

Free Will articles by Hendryx and Sproul

John W. Hendryx on "Free Will"

http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Free-Will/Essays/
"Many persons naturally assume that man has a free will. But what do they mean by this? You may want to ask them to define terms by asking, "Free from what?" "Free from sin?", "Free from God's decree?" No, neither. So what do people actually mean when they claim man has a free will? Perhaps many persons mean to say that man is free from external coercion. In this we all can agree, but just because someone is free from coercion does not mean his will is free. There are other ways in which man's will is not free. If the natural man make choices BY NECESSITY then he also lacks a kind of freedom. We might want to consider whether the Bible uses the expression 'freedom' to describe any fallen man. And the answer is no, not UNTIL Christ sets us free (Rom 6). Jesus says that prior to grace, persons are 'slaves to sin'. And, last time I looked, a slave is not free. If man is in bondage to a corruption of nature, as the Scripture attests, then he is not, in any sense, free as the Bible defines it. That is, until the grace of God in Christ sets him free. It would be correct to say man HAS A WILL and that his choices are VOLUNTARY (not coerced) but this does not make the choices free. Fallen man chooses sin of NECESSITY due to a corruption of nature, and this is just as much a form of bondage of the will from which we need to be set free by Christ, and a more properly biblical way of expression. Just because we make these choices, of necessity, does not alleviate our responsibility. **If we borrow \$5 million and squander it in a week of wild living in Las Vegas [like our condition of debt after the fall], our inability to repay the debt does not alleviate us of any responsibility to do so (see Rom 3:20).** So I contend that whenever speaking about the concept of "free will," because of the confusion surrounding it, we should only define freedom as the Bible does: that man's will is not free, but rather is in bondage to sin. Clearly the Bible affirms that apart from a supernatural and merciful work of the Holy Spirit to change our naturally hostile disposition to God, no person would ever receive Christ (John 6:65). And Just as water does not rise above its source, so unspiritual men do not think or act spiritually (1 Cor 2:14).

Freedom of the Will by R.C. Sproul

“Does God's foreknowledge eliminate human freedom? Does the immutability of God and the omniscience of God mean the end of all human freedom?”

If free human actions were not known in advance by God, then when He learned of them, He would undergo a change in His knowledge; He would learn something new. Here both immutability and omniscience would be compromised.

If human actions are known by God in advance, is it not certain that they will come to pass exactly as God has foreknown them? If God knows today what I will do tomorrow, then there is no doubt that when tomorrow comes, I will do what God already knows I will do. With respect to the mind of God my future behavior is absolutely certain. But, does that mean that my future actions are absolutely determined or coerced by God?

God can know the future in more than one way. He can know the future because He has determined the future, or He can know it as a spectator. Consider the following analogy. Suppose you are standing at the corner of the roof atop a five-story building. As you look down to the street directly below, you see two runners on the sidewalk. One of them is approaching the edge of the building below you from south to north. The other runner is approaching the edge from west to east. They cannot see each other because their view is obscured by the building. From where you are standing you can see that the two runners are going to collide. You want to shout for them to stop, but you know it is too late. They are a split second away from crashing into each other. All you can do is stand helplessly waiting for the collision.

The analogy suggests a human way of knowing the future without causing or forcing the future to happen. (Of course, like any analogy, it is far from perfect. It is possible that one of the runners will step into a manhole just before he reaches the corner, or one might be vaporized by a laser gun at the last second. Our knowledge of the future in this case is not really certain.) The point of the analogy though, is simply to illustrate that **we can have knowledge of future events without causing those future events.**

Some have approached the subject of God's foreknowledge from a different perspective. Their argument is based on God's relationship to space and time. The idea is this: God is eternal; He is above space and time. God sees all things from the vantage point of the present. There is no past or future with God. He sees all things as present. If God sees all things as present, then how He does it is completely beyond our comprehension. What God's ultimate relationship to time is remains a highly speculative matter. If what is future to me is present to God, then we know His knowledge of our future is perfect and that future is absolutely certain. God can make no errors in His observations.

