**On Free Will and Categories of Love**

“Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin,” John 8:34.

Sin doesn’t make men free in any sense of the word, it makes them slaves. That’s truly the whole premise of this letter. While this is simple and agreeable as a propositional truth statement, many believers in the whole scheme of existence seem to deny it. Some Christians today actually make SIN the *sine qua non* of human existence and a resultant “Free will” one of the greatest expressions of God’s love. It goes something like this: to be truly free many people think that you’ve got to have the opportunity to hate or to rebel against God. So if love for God isn’t a “Free” choice then it’s not love. Sin at the beginning then becomes a required element for true love to exist because it alone creates the option of rebellion. It’s as if many say that to be truly free you simply *must have sin* because sin gives man the option of either loving or leaving God. I think this creates a real problem for Christians. Such people must conclude that Adam was not free to love God from his creation; he was only truly free to love God after his rebellion. This, they say, makes the decision to love God genuine for us all. “God didn’t want robots,” they say, and so He allowed for sin in order to give “Free agents” the choice to love Him or not. Sin, therefore, in a very direct way actually makes the world go-round. It’s strange, but without sin some actually wouldn’t be able to define freedom. Free will, as some define it, can only be found after Adam’s fall and is a gift wholly dependent on the reality of sin. Some say that it’s one of the highest endowments or greatest gifts given to all mankind from birth. It’s this supposed “Freedom” of choice that many people assume actually separates mankind from the beasts and the rest of the created order. Autonomy is the assumption.

Some will consider this letter a worthless and perhaps even a dangerous speculation. Others will see that the issue runs to the heart of our understanding of God’s grace.

We simply cannot say that mankind has a morally free will. Even if we make this assumption we must conclude by the evidence that it never profited anyone anything at all, Romans 3:9-18. Unregenerate man cannot be called free in any spiritual sense of the word, and the spiritual sense is the most real, 2 Corinthians 4:18. Sin doesn’t allow us to think that man is free. This is not to say that he doesn’t make decisions (even though God knows everything that we’ll do anyway). All I’m saying is that he is not morally free while bound in sin. He cannot simply call on Jesus of his own power. Many preach an ineffectual Gospel by presenting it as if it’s just a decision available to all in their own power. We flatter sinners with this because we actually think it will help them. While this ideology may seem to open the Gospel in the first place, it comes in soon again as a hollow anti-promise that actually defiles grace. God must awaken man from death. Jesus said that slaves are *not* free, John 8:35*.* There is great restriction. We can’t fellowship with God in sin, we can’t fellowship with other Christians in sin, and we cannot honor God or call Him Lord rightly while dead in sin. From birth we are neither good at heart nor are we neutral; we are wholly inclined unto evil from our birth. We sin because that’s our nature, Romans 2:14-15. We’re born into that nature, John 3:6; John 6:63. To live in Jesus we must die to that old nature by being “Born again” by the Spirit of God. “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,” Genesis 6:5. This is still mankind’s present condition, Romans 3:9-19, and a much more severe judgment than that of Noah’s day is promised against it, 2 Peter 3:5-7. When a person is not regenerated by the Holy Spirit they have no moral ability to choose Jesus Christ as Savior. Romans 3:11 says that, “There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.” Why? It’s because they’re bound in sin. They don’t want God. In the Old Testament only Israel came to God among all the nations. This is because God came to them. No other nation came, ever. Why? It’s because no one is seeking God. That’s what sin does. Even Abram wasn’t seeking God; God came to him. At the very least we must conclude that if we do have a “Free will” it never did anyone any good in light of eternity. Even if we did have it, apparently no one uses it rightly as Romans 3 tell us that there is, “…No one who seeks God.”

