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Does Man Have a Free Will?

by Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., 1983

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Read the accompanying [Newsletter for August 2011](#)



There is one subject that has intrigued mankind over the centuries. How much does man express his own will and how much does God express His? Of course, I am assuming that people believe that there is a God. And there is indeed a God. There is a God family. The Bible certainly reveals who God is and who His Son is. Accepting that as fact, how much do God and Christ interfere in our lives in matters that are important to us and to all humanity? It seems like we are able to express a certain amount of free will on our own. How much do we have? Or do we have any free will at all?

Within our own human experience it appears that you and I have total free will. Every time I get up in the morning I am the one that determines the time that I get up. I can lie there for 5 minutes, I can lie there for 15 minutes, or I can jump out of bed. Whatever I want to do it seems that I have the will to do it. I can go to lunch when I want to. I can go to bed when I want to. I can go on a trip when I want to, apparently. It seems that almost everything that I do, I do because I want to do it. I sometimes wonder if God has any interference at all in such matters.

I know that He does. I do not have any doubt about that simply because the Bible says that He has a will and a purpose, a plan, that He is working out down here below. My point is this: though that be recognized, and we know that God certainly has a will of his own, and he recognizes it, how much free will do I have as a human being. How much do you have as a human being? Or, do we have any at all. Does everything occur according to God's will? By that I do not just mean by God's allowance. However, I think it can be effectively argued that anything God allows must be within His will. So you are back at square one as far as God is concerned.

Certainly we know that God is almighty and all powerful. He exercises His sovereignty in this world. Still, though that is recognized, does he give you and me a reasonable amount of free will? Do we have any free will at all? Or, is that all that we do have?

Most preachers believe that mankind exercises complete free will in everything. I heard a preacher last night on television and he was begging, he was pleading with all his heart. In fact, there were a gaggle of preachers trying to get people to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. They were saying, please, accept Jesus Christ now! You have heard this message before. It tells you what Christ has done for you. He

cannot save you unless you respond to Him. If you come to Him you will go to heaven. But if you don't come to Him, you will go to hell and Jesus Christ will be so-o-o disappointed.

You have to come to Him. It is up to you. God would not interfere with your will for anything in the world. That is what the preachers were saying last night. In fact, that is what 90% of most preachers would say. They study the Bible. They think that man has complete free will in the matter of salvation. In fact, they believe man has complete free will in everything and that you can do as you please. You can choose if you want to be a reprobate. You can choose to be a saint. You can choose; it is up to you, most preachers say. And there are some Scriptures that seem to say that man has free will; I will show some of those to you.¹

There are other Scriptures which show that God is sovereign, that He is the one who pulls the levers and presses the buttons. What we need to ask is how far does God go in expressing His own will in matters associated with mankind or anything in the universe? We find in the Scripture that God is the one who is sovereign in all matters of this earth.

In Accordance with God's Will

The apostle John told us as Christians and as human beings that if we want promises from God answered and given to us they must be always within His will. We are told in the Scriptures on prayer what you should pray for, how often you should pray.² You can pray as much as you want, but if it is not in accordance with God's will, your request will not see fruition.

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing ..., he hears us.”

• 1 John 5:14

Note the ellipsis. I left out one important phrase. Note the underlined words:

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”

• 1 John 5:14–15

It is most important that the phrase be emphasized. It says **“according to his will.”** I think that prayer is very efficacious. I think that we all ought to be doing it. I pray daily. I am not putting a halo on my head. I feel compelled to do so. I love it. I do not pray perhaps exactly like some people would. I do not hold my hands in a particular position. I pray daily. I hope we all do. I know that my prayers will be answered if they are in accordance with God's will.

But this situation is almost like a circle. You may say, well, if this is God's will, you do not have to pray for it if it is His will anyway. Or, if you pray for something not to happen and that is not God's will, well, it will not happen no matter if you spend 5 or 10 hours on your knees. But prayer is very good. It is very beautiful. It helps you to get in tune with Almighty God and to have that spiritual essence that you need surrounding you and within you; it is called God's Holy Spirit. It is essential that we be in contact with Almighty God through Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.

But in no way will we have any of our prayers answered, no matter what, unless they are in accordance with God's will. That is what the apostle John says. Sometimes I have asked for things and I was certain what my will was, but it was not the will of God the Father or Christ. But someone would say, if the will that I have is governed completely by God, even then He wanted me to have a will separate from His so that He in turn could show His own will to me, which is part of my will, etc., etc.

