gift from God and without it, it is impossible to be saved.

This is the doctrine of the total depravity of man. Man is so depraved that he is incapable of making the right decision concerning his salvation. In other words, a dead person cannot believe. He must first be made alive. Regeneration is needed *before* he can make that decision for Christ. That right decision is enabled by the Holy Spirit by the gift of faith. They use Ephesians 2:8-9 to prove their point. They are certain this passage seals the argument that faith by which we are saved is a gift from God. But even John Calvin said this text does not mean that faith is a gift of God, but that salvation is a gift of God. The Greek makes this very clear. "That" in verse 8 is *touto* and is in the neuter form and not *toute*, which would make it feminine. The extreme Calvinist says, "that" refers to "faith" before it; that God gives the sinner the faith necessary for regeneration. The problem is "faith" is *pistis* and is feminine. The pronoun does not agree with the

proposed noun. Furthermore "grace" *charis* is also feminine so "that" does not refer to it either. It can only refer to salvation as the gift of God. Paul could easily have used *toute* (feminine gender), instead of *touto*, (gender neutral), and made this very clear if his intention was to focus on faith as the gift instead of "saved by grace through faith" (salvation). But he didn't do that. We can only assume Paul said exactly what he meant to say. Anyone can be saved as long as they demonstrate faith, and God does not have to supply the faith.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Sovereignty and free will. Is it one or the other? The extreme Calvinist rejects free will. The Bible says it is both sovereignty *and* free will. Human beings, even in their fallen state, have the freedom to choose. Scripture declares the absolute sovereignty of God over everything. Yet at the same time, it is declared that we are held accountable for our actions. Ought implies can.

The Cross was both predetermined and freely chosen. Acts 2:23 says Jesus' death was determined "by God's purpose and foreknowledge". Yet in John 10:17-18 Jesus says, "I lay down my life - only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

The crucifiers were both predetermined and free. Acts 2:23 says "...this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." There you have predetermination and free will in the same passage concerning the same act!

"Stumbling" over Christ is viewed as both disobedience and destiny.

1 Peter 2:8 ...and, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

Salvation is both ordained and persuaded into it.

Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Acts 14:1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

It is predetermined, and yet a persuasive argument can be made that convinces the unbeliever. God preordained the means — persuasion — with the end — eternal life. The Bible teaches both divine sovereignty and responsibility.

Extreme Calvinism says predetermination is independent of foreknowledge. What God predetermines becomes of necessity foreknowledge. First, this denies free will. Second, the concept of irresistible grace is a violation of free choice. There are no shotgun weddings in heaven.

C.S. Lewis put it this way, "The irresistible and indisputable are the two weapons which by nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will ... would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo."

There are two kinds of people in this world: Those who say to God, "Thy will be done." and those to whom God says, "Thy will be done." All that are in hell choose to be there. Without self-determination, there could be no hell.

Armenianism says God's predetermination is based on foreknowledge. God knows in advance what choices man will make and predetermines such. The Bible seems to say otherwise. It isn't man's will that drives God but His own determinate purpose and will. If they were right, then salvation would not be by grace but by a human decision.

The whole idea of being chronological or sequential in God's thoughts is highly problematic. God is a simple being, that is He is indivisible and not dependent on anything in the universe for what He is. Whatever He has He

is. His attributes are identical to His nature. God's knowledge is not sequential; rather it embraces everything in a single spiritual co-intuition. His thoughts are not sequential but simultaneous.

If He were not simple, then He would think in temporal succession. If temporal, He would be spatial, and if limited to time and space, He could think no faster than the speed of light. Thus He could not know the whole universe in a single moment to say nothing of an infallible knowledge of the future.

God's predetermination is in accordance with His foreknowledge. God's election is neither based on His foreknowledge of man's free choices nor exercised independently of it. There is no chronological priority of foreknowledge and predetermination. God is a simple being. Both foreknowledge and predetermination are one in God. Whatever God knows He determines. Whatever God determines He knows. His thoughts are eternally coordinated and unified. What God foreknows cannot be based on what He forechose, and what He forechose cannot be based on what He foreknew. Both are simultaneous, eternal, and coordinate acts of God.

God's predestination and human free will are a mystery, but not a contradiction. They go beyond reason, but not against reason. God determined that moral free agents would do things freely. He did not determine that they would be forced to perform free acts. In short, we are chosen but free.

We tend to see our decisions and the influences that drove them in a limited time context compressed down to the present or perhaps our lifetime. But the reality of who we are is much greater than that very limited period. Many of the providential influences in our lives that brought us to where we are at any given moment are far more complex, go way back much further than we usually consider, and often are completely unknown to us. We may look at a decision we made and say we know why we made that decision, when in reality we may not truly know all the reasons why we did what we did because there was a combination of extremely complex providential events and decisions by ourselves and others going back many generations that ultimately brought us to today and the decision we may be called upon to make today.

If we could access the computer of divine decree in Heaven, we would see that what we are today and the decisions we make today can be traced past our immediate ancestors and all the way back to Adam. We are a product of our own decisions and we are held accountable for those decisions, but we are also the product of the decisions of others that in some way influenced us or those who preceded us in human history, not to mention God's providential actions designed to influence our decisions. That, by no means, excuses us from responsibility. Whatever the influence, the decision we make today is still ours to own. God's providential work in our lives that leads us to the place He has determined for us is far more complex in that it covers all of human history and the entire world. Think about that as you consider the magnitude of His omniscience and omnipotence in providentially managing your life and the "all things" associated with it.