Consider this passage: “But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. “And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father,” John 6:64-65. It would be different if Jesus said, “No man *may* come unto Me unless…” He said, “No man *can* come unto me unless…” Those are very different words with very different implications. “Can” is a word denoting ability and “May” is one of permission. All men are permitted to come at any time; they don’t because they’re never willing. God need not restrict them, they don’t want God by nature. They cannot come and furthermore don’t wish to. They’re not willing to come and are totally accountable for the sin of it. Sin prevents them from being willing, though they’re by absolutely no means passive in rebellion, Romans 1:28. Sin puts men into bondage. This is why we must conclude that man is not “Free” in the sense that some wrongly assume. They cannot even call on Jesus because they’re “Slaves of sin.” This is obvious because they’re dead in sin, Ephesians 2:1. This is a spiritual reality. They can’t even perceive spiritual things, 1 Corinthians 2:14. Many people understand that salvation is a gift, but they erroneously avow that it’s our job as free individuals to open it. “God can give the gift” some say, “But you’ve got to open it.” I used to assume that, but have come to see that there’s a problem with that understanding. The sinner is dead. Place a gift in the lap of a dead person and ask them to open it. They can’t. The gift will sit there and putrefy right along with them. The analogy doesn’t work. We must be born again (resurrected spiritually) before we can even see the gift, let alone open it. After we’ve been given life by grace we “Open” the gift in willing repentance and faith which leads into our joyous sanctification and accompanying works. We do that, but only as response to God the Holy Spirit. This and this alone is truly the foundation of a relationship with God that’s truly by grace *alone* through faith *alone*, Ephesians 2:8-9.

Even as a Christian I cannot stop sinning. No, I’m no longer a slave to sin. It does not own me, but I cannot be free of it altogether. In Christ all those who believe are set free from the power and penalty of sin, but are not yet free from the presence of it. I’m still bound, Philippians 3:12, and I still sin, Romans 7:19. Until I physically die and live again with God I will not experience the true nature and fullness of the freedom that Jesus bought for His elect on Calvary. Even now, my will is not free. Martin Luther said, “You think you have a free will? Stop sinning.” That’s a powerful truth. I’d love to stop but I can’t. I’d do anything to stop sinning. If God said, “Look, here’s the button, press it and you’ll never sin again; you’ll be completely sanctified and there will be nothing more to keep us from perfect fellowship,” I’d press it in a second without hesitation. He doesn’t offer that. He promises that one day I’ll be totally free.

For many Christians their songs and hearts simply don’t line up with their articulations of God’s grace. They give all the credit for salvation to Jesus only hypothetically. They want to give Jesus *all* the credit for salvation, but they cannot abide a God who is completely sovereign over those who go to heaven or hell. They’ve never understood. In truth they believe that it was they who saved themselves with Jesus’ help. “He made it *possible* for all to be saved,” they say, but He doesn’t actually save anyone. He is just a helper helping people if they want it. This is a pseudo-Savior. Remember, they must be left alone to decide or else love is not love, right? Free will, being our endowment, then becomes the deciding factor, not God’s election. If a person chooses Jesus “Of their own free will” then they’re saved. This choice must be unassisted. It must be completely a person’s own decision. It’s a 50-50. God can’t coerce your 50% of the deal in any way. He can’t help anyone more than another. This effectively makes man very powerful and God pathetic. I must confess that I despise any teaching that does this. It makes Jesus a weak beggar asking to please be “Elected” Lord. He’s on the outside merely knocking at hearts. The Bible says that when Jesus died He did it to “Save” His people from their sins, Matthew 1:21. I believe that He actually did that. It’s dangerous to say He merely made salvation possible for His people. No, He made it happen. He bought them, He paid their ransom. Not for all men, but for His sheep, Matthew 20:28. Just as the high priest bore the names of the children of God on his shoulders before God, so Christ went in before God for a specific people, Exodus 28:12.

Instead of giving all the glory to God some Christians effectively, though most times unwittingly, strip Jesus of the honor due to Him by saying that they made salvation happen for them by deciding “Of their own free will.” They were slaves to sin, but they bought their citizenship. They don’t often confess this intentionally, but they do it nonetheless. Don’t give yourself credit, friends. If the Holy Spirit lives in you then Jesus should get *all* the credit for saving you. Not as a gift giver who merely places a gift within your grasp, but as a gift giver who places life inside dead corpses allowing them to truly live. Salvation isn’t medicinal therapy to wounded waywards; it’s a giving of life to dry-boned corpses.

Please understand that I believe this debate to be “In house.” I’m not saying that Christians who believe in free will are non-believers. It’s just that their head doesn’t line up with their finest and most pure prayers. They thank God for His grace in saving them, but His grace actually saved nothing. It merely made it possible for them to save themselves with Jesus’ help.