¹ Dr. Martin expanded on this subject in another article, “[Free Will and Predestination](#),” which approaches free will and salvation from a perspective with different biblical evidences. DWS

² See Dr. Martin's article, “[The Essentials of Prayer](#).” If you pray outside of God's will you are wasting your own time, no matter how strong your faith is. Furthermore, God loves to be asked for things that are within His will, just like any parent. DWS

I know this seems like legalistic mumbo jumbo, but some people feel there is no will whatsoever expressed by humanity at all. We are just puppets to a certain extent, reflecting the will of Almighty God.

- The Bible is plain: nothing happens on this earth or in this universe unless God Almighty allows it.
- Anything that God allows, He wills. That is a fact.

When it comes to me as Ernest Martin or you, whoever you are, it seems like we exercise our own wills all the time, or quite often. Sometimes we see an interference from God, and usually very pleasantly so if it is not in judgment. If it is in judgment, Christians still should like it, although it might not be too pleasant.³ It is nice to come into contact with God if you love Him and if the Holy Spirit is motivating you. We are still left with the question: how much free will does mankind have or does he have any at all?

A Biblical Answer

The Bible seems to show that man and angels do have free will. I will make that as a blanket statement. It seems to show that, basically, but God's will supersedes man's will or any will of the angels and even the will of Satan the devil. That means that God is in control over all, but He allows a certain amount of free will to be given to man and to angels.

This dichotomy between God's will and man's will is found in several places in the Bible. Look at Philippians chapter 2, beginning in verse 9. Paul says:

“Wherefore God also has highly exalted him [Christ Jesus], and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

• ***Philippians 2:9–11***

I have long emphasized in my lectures and literature that this is an example of free will being expressed in these verses. It says, **“of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth,”** that is in tartarus.⁴ The Bible says there are angelic creatures who are confined in tartarus under the earth, which is probably part of the oceans or a watery existence of some kind.

Paul is saying that **“every knee should bow”** and **“every tongue should confess.”** Every time you see the word “confess” in the Old or the New Testament, understand that it is an old English word correctly translated from perfectly good Greek and Hebrew words that mean “confess” with the mouth. Get a concordance and check it yourself in any of its cognate forms. It makes no difference, in every context in the Bible it is in a context of people freely, of their own free will and volition, confessing something — always.

It is never under coercion by God or someone else forcing you to do something. It always means a voluntary confession with the lips. It may very well be motivated by God's Holy Spirit, and that is the case in many instances, but still when “confess” is used it means it is voluntary in all other the parts of the Bible. I see no reason why it should not be accepted in that way in this context:

³ In Hebrews 12:5–7 Paul wrote:

“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not you the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not?”

⁴ The Greek word “*tartaroosas*” is an aorist verb derived from the noun “tartaroo.” The verb means “casting into tartaroo.” In Greek mythology Tartarus was the prison of defeated gods. However, mythology does not inform the Bible. In 1 Timothy 1:4, 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:4; Titus 1:14; and 2 Peter 1:16 the word “fables” in Greek is the word *muthos*, from which we get our English word “myth.” Reference to Tartarus is used only once in Scripture and it is experienced only by angelic beings, see 2 Peter 2:4:

“For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [verb, *tartaroosas*], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment ...”

“Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation ...”

• **Philippians 2:12**

That is the only New Testament verse that seems to say that man has a part to do in salvation, **“work out your own salvation.”** In fact, people have come to me and said, Ernest, I thought you preached a Gospel in which no works are involved in salvation. I come back and say it does not make any difference what Ernest Martin teaches, it is what the apostle Paul and Christ Jesus preach that makes all the difference. It is absolutely true there is not one ounce of work that is essential in salvation, not work that you do or I do. Yet it does say, **“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”** That seems like you have free will in doing work to secure your salvation that comes through Jesus Christ, does it not? Of course it does. I admit that.

Paul not only had verse 12 as we have it in our Bibles today, but he had the next sentence that qualified that previous one. Now the sovereignty of God comes into it. **“For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”** (Philippians 2:13). It is not your good pleasure; it is **“His good pleasure.”**

- Who is doing the work in you? God is doing the work.
- Who gives you the will power to do what is necessary to please God? God is the one that does it.

He is working in you **“both to will and to do,”** to perform **“of His good pleasure.”** Each of you have a love and concern for Jesus Christ and the Bible, or you would not be reading this. Do you know who put that concern within you, that desire? It has come from no less than God the Father, the sovereign of the entire universe. It is He that causes you **“to will and to do of his good pleasure.”** It is He doing it. Now get out and work, but it is He working in you.

We will find that everything dealing with salvation — all factors connected with salvation — are in the providence of God to be accomplished. There are other things that you can accomplish, but when it comes to matters of salvation, none of us can lift up ourselves by our own bootstraps. It is impossible. When it comes to salvation, there is not a bit of flesh that can make flesh into spirit or that can give a spiritual existence to mankind for all eternity. It is impossible. Only God has the power to do that, and that is what the apostle Paul is saying here. **“For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”** (Philippians 2:13).