It is one thing to say that God causes or coerces all things. It is quite another to say that God foreordains all things. If God forces or coerces all things, then He would have had to coerce the fall of man. If this were so, then God would be the cause, indeed the guilty perpetrator of sin. Not only would God be guilty of sin but His coercive actions would destroy the freedom of man.

To aid understanding we need to consider two models, two images of God, which lead to serious distortions of the divine character. First is the image of God as a *puppeteer*.

Here God manipulates the strings of marionettes. The feet and the arms of the puppets jerk and dance as God pulls the strings. Puppets have no will. They have no heart or soul. Their bodies are filled with sawdust. If God were like this, not even the Wizard of Oz could make us truly free.

The second image of God is of the *spectator*. Here God sits on the sidelines of world history. He observes the game closely. He makes careful notes about the action and will turn in a scouting report. He is the ultimate armchair quarterback. He second-guesses the plays that are called. He roots for His favorite team. However, He is powerless to affect the outcome of the game in any way. The action is on the field, and He's not playing. This model of God destroys His sovereignty. The spectator God is a God who reigns but never rules. He is a God without authority. He observes history but is not Lord over history.

Neither of these images does justice to the biblical view of God. They serve merely to alert us to the pitfalls that lurk in the shadows. They represent borders over which we must not go.

We must be careful not to so zealously maintain the sovereignty of God that we end up denying human freedom and responsibility. At the same time we must be careful not to so zealously preserve human freedom that we reduce God to an impotent spectator of world affairs.

The correct approach is to insist that God foreordains all things and that all future events are under His sovereignty. The future is absolutely certain to God. He knows what will take place, and He foreordains what will take place.

Foreordain does not mean coerce. It simply means that God wills that something take place. He may will future events through the free choices of creatures. This is the great mystery of providence - that God can will the means as well as the ends of future events. God can even will good through the wicked choices of men.

The greatest event of human history was at the same time the most diabolical. No greater shame can be tacked to the human race than that a human being delivered up Jesus to be crucified. Judas betrayed Christ because Judas wanted to betray Christ. The Pharisees pressed for His death because the Pharisees wanted Jesus killed. Pilate succumbed to the howling crowd, not because God coerced him, but because Pilate was too weak to withstand the demands of the mob.

Yet the Bible declares that the Cross was no accident. The outcome of God's eternal plan of redemption did not hinge finally on the decision of Pontius Pilate. What if Pilate had released Jesus and crucified Barabbas instead? Such a thought is almost unthinkable. It would suggest that God was only a spectator in the plan of redemption, that He hoped for the best but had no control over the events.

God did more than hope for the Cross. He willed the Cross. He sent His Son for that very purpose. Before Jesus was brought before Pilate, He pleaded with the Father for a different verdict. He begged that the cup might pass. Before Pilate ever raised his Roman scepter, the gavel had fallen in Gethsemane. The verdict was in. Jesus was delivered by the determinate forecounsel of God.

Augustine said that "In a certain sense God wills everything that comes to pass." He ordains things with a view to human freedom. He does no violence to our wills by His

sovereign ordination. He is not a spectator and we are not puppets. **His knowledge is certain, and our actions are free.**

How the providence of God works out these matters of concurrence is mysterious but not contradictory. There is nothing that is rationally incompatible about God's sovereignty and human freedom. Scripture clearly teaches that God is sovereign and that man is responsible. Neither teaching is false. I am not proposing that freedom and sovereignty are not contradictions simply because the Bible teaches both. I am saying that the **two concepts are not contradictory because they are not mutually exclusive concepts. Divine sovereignty and human autonomy would be mutually exclusive.** If God is sovereign man could not be autonomous. If man is autonomous God could not be sovereign.

God is sovereign. Man is free. Man's freedom is limited, however, by God's sovereignty. God's sovereignty is not limited by man's freedom. This is simply to say that man is not God. God is free and man is free. But God is more free than a man. Man's freedom is always and everywhere subordinate to God's freedom. If we reverse these we pass from theism to atheism, from Christianity to humanism, from Christ to Anti-christ.” (Sproul from *One Holy Passion*)