A presupposition is a generally implicit assumption (though it can be made explicit) underlying a claim or a thought. Presuppositions affect us all in many ways. These are the assumptions and beliefs that we all have in life. We get them from a lot of different things and bring them to the table in every area of our study of God and His word. We all bring presuppositions with us to the Bible. Because we’re born sinful most presuppositions are bad and so the Bible systematically dismantles them in bringing our hearts and minds into a teachable frame, Romans 12:2. A disciple whose heart is committed to Jesus is willing to have their presuppositions challenged and changed by God. They can sometimes change in an instant even if we’ve had them our entire lives. Have you ever heard a sermon, read a book, or had an experience in life where a large belief of yours changed as a result? In my opinion the largest presupposition of our day is free will or human autonomy. I do suspect it is a western interpolation, but certainly not exclusively. This idea distracts from the Biblical Gospel and works to damper our prayers to Jesus. It breeds irreverence by exalting man far too much. We cannot consistently say that we’re saved by grace through faith *alone* and believe that we, of our own wills, must first come to God to be saved. I believe that the Gospel only makes sense with two facts in place. One is our total depravity before God and the other is that grace is a free and unmerited gift to sinners. This grace cannot be a gift of God in response to our seeking. If it is then it’s a merited gift and is no longer of unmerited grace at all. A proper understanding of justification truly is in the details. It’s for this reason that this question of free will runs to the heart of the faith. Luther called the doctrine of justification by faith alone the *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae,* “The article by which the church stands or falls.” If we give ourselves credit calling our faith a result of choice from free will then indeed the flesh profits everything, something completely contrary to our unprofitable nature, John 6:63. If free will is the focus on why you’re saved, I believe you miss what’s so amazing about grace. This is true because you’re inevitably forgetting that men are completely helpless before God in sin. You also must believe that God gave salvation in response to what you did. Therefore He owed you something and you’ve reason to boast in your works, Titus 3:5. There’s absolutely no boasting according to the law of faith, Romans 3:27. When one truly fights through the flesh and is thus humbled before God in this understanding then the Bible’s unmerited grace becomes a reality worth singing about. The only reason we’re saved is God. Because of sin I must conclude that the only reason I’m saved is because of God.

This idea of “Free will” is nowhere explicit in Scripture, but I know where many people get it. It’s because the Bible has no problem at all describing salvation as a choice we make. Going behind the scenes, however, will show us that long before any sinner ever made the choice to follow Jesus, God was at work from all eternity to bring it to pass. We love God because He first loved us. This is what the Scriptures reveal to the Christian. Freedom is a very large presupposition that is actually rooted in sin with mankind wanting to be the master of his own destiny. It’s a natural human presupposition that uses the Bible and the Scriptures regarding choice to piece itself together. Choice is something we do in response to God. Choice doesn’t equal free will. Inmates serving life-sentences can choose mashed potatoes or corn with their meal, but they cannot choose to leave the prison.

John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* is an exceptionally marvelous book*.* I highly recommend it to anyone looking to examine this subject in greater depth. I would also recommend R.C. Sproul’s book *Chosen by God.*

As long as there’s death in sin, mankind is not free. Unregenerate (un-saved) man doesn’t possess a free will that can simply free him by choice. Free will is an illusion that produces many dangerous biblical inconsistencies. I’d like to discuss the different classes of love that must be invented under the sway of a free will worldview. Some say that “Free willed” individuals must “Accept” Jesus in order to be saved from sin. This is always encouraged as an ideology in our day. God can save no one until men permit Him to because of their all powerful freedom of choice. God consequently becomes a beggar and a weak caller/hoper. He has created a rock that He cannot lift. He is made impotent and helpless to save by the power of choice. This falsity affects how we sing, how we evangelize, how we pray and much more. If you believe we are truly autonomous creatures alongside God then I intend to challenge this view of yours with a more sure foundation. I’m not saying it’ll be easy, but I do believe it to be true.