Though we see the sovereignty of God coming out in these verses of the apostle Paul, yet when he speaks about actively bowing the knee and confessing with the tongue, it seems to be done by human and angelic free will. That is true, but the inspiration, the spark of that, all of these factors connected to salvation come from God the Father through Jesus Christ, and the action is accomplished through God’s Holy Spirit. That is made abundantly clear and there is no doubt about it.

God and the Will of His Creation

Paul said in Romans chapter 8 that God was supreme not only over mankind but over the physical and spiritual universe that we find ourselves existing in. Paul says:

“The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation]⁵ waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature [creation, the totality of it] was made subject [by God] to vanity, not willingly, ...”

• **Romans 8:16–20**

⁵ That is the King James Version rendering. The word “creature” actually means the “creation” in Greek. The entirety of the creation that God had a hand in, the totality of it. **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”** (Genesis 1:1). *ELM*

Notice the last words. We are talking about free will. Does God have the will? Does man have the will? Does creation have free will? Paul says that the creation (he is personifying here) that **“the creation was made subject to vanity,”** that is, to waste, to difficulty, to chaos, to a running down: **“... not willingly, but by reason of him [God] who has subjected the same in hope”** (Romans 8:20).

There is hope for the creation. If you personify this earth and look at it from space, you see a very beautiful creation of God. When you get closer you find that things are being born and reproducing all over, plants are coming up, new animals, human beings are coming into this world. This is a world of life. You cannot go anywhere in the world without seeing some form of life. This is a beautiful planet of life, life that is constantly reproducing.⁶

Decay and Death

There is also one common factor that is associated with life on this earth, and that is death. Everything that lives eventually will die. That includes the plants, animals, and that means all human beings. That in a sense is vanity. Who made the creation subject to vanity or to decay, difficulty, and problems? We ourselves look at this world and we see people starving in Africa and Southeast Asia at the present time. It is a pitiful situation. We could ask God to stop it if we want to ask. He could do so but seemingly He does not stop it.

Well, that decay and death is part of the creative process and a part of the creation. God has subjected the creation at this time to a type of **“vanity, not willingly”** (Romans 16:20). The creation does not want to be that way, but that is the way it is. You and I do not want to be that way in our hearts, do we? But that is the way it is. You and I want to be healthy all the time. You and I do not want to have our tummy aches and our tooth aches, or worse, but we do have them, don't we?

- Who made it that way? God did.
- Do we want it that way? No.
- Does He want it that way? Yes.
- Who is willing it? God wills it to be so.

That is what Paul is saying: **“for the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly.”** It does not want it. None of us want it. If you could ask a horse, if he could talk, he does not want it either. **“... but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope”** (Romans 8:20). In hope. Do you know that there is hope even for the creation? The entire creation will be given something like the manifestation of the sons of God.

“Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.”

• **Romans 8:21–22**

Is that not true? This earth, no matter how wonderful and beautiful it is, and we love it so much, it is God's creation of beauty to us, yet it is groaning and creaking and there are difficulties everywhere. We all groan and creak with it, do we not? All of us do. In fact, that is what Paul says in the next verse:

“And not only they [the creation], but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption [the sonship], to wit, the redemption [the deliverance] of our body.”

• **Romans 8:23**

That is what we want. I could go on with the rest of the subject the apostle Paul gives here, and it is a beautiful one. You and I want a body that is different than this one, don't we? We are generally pleased with

⁶ Read Dr. Martin's fascinating article, [“Creation of Life in Contemporary Times.”](#) DWS

our bodies, I guess, but in our narcissism we love our bodies so much. We need a different type of body that does not decay. The whole creation **“waits for the manifestation of the sons of God”** (Romans 8:19) and we have hope too, but we also have pain and difficulty at the present time. We are suffering along with the rest of creation. That is what it says about we who **“have the firstfruits of the Spirit.”** We also groan in our body, waiting for **“the redemption of our body.”** One of these days it is going to come. Paul even said in verse 11:

“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you.”

• **Romans 8:11**

Even our mortal bodies will be quickened, made alive one of these days. We will be delivered. When we are delivered the entire creation will be delivered also. That will be a marvelous thing for us to witness.⁷

I am dealing with the creation because Paul makes it quite clear about who is in control of the creation? It is God almighty. Did the creation decide it wants to be this way? No. God is the one who wills it for a particular reason. So this brings in the sovereignty of God.

There is no man, woman, or child, or no angel in this universe who can ever ultimately thwart the will of Almighty God. In no way, shape, or form can that be done. There are Scriptures galore to determine that. I could read them.

