Universal Salvation and Free Will

Commentary for March 15, 2017 — Is God's Will or Man's Will Supreme

I give you here a biblical argument to confront those who believe in an eternal hell or eternal annihilation for sinners. I am sure others have made this argument, but I did not look for anyone else's information. To me they are obvious in Scripture.

God's Will, It Will Be Done

Knowing God's will is simple, but you need to reference God's Word to learn it. The will of God is something we should strive to learn, and we can mature to learn His will, and become more complete to do the will of God (Colossians 4:12). For example, **"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"** (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

> **"And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove** [test] **what is** [1] **that good, and** [2] **acceptable, and** [3] **perfect, will of God."**
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> • ***Romans 12:2***

Yes, the will of God is [1] good. The will of God is [2] acceptable to all. The will of God is [3] perfect. Yes, God's will is knowable. To accomplish **"the will of God,"** Paul tells us what Christ did to fulfill the will of God our Father:

> "[Jesus Christ] **Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world** [*eon,* age], **according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever** [for the eons of the eons]**. Amen."**
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> • ***Galatians 1:4–5***

Christ also **"gave Himself for our sins,"** substituting His life for ours, and substituting His righteousness for our unrighteousness so we can come into God's presence. On the ASK website I often quote four verses about God's will, as did Dr. Ernest Martin. God's will is this:

> **"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who WILL have ALL MEN** [1] **to be saved, and** [2] **to come unto the knowledge of the truth.**
>
> [Why?] **For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."**
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> • ***1 Timothy 2:3–6***

What did Christ Jesus do? **"He gave Himself** [as] **a ransom for all"** (verse 6). The "all" of verse 6 refers back to the phrase, **"all men to be saved"** in verse 4. In the future God shall accomplish His will for all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). Believe it. Live it.

Human Beings Have Limited Freedom of Will

How could human beings have free will? Free will, for what purpose, to what end? Clearly, God limits us within the physical realm with severe limitations as to our physical, emotional, and spiritual abilities. The moment we are born, we begin progression toward death.

We have a will, certainly, but it is limited and not totally free. We cannot fly without mechanical help to overcome our physical limitations. Emotionally our bodies and minds can endure only so much stress before we die. God has created each of us to have **"sinful flesh"** (Romans 8:3). Spiritually the world, the flesh, and the devil tempt and provoke us to sin. The apostle Paul tells of his inner spiritual conflict in Romans 7:14–25. Even with God's Holy Spirit within us, just like Paul we struggle to live a righteous life. Yes, we are severely limited in our choices and our human will, although spectacular at times, is limited.

Some might respond that man's "free will" is relative and God has given us a choice to choose him to attain "eternal life."[1] Yet few since Adam have ever chosen to follow God. Jesus taught the disciples to pray that God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2). Jesus always fulfilled God's will (Matthew 26:42; Luke 22:42; Galatians 1:3–4). These are not just formulaic words; they are a description of reality as well as a future prophecy of Jesus. He prayed with confidence because He helped formulate the Father's plan of universal salvation even before the foundation of the world (John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; and 1 Peter 1:20).

You Cannot Be Free until You Act from Truth

In the Treasury of the Temple (John 8:20) Jesus said to the people of Israel: **"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"** (John 8:32).

Two verses later, **"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin"** (John 8:34). The word "servant" is the common Greek word for slave. A slave is not free.

We read above in 1 Timothy 2:3–6 that God's will is for all men not only to be saved, but also to come to a knowledge of the truth. The word "knowledge of the truth" in that passage means "full-knowledge" in Greek. Both are the will of God: (1) for all men to be saved, and (2) for all men to come to a full knowledge of the truth. Only then, as Jesus said, will a person be free — by knowing the truths of God — and then through God's grace, be saved.

Knowledge alone is not a way to salvation (that is *gnosis,* "knowledge," that Paul in 2 Timothy 6:20 labels as **"science falsely so-called"**), but … once God opens your mind to accept truth, then you will ***s-l-o-w-l-y*** learn the full-knowledge truth of God. Remember, all salvation come from God through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9). Only then does Philippians 2:12 come into play.

There are two related articles by Dr. Martin on this subject:
"Free Will and Predestination"
"Free Will and Salvation"

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[1] "Does Man Have a Free Will?" by Dr. Ernest Martin, my July 2010 Commentary, "Freedom Versus Choice," and August 2011 Commentary, "You and Free Will" all give more details on man's free will.