Many people, when one considers it, must create at least three separate categories for love. 1) Is a pre-fall love that Adam and Eve had with God in the Garden of Eden. 2) Is the love mankind has available today *if they’ll choose Jesus*. 3) Is the love many will have with God in heaven after they’re dead. The second love only exists because of sin. The first and third are realities apart from sin. These three categories for love *must* exist if mankind’s state of being as it relates to sin defines what love is. I’m not trying to start a denomination over this; I just truly think it’ll help many people. It’ll help us to remember to thank God appropriately for setting us free, as it’s written: “…God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered,” Romans 6:17. This letter is about God-besoughted worship and giving Him all the glory in the Gospel of His unfailing grace.

Predestination is a concept that must be defined by any serious Bible student. Everyone who knows the Bible has some definition of it. It’s a Biblical concept though defined very differently in the church. God’s unconditional election of believers, far from being that which removes assurance, is actually the blessed foundation and sure source of all true security. It is this calling and proving of God’s perfect will that Christians are called to seek after, Romans 12:2. It’s God’s calling and election that is proven by our works and love, Philippians 2:12. Salvation belongs to the Lord. It is a gift given to sinners without merit. If men are saved by grace *alone* then unconditional election is the only consistent appreciation of such grace in doctrinal form, Ephesians 2:8-9. Understanding that freedom is no savior is very difficult for many people today, but a careful examination of Ephesians 1 alone can often lay all such anxieties to rest. We must also think well on Romans 8:28-11:36 as we seek God on the subject. Honoring Jesus by giving Him all the credit for salvation gets right at the heart of the Christian’s faith. You cannot do that unless you recognize that you were not a wounded soul in need of medicine. You were a corpse because of sin and you needed a resurrection. That’s really gracious of God to give. Let’s get back to the inferences of a “Free will” worldview.

When Adam was in the Garden of Eden, do you think he loved God? Think for a moment on how you answer that question. Did Adam love God prior to the fall? If you say yes then you’re acknowledging a perfectly created and pre-installed love that as of yet he had no “Choice” in. Adam was created into a love with God. Poor Adam, he must have been miserable, right? What a robot! What a puppet! If you assume that man had to be able to *not* love God in order for his choice of love to make love genuine then Adam could not love God with real love in the garden with God. He couldn’t love by choice until sin entered his heart through Satan’s work. This is true because then and only then did he have the accessible option to obey or not. This is a tacitly drawn conclusion from our previous free willed presuppositions on love. In other words, until Adam went away from God his coming to God couldn’t be all that great. This then is where we find men today. God’s fellowship with His man then was missing something before the fall. It was lacking that spark that makes love lovely. If you believe this then your assumption is that until Adam knew good *and evil* he couldn’t really love God.

I think Adam loved God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength before the fall. Adam loved God and, get this, he had no choice in the matter when he was created. Poor Adam, he didn’t know love like we do because we get to choose, right? No, we would be better to say that he yielded to corruption and love was lost. Adam truly knew love *before* the fall. He had freedom of will *then*. Sin destroyed true love; it didn’t invent it, improve upon it, or create the opportunity for it. Mankind *lost* freedom in sin; we didn’t gain it. Jesus came to restore that love in heaven.

Even though the existence of sin did set the stage for the greatest display of love we shouldn’t say that sin itself is the liberation and undergirding of love in our theology. Because of sin we see love displayed on the cross: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us,” [Romans 5:8](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nkjv/Romans%205.8). Sin, however, is still evil. We don’t *need* autonomy to love God; we need God to remove our sin so we can truly love Him. This is the world God designed to accomplish His display of love in the best way possible, however, what I dislike is the underlying assumption that sin actually made man free to love God. Sin doesn’t liberate, it enslaves. If you think about this, how much can an ideology like this pervade our thinking? How many movies or books have we read that make man neutral and able to invite in Satan or God at his pleasure. Both good and evil, God and the Devil are relegated to the role of a vampire. They can’t come in unless they’re invited. Satan is bound by the all powerful free will. Even God cannot do a thing unless permitted. This is ridiculous. Sin is not empowering, it’s destructive. Adam knew love before he knew sin. After sin came, that love was destroyed. Adam lost his freedom of will and we lost it in him, Romans 5:12.