Continuing in Romans, Personal Examples

Paul talked about the material universe and how the creatures in it are groaning and waiting for the redemption of the sons of God, just as we wait for the redemption of the body. He then goes on to talk about human relationships and how God’s will interferes in that area also.

“... when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;

(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calls;)

It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. ...”

• **Romans 9:10–12**

Rebecca has two babies in her womb. She does not even know what sex they are. They are twins who begin to struggle inside the womb as we find in Genesis 25:22. Here is what God says, as Paul brings out:

“It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

• **Romans 9:12–13**

One son was Jacob who turned out to be a scoundrel. God said even before he was born, I love him and I will put my grace upon him. **“Esau have I hated,”** I will not put my grace on him. That was for their human existence on earth. **“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid”** (Romans 9:14).

What would most of us say? Here are two babies in their mother’s womb. She has not even seen them yet. She is bound to love both of them. After all, they both are her children. God says to her before they are able to do any works whatsoever, not breathing any air, one will serve the other, **“the elder shall serve the younger.”** You might say that is not fair. Give both of them a chance.

You know the saying in our Declaration of Independence in the United States: **“that all men are created equal.”** According to this they are not created equal at all, because while they were still in the womb, having done neither good nor bad, God said this one will be hated and this one will be loved.

⁷ This deliverance of the creation will take place with the creation of the new heavens and earth (Revelation 21:1). DWS

I suppose Rebecca might say that is not fair. Paul recognized that himself which is why he asked: **“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?”** It appears to be so. But then Paul answers, **“God forbid”** (or **“let it not be,”** as it is in the original Greek, Romans 9:14).

God’s Will and Pharaoh

Paul goes to another illustration: **“For he says to Moses, I will ...”** (Romans 9:15). There is that word “will,” taken in the sense of how we are considering it here:

“... I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

• **Romans 9:15**

If God does not want to show mercy and compassion to someone, He does not have to do so. I suppose I could come right back and say to Paul, does this show unrighteousness with God? Paul would again say, **“God forbid.”** This is fact to anyone who has any common sense. Most of you and I live in these beautiful United States of America and others of you live in other fine areas of the world. I lived in Great Britain for 14 years. It was a beautiful garden over there. There are other many fine areas in Europe and elsewhere in this world. But some areas of this world, if people are born there, they are in very difficult circumstances. God made those areas also. Is there unrighteousness with God? We might think so, but Paul says **“God forbid!”** Let it not be. All of this shows that God is in control. Look at verse 16. Here is the answer:

“So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.”

• **Romans 9:16**

It does not matter what you will or what you run to do. It is God who shows mercy, or God who shows compassion, or God who shows lack of mercy or compassion. Overall God will show love to everyone. It says that elsewhere in the Scripture, but not in all circumstances of this life. Paul goes on:

“For the scripture says unto Pharaoh, ‘Even for this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.’ Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens. You will say then unto me, Why does he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will?”

• **Romans 9:17–19**

That is a good human question. In fact, that is a good divine question. How can God find fault when it is up to Him to either harden a person’s heart, or make a heart soft, or make the heart to accept Him?

That is the way God’s will operates. He raised up Pharaoh, a very evil man, yet Pharaoh wanted to repent and let the Israelites go time and time again. But Paul went on to say that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so he would not repent and allow the Israelites leave Egypt when he, Pharaoh, wanted Israel to leave.

“You will say then unto me, Why does he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who are you that reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”

• **Romans 9:19–21**

This is Paul’s reasoning. We can either accept it or not, it is what he says. I take it as coming from God’s Holy Spirit. The potter can take one lump to honor and another lump to dishonor.

“What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.”

• **Romans 9:22–23**

“**Afore**” means before the foundation of this world. Paul is talking about the Roman believers he is writing to, and he is talking about you. Let me ask, why has He called you to a knowledge of His truth now, and to His love in Jesus Christ? Why has He not called some other person, or people in other areas of the world? Paul sums up these passages in Romans chapter 8 and 9. He gives this answer:

- God is sovereign.
- No one can dispute His will.
- He does exactly what He wants to, both in the creation and in humanity.
- He can bring up one to honor and another to dishonor.

Does God have the right to do that? Yes, He is the potter and we are the clay. We should trust Him. There are some fitted to destruction at this time, and some that are fitted for mercy. That is what Paul said, and that is how he ended it.

He goes on to say that all in the end will come to mercy and there will be love and concern given to all, and that includes the people who went contrary to Christ back then, even His own people Israel. In chapters 10 and 11 of Romans Paul explains that out of Zion shall come forth the deliverer who will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Who is it who turns away ungodliness? It is God.

It says that some He blinds and some He opens their eyes. When God finally brings the complete fulfillment of things, all people will come to a knowledge of Christ (1 Timothy 2:4), but it will be accomplished in His way.

God's Will, Man's Will

Having looked at the Scriptures above from Romans, I ask you,

- Who is in control of the entire universe? The material, the spiritual (which means the angelic realm), and our own individual lives here on this earth? It is God.
- Who is it that sets up nations and kings, and brings down others to make them sit in dung heaps? It is God.
- Who is it that sets the bounds of the nations so they cannot go farther? Or tells other people, you go here and they go? Or tells some not to go and they do not go? It is God. He is in complete control.

So, does mankind have a will? Thus far it seems that mankind, from what we have been looking at (and I can give a host of other Scriptures), has no will at all. But mankind does have free will because God allows certain things that man wants to do, within the overall will of God. Any time God allows something for you to do, one way or another, it must come back to that being His will. That is the only way you can logically argue it in the end.

You can spend a day, a week, or a lifetime trying to sort that out, but ultimately it comes back to the fact that if God allows something (that means He lets it go on), that is His will. However, a man or a woman doing his or her own will can get them into trouble also, and God allows that too. Sometimes He actively intervenes in a person's life, like He did in Pharaoh's, or in Esau's, or Jacob's, or Nebuchadnezzar's.⁸

He can interfere any moment, but He also can allow us to do certain things. By us doing them, by His allowance, it is still His will. Let me show you how this works. At his conclusion of the letter to the Corinthian *ekklesia*, Paul was summing up matters concerning personalities and he talks about Apollos, who was an associate of the apostle Paul:

⁸ He called Nebuchadnezzar “**My servant**” yet he was a horribly evil man (Jeremiah 25:9, 27:6, 43:10). *ELM*

“As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him [Greek: entreated, begged him], to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.”

• 1 Corinthians 16:12

Here was an apostle of Jesus Christ who was in more authority than Apollos saying he wanted Apollos to go to the brethren at Corinth. It will be the best thing for them. Apollos thought the matter over and said, no, I will not go right now. We could say that was in the will of God. I guess it was in one way of looking at it, but Paul said it was not Apollos’ will to do that at that particular time. Could Apollos make up his own mind? I suppose he could. It seems to read that way.

Paul’s Will and the Gospel

Let us go back earlier in First Corinthians:

“Do you not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so has the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!”

• 1 Corinthians 9:13–16

Paul had a commission to preach the Gospel. Christ gave him that commission on the road to Damascus.

“For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel [to the Corinthians] of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.”

• 1 Corinthians 9:17–18

This context shows that Paul did have power to obtain money from the people of Corinth. He received it from the Corinthians. They sent in money all the time to carry on with the Gospel work. But when he was with the Corinthians (he was there at the first, staying 18 months with them) he did not take money from them at all. He was supported by other means. That is what he is talking about here. He says it was **“ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.”** That was fine. But Paul, as far as the Corinthians were concerned said: “I have decided not to charge you in any way,” because he wanted to make an impression on them.

Originally he was preaching to them and teaching them without money from the Corinthians. Now I come to verse 17: **“if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward.”** That means he had the right to accept that money, but he did not accept it though God said Paul was ordained to take it. By not taking it that became a reward, something above what Paul was allowed to have because God ordained it, yet Paul did not do it. That was a reward as far as he was concerned.

He goes on to say that if he does preach **“against my will a dispensation of the Gospel is committed to me”** (Romans 9:17). That meant he was already committed to preach that Gospel and he was going to have to do it anyway. He says woe is me if I do not preach it (verse 16 above), but by him preaching to the Corinthians without money, that gave Paul a reward. He did that on his own when God said he was allowed to take financial support.

Commissions and Reward

I, Ernest Martin, am not making appeals for money by teaching or preaching the Gospel. In fact, I have not even been called to preach the Gospel to my knowledge. I have no commission from God to teach. That

may sound strange because I have been teaching it for about 30 years, I rejoice in every moment of it, and I do not think I would want to get out of it. I have not had any experience from God like the apostle Paul did. Christ Jesus has not told me, Ernest Martin, you have to preach the Gospel. I do not know what I would do if I could not do what I am doing. Maybe I would be a good weatherman. I could always take tourists to Israel or teach down there.

I have not been commissioned to teach the Gospel. If some people feel that I am, that is their opinion, thank you. I have not been told that I have such a commission. We can all say the same thing. I stay up hours at night and enjoying every minute of it doing my work. I work at least 18 hours a day. I simply like what I am doing.