Let’s also consider the end of things as it relates to love along the same line of reasoning. Remember, you have to have free will to love God, right? You must be free to choose sin. Free people must have options. God can’t have robots without choice because choice has become a god itself in our day. Here’s another question: Will a person love God in heaven when there’ll be no more sin option? If your definition of love demands autonomy then the answer is no. If I am kept in heaven by a sovereign love, if heaven “Restricts” my options, if there is no more sin then I am no longer “Free” to love God. My love is robotic. People there will be bound and manipulated like puppets. Does that sound like the heaven described in Scripture? Is it full of bound up people? No, it isn’t, dear friend. There will be true freedom of will and love in a way we’ve never known or imagined. This love doesn’t have the option of sin, so while it relates somewhat in time to the first, it looks nothing like the second.

There is a difference in how we can define love relating to sin, but it’s not due to freedom of will it’s due to God and His purposes. While I believe that love is different between heaven, pre-fall and the present, autonomy is not the deciding factor of it or something I deduce from it. God’s design for the universe is the difference. God designed the universe to be exactly how it is including its present evil. He is not asking us to rescue Him from the picture He paints in the Bible of His sovereignty over everything. God is completely in control of everything and your will is no obstacle. “I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him,” [Ecclesiastes 3:14](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nkjv/Ecclesiastes%203.14).

If you believe that man has to be autonomous to really love God then you must create at least three separate categories of love. You have to have 1) a pre-fall love that Adam and Eve were forced/created into, 2) a post-fall (earthly interim) true heart-felt love, and 3) an eternal heavenly love. The third category of love becomes the difficult one for many. There will be no sin in heaven, Revelation 21:4. Isn’t that what we want? We’ll no longer sin. We’ll be free. If you can agree that love there is not contingent on choice then I hope you’ll come to see what we’ve done to love when we say that choice must be present for it to exist. I hope you’ll come to see that it’s unbiblical. I’ve even heard some speculate that perhaps men can fall from heaven as Satan did even after they’ve been glorified. They dare assert this because “Freedom of will” is essential to their worldview. Man is not man if he’s not completely self-determinant. Because the option of sin strangely creates the option of love, heaven must be up for forfeit in order to be pure according to human autonomy which is, after all, the highest design in man. Men must be able to sin in heaven if love is to be sincere there (according to many people’s definition of what love is). God can’t have robots, they say. Their idea of freedom then becomes a bondage to them and an obstacle between them and Jesus. Their assumptions become a false witness that, though it doesn’t kill, wounds. They cannot sing to God about His grace alone because their own pride always enters in. They chose and that is what separated them from those who didn’t. They’re placing their hopes in themselves and seeking assurance in the wrong places. Even though at their best moments they want to give all the glory to Jesus they retain one crown for themselves, the crown of self-initiation. I submit to you that though the term is inappropriate, I’d love to be a robot if it meant I could see God and love Him fully.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again,’” [John 3:6-7](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nkjv/John%203.6-7). “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life,” [John 6:63](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nkjv/John%206.63). Luther rightly said, “That “Nothing” is *not even a* *little* something…”

So what am I saying and why would I say it? First the what – men are not free! In sin they’ll never choose Jesus because they dislike Him, Romans 8:6-8. They want riches, friends, heaven, or their ears itched in a best life now but not the righteousness of God in Christ. When we were in sin we were dead and a total slave to our impulses. We did what seemed right to us at all times. If we are in Christ we have a new master and are no longer free to sin. Now the why – salvation belongs to our God. Learn why you chose Christ. If you are manifest in all the fruits that flourish in the gardens of God it is not merely because Christ bought you a choice on the cross. No that is very limited. That is a limited atonement. He did not merely purchase you a choice; He purchased you, 1 Corinthians 6:20; Ephesians 1:14. That’s big! That’s good news! That’s power! “I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness…But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life,” [Romans 6:19,22](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nkjv/Romans%206.19-22). We’re now willing slaves. That’s good. We’re servants serving God in love and fidelity and we’d have it no other way, [1 John 5:3](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nkjv/1%20John%205.3). It is the Christian’s joy to be under God; we’re not burdened by Him.

My conclusion by the nature of sin and death is that men are not morally free. They are men dead and in need of a resurrection to live. Dead men cannot be told anything until they are made alive. Dead men are not free.

To God having ransomed my heart from idolatry and His power to subdue all things to Himself I am happy to say “…I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness,” [Psalm 84:10](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nkjv/Psalm%2084.10).

Thank you for your attention to this letter.