The point is, if I am not commissioned to do it, and I am doing it anyway, and if you are not commissioned to do it and you are doing it anyway, you are getting out the Gospel, Christ is working through you (and I believe God is working through us, I absolutely believe it). If we do not have a commission and we are still doing it, look at the reward we will receive! That is what Paul is saying. There is a reward for doing a job no one else seems to be doing.

I am not criticizing anyone else, but there are many teachings in Scripture that are not being taught by people who claim to be ministers of Almighty God and claim to have a commission. If you have a commission from God and He has called you, you had better do exactly what He tells you. You had better do it all to the extent He said, and then go above and beyond that. Only then will you begin to accrue a reward.

It is like those who tithe. They think they have to tithe 10%. If you feel you have to tithe 10% and you believe that is God's commandment for you, then you are not getting a reward until you give 11%. The 11% means you get 1% reward because the 10% would be what is required of you. What you give beyond what is required is when your reward comes.⁹

The apostle Paul says something similar to the Corinthians: I have a right, indeed it is ordained, that I live by the Gospel when I preach to you Corinthians, but I will not take one drachma [an ancient Greek coin] from you. I will teach but I will not take money from you. I am doing this so I can get a reward. This was Paul's own will that he was doing. He did it on his own free will. That is how God rewards people. There are a host of Scriptures I could give on this subject of free will. The epistle to Philemon speaks about free will. Several other places in the book of Romans and in this epistle to the Corinthians, Paul talks about free will being exercised.

Free Will from God

I will tell you where the free will comes in.

- When it comes to salvation, if God saves you or gives you the factors of salvation which are repentance and faith and belief and confession, all of those things, all those come as a gift.
- If God gives a commission to a person, that person had better do that commission. Once you have the commission, once you know that you have the faith, that extra is where you build your rewards.

Rewards are important. Rewards are based on works. Turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and I will show where this is true. The apostle Paul begins an illustration of farming. In the middle of verse 9 he gives an illustration of carpentry. He shows how works come into matters of commissions or callings from God:

"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants any thing, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. Now he that plants and he

⁹ See Dr. Martin's book [*The Tithing Dilemma*](#) for a full explanation of the issue of tithing. This book can be read online and it is available for purchase. DWS

that waters are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: you are God's husbandry, ..."

• **1 Corinthians 3:6–9**

You are the result of God's work. Paul was willing to admit in this illustration of farming that he planted, he was working. It was his commission and he worked, he planted real hard. He will receive a reward for that in the future. Apollos watered the field. That was labor. **"But God gave the increase."** That is, mankind could do nothing about the increase. God did that.

Farmers in Iowa can plant the corn, they can water the corn, but who made the corn to begin with? Who is it that brings up the corn? God brings the increase. He gets all the glory. If you plant real hard, or you plant more acreage than you are supposed to, or you water real hard even when you should not have to, those actions are labors, works. Rewards can come from them. Look at another illustration, carpentry:

"... you are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon."

• **1 Corinthians 3:9–10**

To the Corinthians he wrote, I put down the foundation in Corinth. Once you have a foundation, then you build the walls, you put a roof on, you bring furniture to go inside. He is giving this illustration.

"But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ [the foundation is Jesus Christ]. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward."

• **1 Corinthians 3:10–14**

That is where the reward comes, by the work that you do on your own. The foundation was laid, and that is Christ. On the foundation you can build gold, silver, precious stones. You can also build wood, hay and stubble, and you can make a beautiful building. Men do that building. That is what Paul said.

"If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

• **1 Corinthians 3:15–16**

First, Paul's illustration was farming, planting, watering, God giving the increase, but you have to get out there doing the work and you get rewards from that work.¹⁰

Next is this building. Who laid the foundation? Paul did in Corinth. What was that foundation? Jesus Christ. Then men came along, Paul said, and began to build on it. He said if you build with gold, silver, and precious stone, the fire will come and not destroy it. Your building on the foundation will remain. But if it is wood, hay, and stubble, it will all go up in smoke.

Let us say you build the building of wood, hay, and stubble and it all went up in smoke. What would you have left? The only thing left would be the foundation. Thanks be to God you had the foundation, a foundation that you could put your feet solidly on for support. That foundation is Jesus Christ. That foundation will never be destroyed.

That is why the apostle Paul said, if a **"man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss,"** because his work on top of that foundation was giving him rewards. If you have gold, silver, and precious stones like

¹⁰ Each Christian's work shall be revealed by fire. Have you done any work to build on the foundation which is Christ? Will your work stand the fire for a good reward? Will you receive any reward? Will I? DWS

Paul was doing, like Apollos was doing, like others were doing, working and working hard, going above and beyond what is necessary, rewards will come from God.

If you build just with wood, hay, and stubble, then when the fire comes all your works will go up in smoke, yet the foundation will still be there because it was not laid by you. It was laid by the apostle Paul and the foundation is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. That will remain solid and secure. That is why he said, **“he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”** Your salvation is never in jeopardy. Never. But your works are in jeopardy.

Yes, man has free will within certain allowances. I have used before an illustration of a stake in the middle of a pasture which is solidly anchored in the ground. A 40 foot rope is tied to this stake. The rope is tied to a horse’s neck and it is secure enough that the horse cannot break away. Within that 40 foot radius the horse can eat all the grass around that stake, anywhere from the stake to the end of the rope. Who tied the horse to the stake? The person who owned the horse did. In this analogy that would be God and the horse would be us.

- Who made the horse? God did.
- Who tied the horse to the stake? God did.
- Who put the stake where it is in the first place? God did.

God says to the horse, eat, do as you please. The horse can do as it pleases easily within that 40 foot radius. This is a perfectly good illustration. It is compatible with what the apostle Paul is saying with regard to the farming and with the carpentry. I think my illustration fits in very well.

The horse (or the person) is a child of God in this case and is saved because of the blood of Jesus Christ who saves all men eventually (1 Timothy 4:10). In fact, our salvation was secured for us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Works and the Time of Your Salvation

I hear preachers saying you have got to get saved. I ask them, when were you saved? They say July 15th, 1934. I reply that I was saved before you were. What do you mean before I was, how old are you? I say I am 51 years of age. I was born on April 20, 1932. Why, you were too young to be saved before I was. I say I was saved before the foundation of the world.

Have you ever read 2 Timothy 1:9? It says, if you are a Christian you were called and you were saved and you were justified according to God’s purpose before the foundation of this world. It was confirmed by Jesus Christ dying on the cross some 1900 years ago. My salvation is as secure as Jesus Christ’s salvation is secure. You could say that jokingly because maybe they would come around to see it, and maybe they would not. They are just desperately trying to get people saved when they already have been saved.

Preachers ought to tell people how they got saved, not how to get saved. It is amazing, they have everything backward. We can reap rewards. The rewards come now that you are saved. You are put here and you have been given a job to do. You have a 40-foot tether (make it 80 feet, whatever). None of you can ever get off of this earth unless you are astronauts in a spacecraft. Even they cannot escape the earth’s atmosphere because they need to take atmosphere with them. You can only go so far. God put you here.

Another thing, none of us will last much more than 100 years of age. If you last to 120 you will be as good as Moses, but none can last much longer than that. You do not ask to die. You do not ask to grow old, do you? No, yet you do. God is in control of these matters. He put you on earth and said “get busy.” You are saved already, 2 Timothy 1:9. Make sure you know that fact. Ephesians chapter 1 and Romans chapter 8 say we were saved before the foundation of the world, confirmed in the death and resurrection of Christ.

We are as saved as Christ is saved, and when He comes again from heaven we will be given that salvation, and I hope, the rewards that go along with it. The rewards are what you build up on top of the foundation. I hope your building is made of, as Paul would say, gold, silver and precious stones. I hope that is what we are building. There may be some wood, hay, and stubble that will come along too.

Let me tell you this. It is better to have wood, hay, and stubble than nothing! At least you get to see the works burn up. The foundation will still be here. That foundation on which you can stand for security is none other than Jesus Christ.

So we have free will. That horse can be told to get on the north side of the stake. The horse can say I don't want to get on the north side of the stake. God says, well, I'll whip your behind then. The horse says I still will not move, so God does it again (see footnote 3 above). Finally the horse says, okay, I'll do it. It runs around to the other side and God does not whip it any more. Do you see what I mean? When God gives no commands, the horse can do as he pleases. If the horse perceives that God wants him to get on the north side before God even tells him to do so, and he trots right around there, that is worthy of reward. He knows what to do and does it right, even beforehand.

All you have to do is study the Scriptures, see what is right, and then try to do it. We all make mistakes, every one of us. Are you not pleased (and you ought to be) that the foundation is secure? Though your building is wood, hay, and stubble, your foundation is secure. How about all of us building with gold, silver, and precious stones?

Free Will and God's Limits on Man

In closing, does man have a free will? He has a free will to do what he wants to do within certain allowances, within certain limits. Those limits are set by God Almighty. The limits in a physical sense start with birth. They end in a physical sense with death. None of us ask to come into this earth exactly when you did. You came into this world at a certain time. You had no control over that. You can kill yourself sooner than maybe you should, but you are going to die one of these days, and it may even be 70, 80, 90 years and that is the end of it as far as the physical life is concerned. You have no control over that, no matter how many vitamins you take. That is all there is to it.

We are all going to die. We only have a certain limit of time and you have had nothing to do with that. God is in control. No man **“has power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither has he power in the day of death”** (Ecclesiastes 8:8). And yes, that includes suicide.

Let me tell you: if you have nothing to do with your birth, and you have nothing to do with getting old (which you do not), and you have nothing to do with your ultimate death, but you will die anyway, what arrogance and haughty effrontery it is to think that we can then give ourselves eternal life by our own will. Preachers are saying that Jesus Christ desperately wants to give you eternal life, but you, of your own free will won't take it. That is ridiculous.

Repentance is a gift from God (Acts 5:31, 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25). No man or woman can even come to Christ unless God the Father ordains it (John 6:44–45). No one. Belief is a gift of God (so is suffering, Philipians 1:29). It is not something that you engender on your own. The faith that saves is a gift (Ephesians 2:8–9). In the context of gifts that God gives to His *ekklesia* on earth, Paul talks about confession itself, though it comes out of the mouth with your own free volition, 1 Corinthians 12:3. It says confession of Christ's name is something that cannot be done in the heart unless it is motivated by God's Holy Spirit.¹¹

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 12:3, King James Version:

“Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed: and [that] no man can say that ‘Jesus is the Lord,’ but by the Holy Ghost.”

1 Corinthians 12:3, Youngs Literal Translation is clearer:

“wherefore, I give you to understand that no one, in the Spirit of God speaking, says Jesus is anathema, and no one is able to say ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except in the Holy Spirit.”

We know from Philipians 2:9–11, KJV, that every intelligent being in all God's creation will eventually say those words:

“Wherefore God also has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

All factors of salvation are solidly anchored in the approbation and will and volition of God Almighty. You have nothing to do with it. All you have to do is that once God calls you, you had better be walking in that 40 foot tether the way He wants you to. How you walk there will be the basis of the rewards you will get. Works are important.

Yes, you have free will. I can take this Bible on my desk and move it to the left or move it to the right. I cannot imagine that such action was ordained of Almighty God before the foundation of the earth, that at this particular day in Pasadena, California just about noon time I was ordained to move my Bible two inches to the left and two inches to the right. Maybe He did do that. Maybe it is all ordained. I do not see that in the Scripture.

I know what was ordained before the foundation of the world, it was my salvation and your salvation in Christ Jesus. Every factor associated with salvation was something outside of ourselves, and it is as secure as Jesus Christ's salvation. That salvation reaches out in scope, finally, to embrace the entirety of creation, as tells us in Romans 8:16–22. Not only will those who are the children of God at the present time find a release from the corruption and bondage that we are in, but even the creation will one day experience a redemption. The groaning and the creakiness and the pain and the vanity, and all other things the creation has been subjected to (and that not willingly), the creation shall be released from that bondage when the manifestation of the children of God becomes a fact.

You are involved in that manifestation. In fact, you ARE that manifestation. The creation was created for you and me, and for the entire human race. As far as I know there may be other worlds out there where God is dealing with people like us, but as far as my Bible is concerned, this is the only place. Indeed, God the Father Himself will one day sit upon the sphere of this earth, according to Revelation chapters 21 and 22. We are very important. I hope we do not have vanity and haughtiness along with that understanding.

Yes, we are important. We are the children of God. And when the complete manifestation of the sons and daughters of God is finished, then the whole creation will be released from the bondage of corruption in which it suffers. God's purpose is to control everything, and thereby show His love to everything in this entire universe. To sum up:

- Negatively, you can exert your will and try to resist God's will. You will fail.
- Positively, you can exert your will in line with God's will to gain rewards. You will succeed.
- God shall accomplish all His purposes (2 Chronicles 20:6; Ephesians 1:11). God will succeed.

Whatever you pray for — and I hope you do pray — pray according to the will of God. Your prayers will always be answered if you pray that way (1 John 5:14–15). We all need to know what is the will of God.¹² I know absolutely what is the will of God, and you will gain great rewards if you practice these things. It is in two parts, from Christ Himself (Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27):

1. The first part is that great reward can come if you love God the Father and Christ Jesus with all your hearts and minds, soul, and strength.
2. The second part has a different focus. Great reward can come if you willingly love your neighbor, your brethren in Christ, and even your enemies as yourself. That is doing God's will.

Ernest L. Martin, 1983
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¹² God's will is intimately involved with the truth of God. See Dr. Martin's presentation "[What Is Truth?](#)" We should test and examine what is the will of God from His word, Romans 12:1–2, Concordant Literal Version:

"I am entreating you, then, brethren, by the pities of God, to present your bodies a sacrifice, living, holy, well pleasing to God, your logical divine service, and not to be configured to this eon, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, for you to be testing what is the will of God, good and well pleasing and perfect."